Nature

If this is the nature of the operation to be effected, not a perfection of the present human mould but a breaking of it to proceed to a higher type, what then is the power & process that works it out? What is this Nature of which we speak so fluently? We habitually talk of it as if it were something mighty & conscious that lives and plans; we credit it with an aim, with wisdom to pursue that aim and with power to effect what it pursues. Are we justified in our language by the actualities of the universe or is this merely our inveterate habit of applying human figures to non-human things and the workings of intelligence to non-intelligent processes which come right because they must and not because they will and produce this magnificent ordered universe by some dumb blind and brute necessity inconceivable in its origin & nature to intelligent beings? If so, this blind brute force has produced something higher than itself, something which did not exist preconceived in its bosom or in any way belong to it. We cannot understand what being & Nature are, not because we are as yet too small and limited, but because we are too much above being & Nature. Our intelligence is a luminous freak in a darkness from which it was impossibly produced, since nothing in that darkness justified itself as a cause of its creation. Unless mind was inherent in brute matter, — & in that case matter is only apparently brute, — it was impossible for matter to produce mind. But since this leads us to an impossibility, it cannot be the truth. We must suppose then, if matter is brute, that mind is also brute. Intelligence is an illusion; there is nothing but a shock of

1 The following sentence was written at the beginning of this essay during revision. It was not worked into the text, and so is given here as a footnote:
Nature is Force of Consciousness in infinite Being. The opinion that sees a mechanical world in which consciousness is only an exceptional figure of things, is a hasty conclusion drawn from imperfect data.
nature impacts creating vibrations & reactions of matter which translate themselves into the phenomena of intelligence. Knowledge is only a relation of matter with matter, and is intrinsically neither different nor superior to the hurtling of atoms against each other or the physical collision of two bulls in a meadow. The material agents involved & phenomenon produced are different & therefore we do not call the recoil of one horned forehead from another an act of knowledge or intelligence, but the thing that has happened is intrinsically the same. Intelligence is itself inert & mechanical & merely the physiological result of a physiological movement & has nothing in it psychical or mental in the time-honoured sense of the words soul and mind. This is the view of modern scientific rationalism,—put indeed in other language than the scientist’s, put so as to bring out its logical consequences & implications, but still effectively the modern account of the universe.

In that account the nature of a thing consists of its composition, the properties contained in that composition and the laws of working determined by those properties; as for [example] iron is composed of certain elementary substances, possesses as a consequence of its composition certain properties, such as hardness etc. and under given circumstances will act in a given manner as the result of its properties. Applying this analysis on a larger scale we see the universe as the composition of certain brute forces working in certain material substances, possessed in itself and in those substances of certain primary & secondary, general & particular properties and working as a result by certain invariable tendencies & fixed processes which we call by a human figure Nature’s Laws. This is Nature. When searchingly analysed she is found to be a play of two entities, Force & Matter; but these two, if the unitarian view of the universe is correct, will some day be proved to be only one entity, either only Matter or only Force.

Even if we accept this modern view of the universe, which, it is not at all dangerous to prophesy, will have disappeared in the course of a century into a larger synthesis, there is still something to be said about the presence or absence of intelligence
in Nature. In what after all does intelligence consist, what are its composition, properties, laws? What in its circumstances is human intelligence, the only kind of intelligence which we are in a position to study from within & therefore understand? It is marked by three qualities or processes, the power & process of adaptation towards an end, the power & process of discrimination between the impacts on its senses & the power & process of mentally conscious comprehension. Human intelligence is, to put it briefly, teleological, discriminative and mentally conscious. About other than human beings, about animals, trees, metals, forces, we can say nothing from inside, we can only infer the absence or presence of these elements of consciousness from the evidence collected by an external observation. We cannot positively say, having no internal evidence, that the tree is not a mind imprisoned in matter and unable to express itself in the media it has at its disposal; we cannot say that it does not suffer the reactions of pleasure and pain; but from the external evidence we infer to the contrary. Our negative conclusion is probable, it is not certain. It may be itself negatived in the future march of knowledge. But still, taking the evidence as it stands, what are the facts we actually arrive at in this comparison of intelligent & non-intelligent Nature?

