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Inconscience

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World and life can be looked at from one of two opposite vision-bases — observed in the light of the knowledge that looks below and sees as the foundation of things the Inconscient from which our physical birth took its rise or experienced in the light of the knowledge that looks above and draws the radiations it throws upon all around it from the Superconscient which is our soul’s source. These two conflicting light-streams — which yet at their extreme points seem almost to meet or at least touch the same mystery — yet shed at first opposite values on the phenomenon of conscious life in matter and illumine in contrary senses the destiny of man and his place in world-existence; for in the light from above it assumes a supreme significance, in the light from below a supreme insignificance.

For if we look from one side, consciousness appears as a circumstance, a thing secondary or even accidental, a little flickering temporary uncertain light in a vast darkness of inconscient world-systems; if we look from the other it is the slowly delivered but not yet perfectly released blaze of that which supported all along this seemingly inconscient creation, subtly concealed in its very cells, molecules, atoms, electrons or whatever still more infinitesimal whorls of motional force-substance have been made its base. Either then consciousness is a perishable jet of flame shooting up out of the slime of this obscure teeming morass we call Matter, a strange inexplicable temporary freak sprung from gas and plasm, chromosome and gene, gland and hormone — we know not well how even when we have found the process,
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and know not at all why and can never know and hardly need to know, since the whole thing is a meaningless and eventually purposeless miracle of incalculable Chance or blind Necessity, — or if it is not this, then it is the very Flame which, dynamic and hidden, has shaped all these things and now, overt and revealed, can work openly on them and on itself to use, to uplift, to subtilise, to refine, to liberate, to transfigure.

If the first view is right, the view so long pressed on us by physical Science, then this very universe itself is but a queer paradoxical movement of mindless eyeless Force or of a brute substance emanating purposeless energy, which yet works as if it had a purpose; for it produces by some inconscient compulsion on itself a steady succession of evolutionary forms that carry themselves as if they had an aim and a meaning, although in the nature of things they can really have none. The whole is a mechanism which automatically turns out what it must with a certain inevitability but has no comprehending Intelligence, no intuitive Power behind it to determine its use. Universal Nature is a Chance that works as if it were a Necessity or else perhaps a Necessity that works like a self-regulating Chance. What seems to be consciousness has come out of this machine just like everything else in this singular freak-universe, constituted somehow, miraculously, impossibly, as the plant and the flower came out of the seed, somehow constituted, or as different chemical atoms are mysteriously constituted out of variant numbers of identical electrons, or as water leaps inexplicably into birth by a combination in exact measure of two gases. We have discovered that by just this process it came, — consciousness, the flower, the atom, water, — but how it could come into being by such a process is an unsolved riddle and how it took this form out of such a mother or could be the result of such ingredients and what each of these things in itself is remains unknowable. It is or has so become (or perhaps is not, but only so seems to our senses) — but that is all, for more than this science limited by its methods cannot tell and speculative philosophy itself with all its range and licence can hardly conjecture. And it does not much matter; for after all this consciousness which emerged obscurely in Time will in a later
Time disappear with its living vessels and be as if it had never been leaving behind the Inconscient still busy with its perpetual and empty labour. And perhaps indeed this consciousness is not really consciousness at all but only a sort of strange vibrant typewriting of conventional signs by which the Inconscient records to itself its own mechanical values; for things are not what they seem, colour is not colour but only a fictitious sign, all things perhaps are mere signs of bundled vibrations and consciousness itself nothing else. However we look at it, it would seem very much as if this universal Energy which creates these strange, inexplicable, impossible things or semblances that yet in a way are, were only a sort of Maya, like that of the Illusionists, aghatanaghatana-patiyasi, very skilful to make happen things that cannot happen, a huge senseless well organised paradox, a sequently arranged mass of inevitable inconsequences, a defiance to reason of which reason is the last brilliant but bewildered outcome. And of all these phenomenal appearances, the uprising of consciousness is perhaps the most paradoxical, the least inevitable, — Nature's most accidental, most startling inconsequence.

