

The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object

A Discussion of the Nature of Transcendental Consciousness

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Part 3 of 25

PART I

The Ground of Knowledge

CHAPTER 2

A Mystical Unfoldment

(continued)

It is a common and apparently quite natural habit with us to regard the material given through the senses as being something actual. Our science and philosophy may fail to give an adequate interpretation of this material, but still we generally feel sure that it is something. So the larger portion of the human search for Reality is in the field of the things given to our consciousness through the senses. But in my reflecting upon the idea that this universe of things is derived from and dependent upon a primordial plenum, it suddenly struck me that in the midst of the bare and original fullness there could be nothing to arouse discrete or concrete consciousness. It is a familiar fact of psychology that a long-continued or unchanging state or quality tends to become unconscious. Thus, in a state of health an individual is only slightly conscious of his body in its organic functioning. But let there be some form of injury or sickness, and at once the individual is conscious of his organism as he was not before. Likewise, when a long-continued period of bodily pain has ceased, there is then a concrete consciousness of well-being such as did not exist before the pain. In such a case, simply to be free of the pain has the value of an active joy, though the same bodily state did not have that value formerly. Through pain the joy-consciousness of health was aroused to recognition. Now, applying this principle in an ontological sense, it follows that the Consciousness of the original Fullness can only be aroused by first passing through the experience of "absence" or "emptiness," in some degree. Thus the active, concrete, and perceptual consciousness is to be viewed as an arousal of specific awareness through a partial blanking-out of the full and perfectly balanced consciousness of the Primordial State. As a result, the world of things, apparently given through the senses, is actually a domain of relative emptiness. We become concretely aware only when contacting voids. There is nothing in this to invalidate the positive findings of natural science. Science studies the direct or indirect determinations of the senses and finds those relationships binding the various parts which render possible the formulation of laws. The question as to whether the terms or facts of science have a substantial base, and if so, what its nature is, is a metaphysical question quite beyond the range of the methodology of natural science. Scientific philosophy reveals a real critical acumen in dropping the notion of "substance" as being relevant to

our kind of science. It says—I think correctly—that science is concerned with terms in various relations, and nothing else. When it goes further than that and says specifically or in effect that scientific knowledge is the only kind of real knowledge possible to man, or possible at all, it trips on the very error it charges against certain other philosophies, namely, that of “definition by initial predication.”

Now, if it is relative emptiness that arouses to activity concrete consciousness, then it follows that actual substantiality is inversely proportional to sensibility or ponderability. There is most substance where the senses find least, and vice versa. Thus the terms-in-relation of the sensible world are to be viewed as relative emptiness contained in an unseen and substantial matrix. From this there follows, at once, a very important consequence. The discrete manifoldness and apparent pluralism of sensibly given things are quite compatible with a continuous and unitary substantial matrix. The monistic tendency of interpretations based upon mystical insight at once becomes clear, and there is afforded a reconciliation of the one and the many.⁷

It is not my purpose, at the present time, to enter upon an adequate philosophical defense of this interpretation, but simply to present the idea which was of decisive psychological importance with me in removing a barrier to mystical realization. At least, the validity of this idea was, and still remains, clear to me as an individual.

The idea I had just recognized made possible an effective conceptual reorientation. The totality of being had become divided into two phases. The higher phase I called the “substantial” or “transcendental.” This was supersensible and monistic, and served as the base in which the lower phase inhered. The latter phase thus became, by contrast, the sensible and phenomenal world, existing only through a complete dependence upon the supersensible and substantial. Within the latter existed endless multiplicity and divisibility.