First, Nature possesses in a far higher degree than man the teleological faculty & process. To place an aim before one, to combine, adapt, modify, unify, vary means & processes in order to attain that end, to struggle against and overcome difficulties, to devise means to circumvent difficulties when they cannot be overcome, this is one of the noblest & divinest parts of human intelligence. But its action in man is only a speciality of its universal action in Nature. She works it out in man partly through the reason, in animals with very little & rudimentary reason, mainly through instinct, memory, impulse & sensation, in plants & other objects with very little & rudimentary reason, mainly through impulse & mechanical or, as we call it, involuntary action. But throughout there is the end & the adaptation to the end, & throughout the same basic means are used; for in man also it is only for a selection of his ends & processes that the reason
is used; for the greater part she uses the animal means, memory, impulse, sensation, instinct,—instincts differently directed, less decisive & more general than the animal instincts but still in the end & for their purpose as sure; & for yet another part she uses the same merely mechanical impulse & involuntary action precisely as in her mistermed inanimate forms of existence. Let us not say that the prodigality of Nature, her squandering of materials, her frequent failure, her apparent freaks and gambollings are signs of purposelessness and absence of intelligence. Man with his reason is guilty of the same laches and wanderings. But neither Man nor Nature is therefore purposeless or unintelligent. It is Nature who compels Man himself to be other than too strenuously utilitarian, for she knows better than the economist & the utilitarian philosopher. She is an universal intelligence & she has to attend, not only in the sum, but in each detail, to the universal as well as to the particular effect; she has to work out each detail with her eye on the group and not only on the group but the whole kind & not only on the whole kind but the whole world of species. Man, a particular intelligence limited by his reason, is incapable of this largeness; he puts his particular ends in the forefront and neither sees where absorption in them hurts his general well being nor can divine where they clash with the universal purpose. Her failures have an utility—we shall see before long how great an utility; her freaks have a hidden seriousness. And yet above all she remembers that beyond all formal ends, her one great object is the working out of universal delight founded on arrangement as a means, but exceeding its means. Towards that she moves; she takes delight on the way, she takes delight in the work, she takes delight, too, beyond the work.

But in all this we anticipate, we speak as if Nature were self-conscious; what we have arrived at is that Nature is teleological, more widely than man, more perfectly than man, & man himself is only teleological because of that in Nature & by the same elementary means & processes as the animal & the plant, though with additions of fresh means peculiar to mind. This, it may be said, does not constitute Intelligence,—for intelligence
is not only teleological, but discriminative & mentally conscious. Mechanical discrimination, Nature certainly possesses in the highest degree; without it her teleological processes would be impossible. The tendril growing straight through the air comes into contact with a rope, a stick, the stalk of a plant; immediately it seizes it as with a finger, changes its straight growth for a curled & compressive movement, & winds itself round & round the support. What induces the change? what makes it discriminate the presence of a support & the possibility of this new movement? It is the instinct of the tendril and differs in no way, intrinsically, from the instinct of the newborn pup seizing at once on its mother's teats or the instinct of a man in his more mechanical needs & actions. We see the moon-lotus open its petals to the moon, close them to the touch of the day. In what does this discriminative movement differ from the motion of the hand leaping back from the touch of a flame, or from the recoiling movement of disgust & displeasure in the nerves from an abhorrent sight or from the recoiling movement of denial & uncongeniality in the mind from a distasteful idea or opinion? Intrinsically, there seems to be no difference; but there is a difference in circumstance. One is not attended with mental self-consciousness, the others are attended with this supremely important element. We think falsely that there is no will in the action of the tendril and the lotus, and no discrimination. There is a will, but not mentalised will; there is discrimination but not mentalised discrimination. It is mechanical, we say,—but do we understand what we mean when we say it,—& we give other names, calling will force, discrimination a natural reaction or an organic tendency. These names are only various masks concealing an intrinsic identity.

