

November 1960

READING 5

ALL GROUPS

TWENTY YEARS AFTER (Continued)

PART I

FIRST LECTURE (continued)

Now let us return to these two questions: What does development mean, and what does it mean that man can become a different being or, in other words, what kind of change is possible in man and *how* and *when* does this change begin?

It has already been said that the change will begin with those powers and capacities which man *ascribes to himself*, but which, in reality, he does not possess.

This means that before man can acquire any new powers and capacities, he must actually develop in himself those powers and qualities which he ascribes to himself, and about which he has the greatest possible illusions.

Naturally, before such development can begin man must *realise that he does not possess consciousness, individuality, permanent 'I', or will*. Because, so long as he believes that he possesses these qualities, he will not make the right efforts to acquire them, exactly as a man will not buy costly things and pay a high price for them if he thinks that he already possesses them.

The most important and the most misleading of these qualities is consciousness. And the change in man begins with the change in his understanding of the meaning of consciousness and with his acquiring command over it.

What is consciousness?

In most cases in ordinary language, the word 'consciousness' is used as an equivalent to the word 'intelligence' (in the sense of mind activity), or as an alternative for it.

In reality, consciousness is a particular kind of 'awareness' in man, awareness of himself, awareness of who he is, what he feels or thinks, or where he is at the moment. Only man himself can know whether he is 'conscious' at a given moment or not.

But opinions of modern psychological schools differ on the question of consciousness. Some recognise that man is conscious in at least part of his functions; others deny any kind of consciousness in man, deny even the usefulness or the necessity for the term 'consciousness'. I will analyse none of these opinions because, from the point of view of the system about which I speak, they are all wrong. Later, it will become clearer what I mean by this.

COMMENT

Leaving aside all theories and opinions let us turn straight to this sentence:

Consciousness, is a particular kind of 'awareness' in man, awareness of himself, awareness of who he is, what he feels or thinks, or where he is at the moment.

When some of this awareness happens to be present, it has a strangely familiar taste. One remembers that one has had it before but has lost it; one seemed to have had it much more as a child. One feels as the Prodigal Son felt when he had plumbed the lowest depths and then suddenly came to himself.

At such moments it is vividly clear that the human mind has a natural place of happiness where it belongs, and that it is unhappy because it is skimming over the surface of life trying to find a fictitious happiness and forgetting the very existence of its true home.

To understand the mechanism of this, we must realise that the human mind consists of something like a lantern (brain-stem) and a reflecting screen (cortex). The lantern is emitting very little light and we are engaged all the time in watching the dim and distorted shadows moving over the screen. Recently the physiologists have proved that there is an alerting mechanism in the brain-stem. Now if we stop watching the shadows for a time and turn our attention inwards it is possible gradually to alert this mechanism, to turn on more light, in fact. But this is an extremely long and difficult thing to do without certain methods invented for the purpose.

However, by using one of these methods we are finding that first a glow and then a light begins to come for short periods, so that when we look at the screen again the images are much more distinct and less distorted. Further, after some time the light can come on independently at other times and always with that particular kind of awareness.

(Pause, and try to recall some clear example of a moment of awareness and see if the above picture is true.)

We now come to the final part of the First Lecture:

For the present I want to draw your attention to three points which have been missed by *all* modern psychological schools.

The first point is that man is not equally conscious all the time, as some systems presume, and he is not equally non-conscious all the time as other systems presume. He is conscious only sporadically and accidentally, and even then only in flashes or for very brief and transitory periods. These sporadic moments of consciousness, plus memory, produce the illusion of continuous consciousness.

The second point is that consciousness has definite degrees: (a) in extent and penetration, and (b) in frequency of appearance and in duration.

Extent and penetration can be measured by comparing different moments of consciousness and their relative value; and frequency and duration can be easily observed and determined as soon as man realises what he is looking for.

The third point is that consciousness in man can be produced *for a moment* at any time by drawing his attention to it; and, what is really important, that consciousness can be made more or less continuous and permanent by the special efforts and long work on himself of a man desirous of becoming conscious.

The mistakes most commonly made about consciousness are that it is either taken as connected with all manifestations of *intelligence* and inseparable from them, or denied on the basis of the long-established fact that the presence of consciousness cannot be proved by observation of the external actions of man.

I will try to explain how consciousness can be studied.

Take a watch and look at the second hand, trying to be aware of yourself and concentrating on the feeling 'I am So-and-so', 'I am here', and so on. Try not to think about anything else, simply follow the movement of the second hand and be aware of yourself, your name, your existence, the place where you are. Keep all other thoughts away.