There remained now merely the clearing up of the residual barriers to the complete identification of the self with the supersensible and substantial world, accompanied by the thorough divorcement of the self-identity with the phenomenal world. But a few days were required for the completion of this effort. Meanwhile, I had returned from physical solitude to the active concerns of social life, although I remained in a state of considerable mental detachment and continued brooding. Finally, on the 7th of August, 1936, after having completed the reading of Shankara’s discussion of “Liberation,” as given in *The System of the Vedanta* by Paul Deussen, I entered upon a

⁷ It has come to my mind that the reader might be inclined to question whether the above account may be called a narrative description, as I did call it in the last chapter, since so much of the writing is manifestly discursive. However, it really is narrative description, on the whole, since it is a record of a process of thought which took place and had vitally determinant effects in the past. Only in subsidiary degree is this autobiographical material related to the objective life of a physical personality. In much higher degree is it an autobiography of intellectual steps and processes. Thus the discursive material which appears here is primarily not interpretative after fact, but rather part of a [determinant in my own consciousness as it] [process in which interpretative factors] became more and more oriented to the transformation. These interpretations were pragmatically effective agents. Whether or not they have a larger objective truth-value is not the question that is before us at present. Later, I shall return to this larger problem.

course of meditative reflection upon the material just read.⁸ While engaged in this course of reflection, it suddenly dawned upon me that a common error in meditation—and one which I had been making right along—lay in the seeking of a subtle object or experience. Now, an object or an experience, no matter how subtle, remains a phenomenal time-space existence and therefore is other than the supersensible substantiality. Thus the consciousness to be sought is the state of pure subjectivity without an object. This consideration rendered clear to me the emphasis, repeatedly stated by the manuals, upon the closing out of the modifications of the mind. But I had never found it possible completely to silence thought. So it occurred to me that success might be attained simply by a discriminative isolation of the subjective pole of consciousness, with the focus of consciousness placed upon this aspect, but otherwise leaving the mental processes free to continue in their spontaneous functioning—they, however, remaining in the periphery of the attentive consciousness. Further, I realized that pure subjective consciousness without an object must appear to the relative consciousness to have objects. Hence Recognition did not, of itself, imply a new experiential content in consciousness.⁹ I saw that genuine Recognition is simply a realization of Nothing, but a Nothing that is absolutely substantial and identical with the SELF. This was the final turn of the Key which opened the Door. I found myself at once identical with the Voidness, Darkness, and Silence, but realized them as utter, though ineffable, Fullness, in the sense of Substantiality, Light, in the sense of Illumination, and Sound, in the sense of pure formless Meaning and Value. The deepening consciousness that followed at once is simply inconceivable and quite beyond the possibility of adequate representation. To suggest the value of this transcendental state of consciousness requires concepts of the most intensive possible connotation and the modes of expression that indicate the most superlative value art can devise.¹⁰ Yet the result of the best effort seems a sorry sort of thing when compared with

⁸ At the time I was seated out of doors, a fact which may prove to be of some significance. References to a value attained by being under the sky with nothing intervening are to be found in mystical literature. Edward Carpenter has said that he could not write in the vein of *Towards Democracy* except when he was out of doors under the sky. It is significant that the Sanskrit word *Akasha* means “sky” as well as “space,” “primordial matter,” and, in a certain sense, the “higher mind.” The sky is the matrix of Light. Thus the sun, the moon, and the stars are embedded in the sky, and the whole sky, from the perspective of the earth, is luminous. Thus, coming from underground out to under the sky is symbolical of leaving the dark place of gestation and entering the Light-world of new birth. That which was hidden becomes revealed; that which was unconscious becomes conscious.

⁹ The final thought before the “breakthrough” was the very clear realization that *there was nothing to be attained*. For attainment implied acquisition and acquisition implied change of content in consciousness. But the Goal is not change of content but divorcement from content. Thus Recognition has nothing to do with anything that happens. I am already That which I seek and, therefore, there is nothing to be sought. By the very seeking I hide Myself from myself. Therefore, abandon the search and expect nothing. This was the end of the long search. I died, and in the same instant was born again. Spontaneity took over in place of the old self-determined effort. After that I knew directly the Consciousness possessing the characteristics reported by the mystics again and again. Instead of this process being irrational it is the very apogee of logic. It is reasoned thought carried to the end with mathematical completeness.