And again in this reading of the universe, more baffling than any unbelievable belief — credo quia incredibile, — with which ever dogmatic theology or mystic philosophy has challenged us, man loses all his cosmic value. An infinitesimal little creature on a tiny speck of matter lost amidst a whirling multitude of stupendous universes most or all of them perhaps vacant of life and thought and made for no other end but simply to whirl, he is (justifying Scripture) even as the worm is — only an edition de luxe, with copious developments and commentaries, of the same laborious but useless text, the same minute, careful, well-arranged, painstaking but insignificant script that we see already in the ant and the termite. Individual man lasts for a few years which are in the aimless vastness of the universe of no more matter than the few days or weeks or months of the insect. The race indeed has endured for millions of years and may endure for some centuries, some thousands, myriads or millions of years longer; but what are these millions in the incalculable aeons of the cosmos? The termite perhaps was before man and may be there when he has
disappeared, perhaps massacring his kind out of existence or destroyed by his own science; it has like man done against adverse conditions extraordinary miracles of intelligence (having yet, it seems, no intelligence with which to do them), built immense fortified cities, cultivated earth, organised remarkable societies, adapted means to end and overcome a stepmotherly Nature. Each has an equal value for itself which arrives after all only to the passion Nature has put in each species for survival, for exploitation of its life; for each other their only significance is to come annoyingly and destructively in each other’s way; for the universe — at least the universe as Science has described it — both have an equal non-value, for to it neither can matter, since they will disappear and the world go on interminably as it did without them. Vanity of vanities, Science teaches us even as did the world’s Scriptures; out of nothingness we came and into nothingness we shall sink hereafter. All that we are and think and create [and] do, however wonderful to our own eyes, or even if really wonderful in the mind’s values, is but a bubble, a vibration, a plasmic pullulation on the surface of Matter.

This is one side of the picture; but there is another.

If there is a consciousness in Matter, however secret and involved, there must be a consciousness secret and involved in the Inconscient.

But the question then arises whether such a thing can be any more than there can be a square circle [or] cold fire. “Not even a hundred declarations of the Veda,” says Shankara, “could prove the coldness of fire.” There are psychologists who deny that there is or can be any such thing as the subconscious, for it is a flat self-contradiction to speak of a consciousness which is below the level of consciousness. To be conscious is to be aware of self and things or at least of things, with whatever limitation, as a man’s or an animal’s waking mind is aware.

To a certain thought it might seem that only the surface of things is knowable, the rest either does not or cannot exist or
must be left in the shadow of an inevitable agnosticism. There are no depths [or they] are, as Bertrand Russell would have us believe, an uninhabited emptiness; there is no inner sky except the sky of thought or an abstract void crossed by the wandering wings of the Idea; if there is a sky behind the sky, it is such a Void, a void of unattainable superconscience. But this too is an imagination, a nonexistence. There can be no consciousness in the Inconscient, no Conscious in unconscious things, no superconscience.

If that were so, it would be impossible to have any true or whole knowledge. For our mind is an Ignorance searching for knowledge and arriving at representations or figures of it, it can never be except by a miraculous transformation something that knows, still less knows truly and knows all. But knowledge exists somewhere, knowledge is possible and a seeking ignorance is not our first and last fate. Our boundaries are lost [. . . ], the depths teem [or] are no longer vacant, the sky above mind is peopled with winged realities. The subconscious is disburdened of its strange contents, the superconscient becomes the top [of] consciousness, the peak of knowledge, there is a Conscient in unconscious things. Let us look then with the eye of the Ignorance first but also with the eye of this greater knowledge at the subconscious, at Inconscience, at the superconscient top of things. An immediate change will take place in our conception of self and our outlook on the universe.

The subconscious is a fact of our mentality. It is not the fact that our whole being, even our whole mentality, is on the surface. There are concealed heights, there are hidden gulfs, there are crowded spaces behind the front wall, below the threshold, in the unseen mental environment. There is a vast inconscient below us, an infinite superconscience above us. All these are part of a secret consciousness in the world, but also part of our own hidden being of which we are not aware or only intermittently and ignorantly or only, in our ultimate evolution, eventually aware.
Even in our ordinary experience there are moments in which one or other of these things becomes apparent, acts in our daily actions or peers out above the surface and replaces our absent and inattentive mind. We start writing and finish the writing without knowing what we have written. We are walking with our mind aware and guiding our course, — the [outer] mind, — but we continue to walk and find ourselves after a time farther on the intended way or beyond the intended goal or turn and have to retrace our steps. In an unconscious or half conscious moment words pour from our lips which we would never have spoken if we had used our fully awake mind and will. What is it that thus takes up the writing, the walk, the speech and completes our intention or betrays us? It must be either something of the mind behind or below its active surface movement or something of a driving life-force or action of the body.

