

11 November 1963

READING 6

We've often been asked: 'Why do you always draw your descriptions of the structure and possibilities of man from such ancient sources? Aren't there any current scientific facts and descriptions which could give us the precise knowledge we want?'

Till now, those scientific facts have been so complicated and clothed in such discordant and difficult terminologies, that it has needed a lifetime of professional study to absorb and understand them and see their relation to our System and to Self-realization. But, having recently had to read up all I could of the scientific work done in the field of neuropsychology all over the world during the last two or three years, I discern that it is now possible to see the wood for the trees.

Since it is a fundamental part of the work of our Society to relate the newer scientific discoveries with the realization of all the possibilities latent in individual man and in mankind as the self-evolving species of organic life, I've got to ask for some effort on your part to understand the basic fact upon which this new turn of events depends.

Let's put it this way. Look at the face of a watch or a clock; you see by the hands not only what the time is, but whether it's running fast or slow, and you can regulate it to keep time. But if it needs cleaning or repairing, you ask a man who knows how it works, a watch-maker, to open the back and do something to the works. Now human beings muddle along like watches keeping time as best they can, running fast or slow, but keeping going till the mechanism wears out and they die.

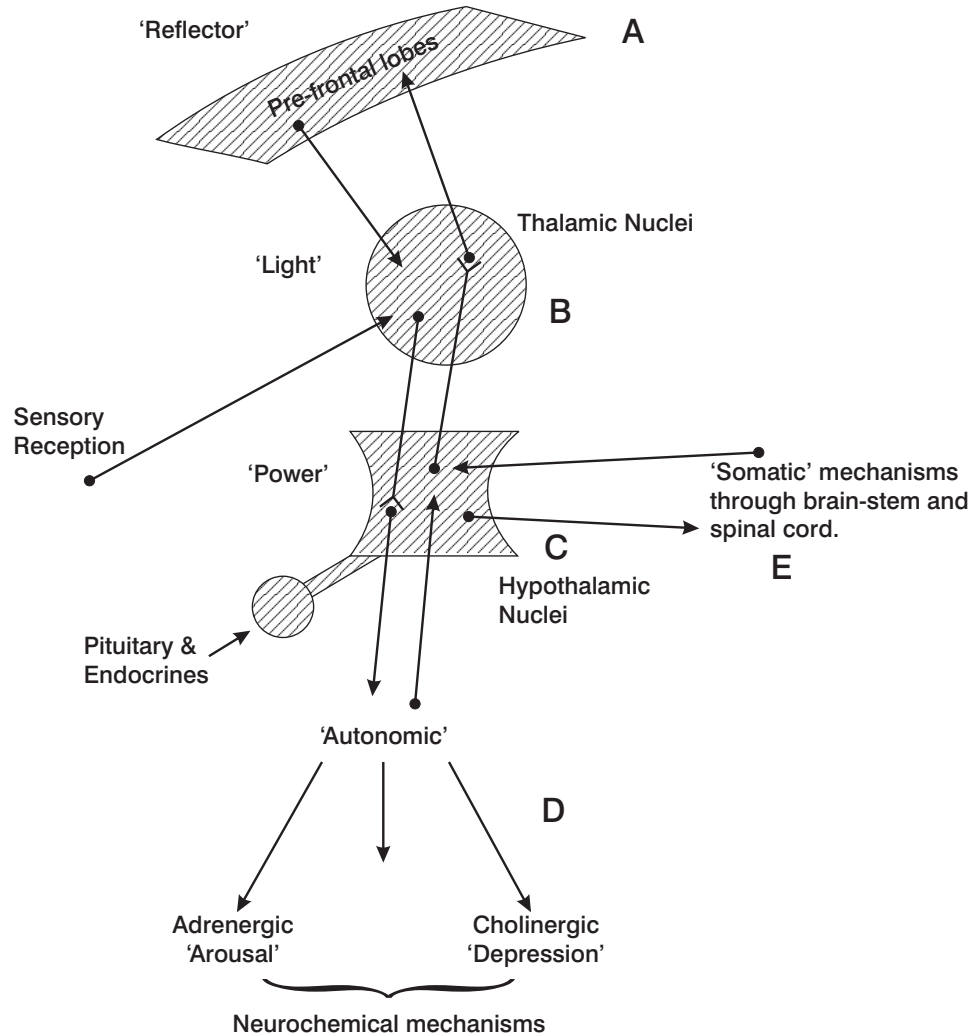
But of course a human being is much more than a mechanism; each one contains latent possibility. Well, suppose there is a simple method not only for regulating the man and making him tick correctly up to time, but which does something to the works as well; fine, he can go ahead. He doesn't need any knowledge for that; doesn't need to open the back of the watch and tinker with the works. Unless? Unless things begin to happen, good or bad – things that take him by surprise, upset the equilibrium. Then he comes roaring along to find a watch-maker! Somebody's got to know how he works; and those watchmakers can't afford to make mistakes; they've got to know the general plan of those works and the differences in different kinds of people.