¹⁰ The Indian and Persian mystics have developed a sensuous poetic imagery for suggesting supernal Value, which reaches far beyond that of the representatives of any Western race. To the Western mind these portrayals seem extravagant. Actually, however, they are inadequate, since sensuous imagination is crippled at its root by its medium. Mathematical imagination, by being freed from sensuous limitation, soars much higher, but nearly everybody fails to have an appreciation of what has happened. As the reader

the immediate Actuality. All language, as such, is defeated when used as an instrument of portrayal of the transcendent.

There are a number of implications and consequences following from such an insight that do fall within the range of formulation, and in this a man who has the appropriate skill can certainly do more than one who has little knowledge of the art of expression. But the immediate noetic and affective values of the insight, while they may be directly realized, cannot be conveyed by any formulation or representation whatsoever.

A definite line of demarcation must be drawn between the transcendental state of consciousness itself and the precipitated effects within the relative consciousness. The former is not an experience, but a Recognition or an Awakening on a timeless level of consciousness. The latter is an effect precipitated into the time-world and therefore has experiential and relative value. At the final moment, I was prepared not to have the personal, time-bound man share in any of the values that might inhere in the insight. But, very quickly, values began to descend into the outer consciousness and have continued to do so, more or less periodically, to the present day. These precipitated values have much that is of definite noetic content and decided affective value, well within the range of expression.

The listing and delineation of the elements that were precipitated into the relative consciousness from the first stage of insight is the next step.¹¹

1. The first discernible effect in consciousness was something which I may call a *shift in the base of consciousness*. From the relative point of view, the final step may be likened to a leap into Nothing. At once, that Nothing was resolved into utter Fullness, which in turn gave the relative world a dreamlike quality of unreality. I felt and knew myself to have arrived, at last, at the Real. I was not dissipated in a sort of spatial emptiness, but on the contrary was spread out in a Fullness beyond measure. The roots of my consciousness, which prior to this moment had been (seemingly) more or less deeply implanted in the field of relative consciousness, now were forcibly removed and instantaneously transplanted into a supernal region. This sense of being thus transplanted has

may be interested in a sample of the Indian imagery, I shall quote a few lines from the opening part of the *Mahanirvana Tantra* (translated by Arthur Avalon):

The enchanting summit of the Lord of Mountains, resplendent with all its various jewels, clad with many a tree and many a creeper, melodious with the song of many a bird, scented with the fragrance of all the season's flowers, most beautiful, fanned by soft, cool, and perfumed breezes, shadowed by the still shade of stately trees; where cool groves resound with the sweet-voiced songs of troops of Apsara, and in the forest depths flocks of kokila maddened with passion sing; where (Spring) Lord of the Seasons with his followers ever abide (the Lord of Mountains, Kailasa).

And so forth. The "Lord of Mountains" is the Door to the Transcendent.

¹¹ The reader is warned that this is still part of the record, and not the more systematic interpretation after fact. The contents precipitated into the relative consciousness as a result of the first insight had a more or less determinant part in preparing the ground for the culminating Recognition which came later, and thus are part of the etiology of the process.

continued to the present day, and it seems to be a much more normal state of emplacement than ever the old rooting had been.