You will find, if you are persistent, that you will be able to do this for two minutes. This is the limit of your consciousness. But if you try to repeat the experiment soon after, you will find it more difficult than the first time.

This experiment shows that a man in his natural state can, with great effort, be conscious of *one subject* (himself) for two minutes.

The most important deduction one can make after doing this experiment in the right way is that man is not conscious of himself. The illusion of his being conscious of himself is created by memory and thought processes. For instance, a man goes to a theatre. If he is accustomed to it, he is not conscious of being there while he is there, although he can see things and observe them, enjoy the performance, remember it and so on. But when he comes back he remembers that he was in the theatre and certainly thinks that he was conscious while he was there. So he has no doubts about his consciousness.

(Pause. Try the experiment)

COMMENT

This experiment is valuable only because it proves to us that ordinarily we have not got this consciousness and no amount of effort will produced it *that way*. More and more effort, less and less result.

Here is another experiment to try: Shut your eyes and try to penetrate into your own nature, simply withdrawing attention from the images on the screen, not noticing thoughts, external noises and so on. This is a method used in certain aspects of the religious Way, where it is combined with efforts to realize the presence of God as in the *Cloud of Unknowing* or some of the writings of Jacob Boehme. But when *we* try such an experiment unaided we are reminded of the sentence in the First Upanishad:

Pin your faith to natural knowledge, stumble through the darkness of the blind; pin your faith to supernatural knowledge, stumble through a darkness deeper still.

One needs a probe or a beam of light by which to find the way.

PART 2

According to the system we are studying, man has the possibility of four states of consciousness. They are: *sleep*, *waking state*, *self-consciousness* and *objective consciousness*. But although he has the possibility of these four states of consciousness man actually lives only in two states: one part of his life passes in sleep, and the other part in what is called 'waking state', though in reality it differs very little from sleep.

In ordinary life man knows nothing of 'objective consciousness' and no experiments in this direction are possible. The third state, or 'self-consciousness', he ascribes to himself, i.e. he believes he possesses it, although actually he can be conscious of himself only in very rare flashes, and even then he probably does not recognise it because he does not know what it would imply if he actually possessed it. These glimpses of consciousness come in exceptional moments: in highly emotional states, in moments of danger, in very new and unexpected circumstances and situations; or sometimes in quite ordinary moments when nothing particular happens. But in his ordinary or 'normal' state man has no control of them whatever.

As regards our ordinary memory, or moments of memory, we actually *remember* only moments of consciousness, although we do not see that this is so.

What memory means in a technical sense, I will explain later. Now I simply want you to turn your attention to your own observations of your memory. You will notice that you

remember things differently: some things you remember quite vividly, some very vaguely, and some you do not remember at all. You only *know* that they happened.

This means, for instance, that if you know that some time ago you went to a definite place to speak to someone, you may remember two or three things connected with your conversation with this person; but you may not remember at all how you went there and how you returned. Now, if you are asked if you remember how you went there and how you returned, you will say that you remember distinctly, when, in reality, *you only know it and know where you went*; but you do not remember it, with the exception, possibly, of two or three flashes.

You will be very astonished when you realise how little you actually remember. And it happens in this way because you *remember* only the *moments when you were conscious*. You will understand better what I mean if you try to turn your mind back as far as you can to early childhood, or in any case to something that happened long ago. You will then realise how little you actually remember and how much there is concerning which you simply *know* or *heard that it happened*.

So in reference to the third state of consciousness we can say that man has occasional moments of self-consciousness but he has no command over them. They come and go by themselves, being controlled by external circumstances and occasional associations or emotions.

The question arises: Is it possible to acquire command over these fleeting moments of consciousness, to evoke them more often and to keep them longer, or even make them permanent?

In other words, is it not possible to become conscious?

This is the most important point, and it must be understood at the very beginning of our study that this point has been entirely missed by all modern psychological schools.

For with the right methods and the right efforts man *can* acquire control of consciousness and *can* become fully conscious of himself, with all that it implies; and what it actually implies we, in our present state, do not even imagine.

Only after this point has been understood does a really serious study of psychology become possible.

NOTE

'For with the right methods and the right efforts man *can* acquire control of consciousness.' And *note* this is the natural state of man – his birthright which he has lost – therefore he is unhappy and discontented. If he regains his birthright he will be happy quite independently of external conditions.

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