What science is rediscovering is that there is a comparatively small part of the nervous system – or of the mind if you prefer, through which life can be regulated. Through it, all the functions of the organism, mental and physical, could be governed. *But this part is not specially concerned with this function or that; its whole concern is with consciousness and the regulation of life as a whole.* It clearly has three divisions like the power, the light and the screen of the magic lantern; but there is considerable obscurity about how to describe those three parts. What is becoming clear is that all three parts are closely integrated into one whole, and for consciousness all those three parts are essential. To quote one author¹:

A changing dynamic mechanism seems to offer the only tenable hypothesis. It is the *integration* itself, the *relationship* of one functioning part to another which is 'mind' and which causes the phenomenon of consciousness. There can be no centre. There is no one seat of consciousness. It is the streaming of impulses in a complex series of circuits that makes 'mind' feasible.

To understand all this it is necessary to keep constantly in mind Mr. Ouspensky's reminder that 'consciousness can exist without functions; and functions without consciousness'. That is why the analogy of the magic lantern – screen, light and power in relation to this most important part is so valuable.

[The following page-and-a-half may well be omitted at most of the Groups:
In extremely simple diagrammatic form it is expressed like this:



One Physiology book² refers to this picture in the words:

It is clear that the prefrontal cortex, thalamus and hypothalamus are so closely interconnected that in the intact person they function as an integrated whole. In emotional situations activity develops in large areas of the forebrain. They set up a discharge to viscera and muscles (exteriorization) and at the same time they give rise to the mental state that prolongs and perpetuates the bodily disturbance.

It is realised that the labels are quite inadequate; but certain possibilities already emerge:

1. Such an event as a strong emotion always has simultaneous physical and mental accompaniments. Without the mental chain reaction the physical effects would in most cases be very transient.

2. The diagram enables one to determine the site and mode of action of most of the powerful drugs in use to-day. Thus morphine kills the pain at B but also clouds A; barbiturates put A and C to sleep but don't kill the pain at B etc., etc.
3. But if you study just D alone and learn to recognize the effects of these high-powered and opposing 'chemical mediators', you can learn very much about Rajas and Tamas Guna. Naturally the presence of Sattva is not suspected and cannot be studied by Science at the present time.]

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All this is a very tentative introduction toward what is quite a new scientific approach to human consciousness. We are, you see, taking the diagram of the House of Three Storeys, not now as representing the whole organism, but that small part through which 'life can be regulated'. It is in this part that the Meditation operates and through which it exerts its far-reaching effects.

We are irresistibly reminded of certain time-honoured descriptions:

1. St. Philotheus in the *Philokalia*

Wakefulness is a spiritual art, and it teaches us to control the movements of the triune soul, the thinking part, the desiring part and the excitable part.

2. Gichtel, a mystic of the seventeenth century, quoted in *A New Model*

Man has become so earthly and outward, that he seeks afar, beyond the starry sky, in the higher eternity, what is quite near him, within the inner centre of his soul.

When the soul begins to strive to divert its will from the exterior constellation and abandon everything visible in order to turn to God, to its Centre, this requires desperate work.

The more the soul penetrates within itself, the nearer it approaches God until it finally stops before the Holy Trinity. Then it has reached deep knowledge.

3. The old Chinese classic: the *Secret of the Golden Flower*

In the field of the square inch of the house of the square foot, life can be regulated. The house of the square foot is the face. The field of the square inch in the face: what could that be other than the Heavenly Heart? In the middle of the square inch dwells the splendour... The Heavenly Heart is like the dwelling place, the Light is the master.

Therefore when the Light circulates, the powers of the whole body arrange themselves before its throne, just as when a holy king has taken possession of the capital and has laid down the fundamental rules of order, all the states approach with tribute; or, just as when the master is quiet and calm, men-servants and maids obey his orders of their own accord, and each does his work.

Therefore you only have to make the Light circulate: that is the deepest and most wonderful secret. The Light is easy to move, but difficult to fix. If it is allowed to go long enough in a circle, then it crystallises itself: that is the natural spirit-body.

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References

¹Stanley Cobb: *Foundations of Neuropsychiatry*, Baltimore 1958, p.128.

²Samson Wright: *Applied Physiology*.