2. Closely related to the foregoing is a *transformation in the meaning of the "Self," or "I."* Previously, pure subjectivity had seemed to me to be like a zero or vanishing point, a somewhat which had position in consciousness but no body. So long as that which man calls his "self" had body, it stood within the range of analytic observation. Stripping off the sheaths of this body until none is left is the function of the discriminative technique in meditation. At the end there remains that which is never an object and yet is the foundation upon which all relative consciousness is strung like beads upon a string. As a symbol to represent this ultimate and irreducible subject to all consciousness, the "I" element, I know nothing better than zero or an evanescent point. The critical stage in the transformation is the realization of the "I" as zero. But, at once, that "I" spreads out into an unlimited "thickness." It is as though the "I" became the whole of space. The Self is no longer a pole or focal point, but it sweeps outward, everywhere, in a sort of unpolarized consciousness, which is at once self-identity and the objective content of consciousness. It is an unequivocal transcendence of the subject-object relationship. Herein lies the rationale of the inevitable ineffability of mystical insight. All language is grounded in the subject-object relationship, and so, at best, can only misrepresent transcendent consciousness when an effort is made to express its immediately given value.
3. There is a sense of enormous *depth penetration* with two phases barely distinguishable during this first stage of insight. The first phase is highly noetic but superconceptual.¹² I had awareness of a kind of thought of such an enormous degree of abstraction and universality that it was barely discernible as being of noetic character. If we were to regard our most abstract concepts as being of the nature of tangible bodies, containing a hidden but substantial meaning, then this transcendent thought would be of the nature of the meaning without the conceptual embodiment. It is the compacted essence of thought, the "sentences" of which would require entire lifetimes for their elaboration in objective form and yet remain unexhausted at the conclusion of such effort. In my relative consciousness I knew that I was thinking such massive thoughts, and I felt the infiltration of value from them. In a curious way I knew that I KNEW in cosmical proportions. However, no brain substance could be so refined as to be capable of attunement to the grand cosmical tread of those Thoughts.

But still beyond the thoughts of cosmic proportions and illimitable abstraction there were further deeps transcending the furthest reaches of noetic and affective value. Yet, in this, the self-identity remained unbroken in a dimly sensed series of deeps reaching on to ever greater profundities of what, in one sense, was an impenetrable Darkness, and yet I knew It was the very essence of Light itself.

¹² By 'superconceptual' I mean beyond the form of all possible concepts that can be clothed in words. However, the nature of this knowledge is nearer to that of our purest concepts than it is to perceptual consciousness.

4. I knew myself to be *beyond space, time, and causality*. As the substantial, spatial, and transcendent “I,” I knew that I sustained the whole phenomenal universe, and that time, space, and law are simply the Self-imposed forms whereby I am enabled to apprehend in the relative sense.¹³ I, thus, am not dependent upon the space-time manifold, but, on the contrary, that manifold is dependent upon the Self with which I am identical.
5. Closely associated with the foregoing realization there is a feeling of *complete freedom*. I had broken out of the bondage to the space-time manifold and the law-form governing in this manifold. This is largely an affective value, but one which, to me, is of the very highest importance. The quest for me was less a search for bliss than an effort to satisfy a deep yearning for Freedom.
6. There is the sense of *freedom from guilt*. That feeling, which is variously called sense of sin, guilt, or *karmic* bondage, dropped completely away from me. The bindings of a discrete individuality no longer existed. The accounts were closed and the books balanced in one grand gesture. This came at once as an immediate affective value, but I realized readily the underlying rationale. As the individual and personal self, I was bound within the space-time field and necessarily incurred the rebound of all actions there, but, as the transcendent Self, I comprehended that field in its entirety, instead of being comprehended by it. So it might be said that all action and its rebounding were contained within ME, but left the Self, with which I am identical, unaffected in its totality.¹⁴
7. I both felt and knew that, at last, I had found the *solution of the “wrongness,”* the sensing of which constitutes the underlying driving force of all religion and much philosophical effort. Beneath the surface of life, in the world-field, there is a feeling of loneliness which is not dissipated by objective achievement or human companionship, however great the range and penetration of sympathetic adjustment. Religious and other literature afford abundant testimony that this feeling of solitude is very widely, if not universally, experienced. I am disposed to regard it as the driving motive of the religious quest. In common with others, I felt this solitude and realized that the sense of incompleteness which it engenders forces the individual to accept one or the other of two alternatives. He may accept the solitude and despair of ever attaining a resolution of it, in which case he accepts fundamental pessimism as part and parcel of the very core of his life. But the feeling of incompleteness may drive him on to a hopeful quest for that which will effect its resolution. The more common mystical resolution is a sense of Union with God, wherein a companionship with a transcendent otherness is attained. My own recognition had more the value of a sort of fusion in identity, wherein the self and the otherness entered into an indistinguishable blend. Before the final moment of the transformation I was aware of an otherness, in some sense, that I sought, but after the culminating moment that

¹³ Surely no man will be so clumsy as to suppose this “universe-sustaining I” is any more the personal “I” than the reflection of the sun in water is the real sun itself.