But in the first explanation there must be a part of the mind, not our conscious thought and will that is capable of continuing automatically a course once habitual or previously fixed or pursuing of itself the direction accustomed or repetitive. It is capable not only of execution but of a radical direction, even a misdirection. This means a consciousness at conscious work, however vague or latently automatic, and can only be described as a subconscient or at least partly subconscious or subjacent, an underlying something else akin to consciousness. This is the first sign of a subconscient mind or of a secret consciousness which may even underlie not only our own surface being, but the whole cosmic operation and its apparently inconscient functioning and driven interactions, its purposeless purpose.

If it is a life-force that goes on with the works of the life when the mind is not attending to them, then only this must be a subconscious action and where it continues an action initiated by the conscious mind, then some sort of mechanical consciousness must be attributed to it. If it is the body that takes up the action, it must equally be credited with a subconscience that can do under certain circumstances the work of consciousness.

I have written a letter and proceed to put the name and address on the envelope, but my mind gets absorbed in something...
else and I find that I have written another habitual name and address, not the one I intended. Memory evidently has done this uncalled for work, but not a conscious memory with the mind aware of what it was doing. A subconscious layer of memory must have come to the surface mistaking the call, or there must have been a double action of memory one deliberate, the other automatic, the temporary suspension of the first giving room to an inadvertent action of the subliminal working.

On the other hand I may complete a sentence with a phrase I had not intended or thought of; where did it come from if not from the subconscious mind? It may even be a phrase having no connection with the conscious thought or in itself incoherent or have the form of words but be unintelligible. What is it that has dictated these things?

As consciousness descends from the supreme and the higher to the lower levels, it loses progressively its force and intensity till it reaches the nadir of inconscience.

The figure of Inconscience is the mask of an all-conscious Creator; the Inconscient creates with an unerring art, adaptation of means to end, ingenious originality, spontaneity and [ . . . ] of device. The conscious creator man cannot even come near the inconscient Creator, God. But [the] Inconscient is only a mask on a mobile face; its blank rigidity hides from us the expression of the face of the Omnipresent.

The Inconscient Energy

At one end of existence, the nether material end, we observe the reign of a complete phenomenal Inconscience. No creative
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consciousness or will can be detected there; we start from something that is but is not aware that it is, things that are but are unconscious that they are or that anything is. Yet it is this vast impalpable Inconscient that seems to have created Matter and the whole material universe.

There is, obvious and undeniable, an Energy that creates and there is a creation; these are the only two affirmations we can make which are beyond doubt. Even if we take the creation to be illusory, still the illusory creation is there and there is a Force or Energy or Power that has created it, whether it be mere unconscious Energy, Prakriti, or an energy of deceptive consciousness, Maya.

What we actually experience here is an energy inconscient or seemingly inconscient which is in constant motion and in that motion takes on forms or produces forms and in these forms it enters into many kinds of activity and engenders a multitude of active relations. Energy and action and the results of action, Prakriti and Karma, this is the whole formula of the material universe. Objects innumerable there are, lives too and things living, a Mind or minds, a Consciousness or consciousnesses or else perhaps mere phenomena in the Inconscient to which we give these names; but all these appear to us as if they were temporary results, events ephemeral or long persistent of the movement of Energy and action, its Karma.

What is this Energy? is it something uncreated and unborn, eternal, absolute though all it produces is created, temporal, relative? If it is born, then whence came it? in or on what does it work? what set it going and towards what? We do not know and seem to have no means of knowing; at least our intellect does not know and has not yet found out any sure way to know; it can only speculate, speculate endlessly in an inconclusive circle.

It is not an unborn eternal Matter from which it is born or of which it is the eternal force or in and on which it works, as was once supposed and as some still suppose. For that is now only a construction of the speculative mind, an idea, a hypothesis, an arbitrary postulate for which there is no discoverable correspondent reality. Matter, as we now know it, is something that we
can almost see coming into existence or at least can determine its process of creation; waves of energy materialising into particles and again becoming waves, but finally the waves coalesce and become atoms of what we must needs call Matter. This cannot be the inert inconscient Godhead, original and eternal, out of which all came, in and on which Energy works and produces by automatic necessity or a fortunately self-organising Chance the material world and all the lives, minds, souls — if souls there are — which in it live and move.

It can be said that this is only a conclusion of Science and Science is unfinished and everchanging; it may refute tomorrow what it affirms today; it may discover that electricity and light, the electron and proton and the photon are not the last word or the first fact; there may be a subtler Matter which is not that but something else — a Matter not formed but motional, vibratory, aetheric. But, still, what can that be but a subtler motion of Energy, a vibration of Energy in Space? And of Space too we do not know what it is, — whether a mere conception of our mind and its sense or an extension of something that exceeds the grasp of our mind and sense, — perhaps an unseizable Infinite.