Even if we could go no farther, we should have gained an enormous step; for we have already the conception of the thing we call Nature as possessing, containing or identical with a great Force of Will placing before itself a vast end & a million complexly related incidental ends, working them out by contrivance, adaptation, arrangement, device, using an unfailing discrimination & vastly fulfilling its complex work. Of this great
Force human intelligence would only be a limited and inferior movement, guided and used by it, serving its ends even when it seems to combat its ends. We may deny Intelligence to such a Power, because it does not give signs of mental consciousness & does not in every part of its works use a human or mental intelligence; but our objection is only a metaphysical distinction. Practically, looking out on life & not in upon abstract thought, we can, if we admit this conception, rely on it that the workings of this unintelligent discrimination will be the same as if they were the workings of a universal Intelligence & the aim & means of the mechanical will the aims & means which would be chosen by an Almighty Wisdom. But if we arrive at this certainty, does not Reason itself demand of us that we should admit in Nature or behind it a universal Intelligence and an Almighty Wisdom? If the results are such as these powers would create, must we not admit the presence of these powers as the cause? Which is the truer Rationalism, to admit that the works of Intelligence are produced by Intelligence or to assert that they are produced by a blind Machine unconsciously working out perfection? to admit that the emergence of overt intelligence in humanity is due to the specialised function of a secret intelligence in the universe or to assert that it is the product of a Force to which the very principle of Intelligence is absent? To justify the paradox by saying that things are worked out in a particular way because it is their nature to be worked out in that way, is to play the fool with reason; for it does not carry us an inch beyond the mere fact that they are so worked out, one knows not why.

The true reason for the modern reluctance to admit that Nature has intelligence & wisdom or is intelligence & wisdom, is the constant association in the human mind of these things with mentally self-conscious personality. Intelligence, we think, presupposes someone who is intelligent, an ego who possesses & uses this intelligence. An examination of human consciousness shows that this association is an error. Intelligence possesses us, not we intelligence; intelligence uses us, not we intelligence. The mental ego in man is a creation & instrument of intelligence and intelligence itself is a force of Nature manifesting itself in a
rudimentary or advanced state in all animal life. This objection, therefore, vanishes. Not only so, but Science herself by putting the ego in its right place as a product of mind has shown that Intelligence is not a human possession but a force of Nature & therefore an attribute of Nature, a manifestation of the universal Force.

The question remains, is it a fundamental & omnipresent attribute or only a development manifested in a select minority of her works? Here again, the difficulty is that we associate intelligence with an organised mental consciousness. But let us look at & interrogate the facts which Science has brought into our ken. We will glance at only one of them, the fly catching plant of America. Here is a vegetable organism which has hunger, — shall we say, an unconscious hunger, which needs animal food, which sets a trap for it, as the spider sets it, which feels the moment the victim touches the trap, which immediately closes & seizes the prey, eats & digests it & lies in wait for more. These motions are exactly the motions of the spider's mental intelligence altered & conditioned only by the comparative immobility of the plant & confined only, so far as we can observe, to the management of this supreme vital need & its satisfaction. Why should we attribute mental intelligence to the spider & none to the plant? Granted that it is rudimentary, organised only for special purposes, still it would seem to be the same natural Force at work in the spider & plant, intelligently devising means to an end & superintending the conduct of the device. If there is no mind in the plant, then, irresistibly, mental intelligence & mechanical intelligence are one & the same thing in essence, & the tendril embracing its prop, the plant catching its prey & the spider seizing its victim are all forms of one Force of action, which we may decline to call Intelligence if we will, but which is obviously the same thing as Intelligence. The difference is between Intelligence organised as mind, & Intelligence not organised but working with a broad elementary purity more unerring, in a way, than the action of mind. In the light of these facts the conception of Nature as infinite teleological & discriminative Force of Intelligence unorganised & impersonal because
superior to organisation & personality becomes the supreme probability, the mechanical theory is only a possibility. In the absence of certainties Reason demands that we should accept the probable in preference to the possible and a harmonious & natural in preference to a violent and paradoxical explanation.