¹⁴ The residual personality continues to exist by *karma*, and continues to pay prices and reap rewards. But all this lies below the new base of reference.

otherness vanished in identity. Consequently, I have no real need of the term 'God' in my vocabulary. I find it useful, at times, to employ this term in a literary sense, because it suggests certain values I wish to convey. But its significance is psychological rather than metaphysical.

Through the Recognition, I attained a state wherein I could be at rest and contented in the most profound sense. For me, individually, it was not necessary to seek further, to achieve further, nor to express further in order to know full enjoyment. However, there was a blot on the contentment that grew out of the realization of the pain of the many millions who live in this world, and also out of the knowledge that a private solution of a problem is only a part of the great problem of the philosopher, which is the attainment of a general solution which shall be of the widest possible universality and availability. But all this is not a defect in the adequacy of the transformed state of consciousness itself.

8. There is a decided increase in the realization of the affective qualities of *calmness* and *serenity*. In the immediate presence of the transcendent state the disturbing factors produced by the circumstances and forces of the world-field lose their effective potency. They are simply dissolved away as something irrelevant, or as something which acts so far below one as to leave him in his real being untouched. When in the mystical state, there is no need of trying to be calm and serene, but rather these qualities envelop the individual without his putting forth any specific effort. Subsequently, when I have been out of the immediate presence of the state, it has been easier for me to remain calm and serene than formerly, though the more I am out of the state, the greater is the effort required to retain these affective qualities.
9. The *significance and value of information is radically changed*. Formerly, I acquired information very largely as part of the search for the Real. In the transcendent state I felt myself to be grounded in the Real, in a sense of the utmost intimacy; and since then I have continued to feel this grounding, though involving sometimes less and sometimes more the sense of immediate Presence. At the present time, knowledge, in the sense of information, has value chiefly as an instrument of expression or a means to render manifest that which is already known to me in the most significant sense. This making manifest is valuable, not alone for the reaching of other individuals but likewise for the enriching of my own personal consciousness. The abstract and superconceptual knowing attains a formal and experiential clarification through giving it concrete embodiment in thought. Nevertheless, in all this, knowledge-as-information serves only a secondary role, quite inferior to the vital importance it formerly had. It seemed as though, in an unseen and dark sense, I already know all that is to be known. If I so choose, I can give a portion of this knowledge manifested form so that it is revealed to the consciousness of others, as well as to my own personal consciousness. But there is no inner necessity, at least not one of which I am conscious, which drives me on to express and make manifest. I feel quite free to choose such course as I please.
10. The most marked affective quality precipitated within the relative consciousness is that of *felicity*. Joy is realized as a very definite experience. It is of a quality more

intense and satisfying than that afforded by any of the experiences or achievements that I have known within the world-field. It is not easy to describe this state of felicity. It is in no sense orgiastic or violent in its nature; on the contrary it is quite subtle, though highly potent. All world-pleasures are coarse and repellent by contrast. All enjoyment—using this term in the Indian sense—whether of a pleasurable or painful type, I found to be more or less distasteful by contrast. In particular, it is just as completely different from the pleasures experienced through vice as it is possible to imagine. The latter are foiled by a sense of guilt, and this guilt persists long after the pleasure-quality of the vicious experience has passed. The higher felicity seems almost, if not quite, identical with virtue itself. I find myself disposed to agree with Spinoza and say that real felicity is not simply the reward of virtue, but *is* virtue. One feels that there is nothing more right or more righteous, for that matter, than to be so harmonized in one's consciousness as to feel the Joy at all times. It is a dynamic sort of Joy which seems to dissolve such pain as may be in the vicinity of the one who realizes it. This Joy enriches rather than impoverishes others.