The Sankhya philosopher affirmed an original indiscriminate Matter which evolves from Prakriti, from the eternal Energy, — is, we might say, its first state of manifestation. But as it is indiscriminate, it is not likely to be in any way determinable by our senses. And, after all, this too is only a creation of Energy, an evolution out of itself or a state which it assumes; we do not get away from the original formula, Energy and its actions and results, Prakriti and Karma.

An energy of some Inconscient Existence has created Matter and the material universe. All this material universe is indeed nothing but an inconscient Energy taking form or producing form and in and through its forms entering into all kinds of activity. Energy (Prakriti) and motion and action of Energy, Karma, and results of its action — this is the formula of our universe.
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But whence then comes consciousness? How can things in their very nature inconscient and unaware become conscious or develop some kind of awareness? There is here a contradiction which is inexplicable and the more we look at it, becomes more and more inexplicable.

This is possible because inconscience is a phenomenon not a fundamental reality. A phenomenon is something that appears to us, but does not show to us the whole reality of existence or of its own existence; it is a front, a face, a circumstance of something more than itself that does not appear but is—the Reality. Inconscience is a phenomenal state; it is consciousness that is the Reality; consciousness is an inherent and eternal state of being, inconscience is its temporal, temporary and apparent condition when it forms itself by its own energy into Matter and material objects. Its consciousness involves itself in inanimate Matter and seems there an inconscience; its energy too acts as if it were an inconscient energy, doing things without knowing what it is doing, creating a universe but unaware of the universe it creates, contriving millions of devices, but without any intelligence. So it seems, but so it cannot be; there is something hidden from us which we have to discover. It is the consciousness behind the Energy, the conscious Being behind the action that we have to discover.

Consciousness, being, force, energy (shakti), these are the three first terms of the fundamental truth of existence. What we have to know is how they work out together in ourselves and the universe.

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Chance, some say, does all; the phenomena of consciousness—for there is no such thing as consciousness in itself, only reactive phenomena of sense and mind provoked by outward impacts—are, like everything else, the products of Chance.

But what is Chance, after all? It is only a word, a notion formed by our consciousness to account for things of which we have no true knowledge—and it does not account for them.
When we do not know how or why a thing came to pass, we escape by saying, it was chance. We do not truly know how or why the universe happened or things in the universe, so we say “Chance made it; Chance did it.” An intellectual escape, nothing more. If we said “A selection, mysterious to us, out of infinite possibility,” then there would be some truth and some profundity in our thinking.

But the emergence of consciousness out of the Inconscient was more probably a necessity in the very being of being, in the innate movement of being, than merely a possibility. Necessity, then? an inevitable determination in Nature? or a self-determination in the conscious Spirit?

Consciousness and Immortality

Our existence is not a freak of some inconscient mechanical Force stumbling into consciousness nor an inexplicable activity on the surface of a blank Nothingness or an impassive inactive Infinite. There is a significance in our life, it moves towards a spiritual end, it fulfils the drive of an eternal reality.

Immortality is the nature of our being, birth and death are a movement and incident of our immortality. Birth is an assumption of a body by the spirit, death is the casting off [of] the body; there is nothing original in this birth, nothing final in this death. Before birth we were; after death we shall be. Nor are our birth and death a single episode without continuous meaning or sequel; it is one episode out of many, scenes of our drama of existence with its denouement far away in time.

All depends upon consciousness. For all world-existence is a form created by consciousness, upheld by consciousness, determined by consciousness. All that is is a consciousness veiled
or unveiled, manifesting or concealing its own substance. All is energy of consciousness masked by movement of mind and life and matter and taking forms which are merely motions of the energy stabilised to appearance, yet always in movement; for the consciousness that constitutes these forms is always in dynamic movement; the visible rhythm and self-result of this self-repeating or self-continuing vibration and never resting motion and dynamis is what we call form. Disperse the energy that constitutes it and the form dissolves. Withdraw the consciousness that expresses itself in the energy and the energy can keep up no longer its sustaining rhythm; therefore it disperses, therefore the form dissolves. If we could so intensify the power of the consciousness put out in us that we could keep the energy always repeating, continuing, enlarging, progressing in its rhythm, then, the form might change but need not dissolve and even physically we should be immortal[.]