But is it certain that in this Intelligence & its works Mind is a speciality and Personality — as distinguished from mental ego — is entirely absent except as an efflorescence & convenience of Mind? We think so, because we suppose that where there are no animal signs of consciousness, there consciousness cannot and does not exist. This also may be an assumption. We must remember that we know nothing of the tree & the stone except its exterior signs of life or quiescence; our internal knowledge is confined to the phenomena of human psychology. But even in this limited sphere there is much that should make us think very deeply and pause very long before we hasten to rash negative assertions. A man sleeps, dreamlessly, he thinks; but we know that all the time consciousness is at work within him, dreaming, always dreaming; of his body & its surroundings he knows nothing, yet that body is of itself conducting all the necessary operations of life. In the man stunned or in trance there is the same phenomenon of a divided being, consciousness mentally active within apart from the body which is mentally even as the tree & the stone, but vitally active & functioning like the tree. Catalepsy presents a still more curious phenomenon of a body dead & inert like the stone, not even vitally active like the tree, but a mind perfectly aware of itself, its medium & its surroundings, though no longer in active possession of the medium and therefore no longer able to act materially on its surroundings. In face of these examples how can we assert that there is no life in the stone, no mind in stone or tree? The premise of the syllogism by which science denies mind to the tree or life to the stone, viz that where there is no outward sign of life or conscious mentality, life & mentality do not exist, is proven to be false. The possibility, even a certain probability presents itself, — in view of the unity of Nature & the omnipresent intelligence in her works, that the tree & the stone
are in their totality just such a divided being, a form not yet penetrated & possessed by conscious mind, a conscious intelligence within dreaming in itself or, like the cataleptic, aware of its surroundings, but because not yet possessed of its medium (the intelligence in the cataleptic is temporarily dispossessed) unable to show any sign of life or of mentality or to act aggressively on its surroundings.

We do not need to stop at this imperfect probability, for the latest researches of psychology make it almost overwhelming in its insistence & next door to the actual proof. We now know that within men there is a dream self or sleep self other than the waking consciousness, active in the stunned, the drugged, the hypnotised, the sleeping, which knows what the waking mind does not know, understands what the waking mind does not understand, remembers accurately what the waking mind has not even taken the trouble to notice. Who is this apparent sleeper in the waking, this waker in the sleeping in comparison with whose comprehensive attentiveness & perfect observation, memory and intelligence our waking consciousness is only a fragmentary & hasty dream? Mark this capital point that this more perfect consciousness within us is not the product of evolution, — nowhere in the evolved & waking world is there such a being who remembers & repeats automatically the sounds of a foreign language which is unnoticed jabbering to the instructed mind, solves spontaneously problems from which the instructed mind has retired baffled & weary, notices everything, understands everything, recalls everything. Therefore this consciousness within is independent of evolution and, consequently, we may presume, anterior to evolution. Esha supteshu jagarti, says the Katha Upanishad, This is the Waker in all who sleep.

This new psychological research is only in its infancy & cannot tell us what this secret consciousness is, but the knowledge gained by Yoga enables us to assert positively that this is the complete mental being within who guides life & body, manomayah pranashairaneta. He it is who conducts our evolution & awakes mind out of life & is more & more getting possession of this
vitalised human body, his medium & instrument, so that it may become what it is not now, a perfect instrument of mentality. In the stone he also is and in the tree, in those sleepers also there is one who wakes; but he has not in those forms got possession yet of the instrument for the purposes of mind; he can only use them for the purposes of vitality in its growth or in its active functioning.

We see, therefore, modern psychology, although it still gets away from the only rational & logical conclusion possible on its data, marching inevitably & under the sheer compulsion of facts to the very truths arrived at thousands of years ago by the ancient Rishis. How did they arrive at them? Not by speculation, as the scholars vainly imagine, but by Yoga. For the great stumbling block that has stood in the way of Science is its inability to get inside its object, the necessity under which it labours of building on inferences from external study, — & all its desperate & cruel attempts to make up the deficiency by vivisection or other ruthless experiments cannot remedy the defect. Yoga enables us to get inside the object by dissolving the artificial barriers of the bodily experience & the mental ego-sense in the observer. It takes us out of the little hold of personal experience and casts us into the great universal currents; takes us out of the personal mind sheath & makes [us] one with universal self and universal mind. Therefore were the ancient Rishis able to see what now we are beginning again to glimpse dimly that not only is Nature herself an infinite teleological and discriminative impersonal Force of Intelligence or Consciousness, prajna prasrita purani, but that God dwells within & over Nature as infinite universal Personality, universal in the universe, individualised as well as universal in the particular form, or self-consciousness who perceives, enjoys & conducts to their end its vast & complex workings. Not only is there Prakriti; there is also Purusha.

So far, then, we succeed in forming some idea of the great force which is to work out our emergence from our nature to our

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2 Intelligent Consciousness that went forth in the beginning. Swetaswatara Upanishad.
supernature. It is a force of Conscious Being manifesting itself in forms & movements & working out exactly as it is guided, from stage to stage, the predetermined progress of our becoming & the Will of God in the world.