I doubt that anyone could possibly appreciate the tremendous value of this felicity without directly experiencing it. I felt, and feel, that no cost could be too high as the price of its attainment, and I find that this testimony is repeated over and over again in mystical literature. It seems as though but a brief experience of this Joy would be worth any effort and any amount of suffering which could be packed into a lifetime that might prove necessary for its realization. I understand now why so much of mystical expression is in the form of *rhapsody*. It requires an active restraint to avoid the overuse of superlatives, especially as one realizes that all superlatives, as they are understood in the ordinary range of experience, are, in fact, understatements. The flowery expressions of the Persian and Indian mystics are not at all overstatements. But this mode of expression is subject to the weakness that it suggests to the non-mystical reader a loss of critical perspective upon the part of the mystical writer. It is even quite possible to be abandoned in the Joy, and so a real meaning does attach to the idea of "God intoxication." On the whole, it seems probable that the most extreme experience of this Joy is realized by those in whom the affective side of their nature is most developed. If the cognitive interest is of comparable or of superior development, it seems likely that we would find more of the restraint that was evident in men like Spinoza and Buddha.

The Joy seems to be a dynamic force. If one is justified in saying there is such a thing as experiencing force, in the ordinary sense of "experience," then it certainly is true that one experiences a force either associated with, or identical with, the Joy derived from the transcendental level. In my experience, the nearest analogy is that afforded by a feeling of force I have sometimes experienced in the vicinity of a powerful electric generator.¹⁵ There is something

¹⁵ In my reading some years subsequent to writing the above, I was particularly impressed by a reference to the "fire" in C. G. Jung's *Integration of (the) Personality*. Dr. Jung quotes an uncanonical saying attributed to the Christ, which runs as follows: "Whoever is near unto me, is near unto the fire." This is on p. 149 [141] of *The Integration of (the) Personality*. Here, also, identification with the "fire" is implied, as well as

about it that suggests a “flowing through,” though it is impossible to determine any direction of flow, in terms of our ordinary spatial relationships. It induces a sense of physiological, as well as emotional and intellectual, well-being. The sheer joy in life of a healthy youth, who is untroubled by problems, faintly suggests a phase of this sense of well-being. It gives a glow to life and casts a sort of sheath over the environment that tends towards an effect of beauty which at times is very strong. I have demonstrated to my satisfaction that this joyous force, or whatever else it may be called, is capable of being induced, in some measure, in those who may be in the vicinity. I find there are some who will report feeling the joyous quality, even though the state I might be experiencing was not announced or otherwise noted. It is not inconceivable that in this “force” we are dealing with something which may be within the range of detection by some subtle instrument. Clearly there are detectable physiological effects. Nervous tensions are reduced and the desire for ordinary physical food decreases. In fact, one does have a curious sense of feeling nourished. On the other hand, there are some after-effects that suggest that one’s organism has been subjected to the action of an energetic field of too intense or high an order for the nervous organism to endure easily. For my part, during the past eight months I have experienced frequent alternations between being in this “force-field” and being more or less completely out of it. The latter I have come to regard as a sort of deflated state. Particularly in the early days and after periods when the “force” and joy qualities had been especially intense, I found that in the subsequent deflated states there was a subtle sense of fatigue throughout the whole body. Return of the joyous state would at once induce the feeling of well-being. However, I soon realized that a due regard for the capacities of the physical organism rendered necessary a discriminating restraint when inducing the joyous “force-field.” I found that this “force” was subject to the will in its personal manifestation and could be held within the limits of intensity to which the organism could adapt itself. In the process of time it does seem that my organism is undergoing a progressive adjustment to the higher energy level.

There are times when this “force” seems to be of the nature of a flame with which I am identical.¹⁶ In general, this flame is not accompanied with a sense of heat,

effects upon those who are near. Fire is that which burns up and so transforms (sublimates) everything except the ash. To understand these mystical uses of words one must isolate and idealize the essential functions of the corresponding literal or physical process.

¹⁶ At the time of the transformation I called this joy-filled “force” the “Current.” The latter term broke into my mind spontaneously and was not the result of an objective reflective search for a descriptive term. A “sense of flow” is an immediate fact of the state, to be distinguished from the objective interpretative judgment: It is a flow. The step from the immediately given to the conceptual interpretation involves the problem of criticism, which I shall have to face later. But this much I may say here—there are interpretations which one feels at once are substantially true to the sense of the immediate value, while others falsify it. True, in this spirit, was the description I gave of the seeming of the Flow. I said it was a Flow which did not proceed from the past to the future, but, rather, turned upon itself so that there was continuous motion with no progress or decline. I later found that this conception evoked no intelligible meaning in minds that were mystically blind. Certainly, in the sense of objective reference, it is meaningless, nonetheless I must still affirm its substantial truth with respect to the sense of the immediate realization. At the time I was not familiar with analogous references in mystical literature, but I have found

but under certain conditions it is. Thus, if while in the “force-field” I permit myself to feel disturbing affections, I begin to feel heat in the organism. The effect is of such a nature as to suggest that the affective disturbance has a value analogous to resistance in an electric circuit. It is well known that an electric conductor of sufficiently high resistance will produce heat, and so the analogy is readily suggested. Further, the “force-field” does seem, at times, to produce a feeling of heat in others who are in the vicinity. These are objective effects, apparently well within the range of objective determination. Yet, the inciting cause is a state of consciousness which I find to be subject, in considerable degree, to conscious control through the intervention of purely mental control with no manual aids. Does this not confirm the suggestion of William James that there is such a thing as a penetration of energy into the objective field of consciousness from other zones of consciousness that are ordinarily in disparate relationship?

Though the symbols of the electromagnetic field and of fire go far in indicating the quality of this subtle and joy-giving “force,” they fall short of full adequacy. The “force,” at the same time, seems to be of fluidic character. There is something in it like breath and like water. At this point it is necessary in some measure to turn away from the mental habits of the modern chemist and physiologist and try to feel a meaning closer to that given by the ancients. It is important that the “water” should not be thought of as simply H₂O, and the breath as merely a pulmonary rhythm involving the inhalation and exhalation of air. In the present sense, the essence of the water and the air lies in their being life-giving and life-sustaining fluids. The chemical and physical properties of these fluids are mere external incidents. In a sense that still remains a mystery to science, these fluids are vitally necessary to life. The joy-giving “force” is Life, but it is life in some general and universal sense of which life-as-living-organism is a temporary modification. Thus, to be consciously identical with this “force” is to be consciously identical with Life as a principle. It gives a feeling of being-alive, beside which the ordinary feeling of life is no more than a mere shadow. And just as the shadow-life is obviously mortal, the higher Life is as clearly deathless. It may be said that time is the child of Life in the transcendent sense, while life-as-living-organism is the creature of time. Right in this distinction lies one resolution of the whole problem of immortality. So long as the problem is stated in terms of life-as-living-organism, immortality remains inconceivable. In fact, in this sense, all life is no more than a “birthing-dying” flux with no real continuity or duration at all. But the higher Life is identical with duration itself. Hence, he who has consciously realized himself as identical with the higher Life has at the same time

them since. Thus, in *The Secret of the Golden Flower* the “circulation of the Light” stands as the critical accomplishment of the “Great Work.” In this, among other effects, immortality is accomplished. Now, analysis of the symbols helps a good deal. Thus the “circulation” suggests self-containedness, while the straight line of chronological time has direction and is therefore dogged by the pairs of opposites. The time-line does not progress any more than it degrades. It gives life and takes it away. Hence, the philosophic pessimist is the one who has seen deeply. Only through the “circulation of the Light” is the tragedy of world-life mastered.

become consciously identical with duration. Thus, death-as-termination becomes unthinkable, but, equally, birth is no beginning.