

17 February 1964

## READING 5

### PART 1

We'll now try to sum up the position reached so far, trying to connect our findings with the present trends of thought. We started by giving a summary of the mechanisms underlying the transition from sleeping to waking and the alerting of the Attention, as established by the physiologists with their very rigorous and exact methods. This is equivalent to describing the house in which we live in the language of the plumber, the gasman, and the electrician. A different language, an everyday non-scientific language is needed to describe the furnishings and contents of that house, and the events (the tea-parties and so on) which take place in it. A different language still would be needed to describe the psychology of the owner of this house and the laws of that psychology. As Sherrington put it in his introduction to the talks on 'The Physical Basis of Mind' broadcast in 1949:

It is a far cry from an electrical reaction in the brain to suddenly seeing the world around me, with all its distances, its colours and *chiaroscuro*.

But your observations have already confirmed that there can be experienced, and described in everyday language, a psychological equivalent to the electrical mechanism of 'non-specific alerting of attention'. Once we realise that there is an important part of the brain which is concerned with the *whole man* and not with one or another function, we can find a few scattered references to this realisation in the chaotic mass of writings on psychology, e.g., in a text-book published in 1896:

Noetic synthesis owes its peculiarity to the introduction of a distinct kind of mental factor, the *apprehension of the whole*, which determines the order and connection of the apprehension of the parts.

(G.F. Stout, *Analytic Psychology*)

We find also that, whereas the first half of this century was mainly concerned with analysis or differentiation into smaller and smaller parts, the second half is becoming more and more concerned with synthesis, the integration of the mind, e.g.:

Actually, in our mental life we find ourselves dealing with the whole objects... not with elements. ... Even when we are... looking up into an unbroken expanse of blue sky, we experience a single whole impression, not a mass of blue points. May it not be that the whole search for elements is misleading?

(J.C. Flugel, *A Hundred Years of Psychology*,  
reprint of 2nd Edition 1953, Duckworth, p.242)

We find also that there has been an influential school of Psychology in existence since 1912, centred on this idea of 'wholeness of perception'. From the point of view of this school:

... the whole living organism is, it is maintained, a 'Gestalt' (pattern or configuration) as is also, for instance, the solar system. In these, as in the configurations of perception, it

is useless to consider the parts in isolation; for a change in any one part inevitably changes the whole. On the other hand, the *whole* can persist when all the parts are changed, as when the same tune is played in different keys.

(*ibid.* p.243)

And Lord Brain, a leading neurologist, voices the same idea:

Is it likely that physiology will ever throw any real light upon the relationship between the brain and the mind? I believe that, working in conjunction with psychology, it will; but you must not expect me to give you a clear idea of how that will happen. I can only guess where present advances seem to be leading us. Think of a pattern. An atom is a pattern of electrons, a molecule is a pattern of atoms. There are patterns of patterns of patterns, and so on indefinitely. The most complicated patterns we know are in the brain. Not only are there twelve thousand million nerve cells out of which patterns can be made, but nervous patterns exist in time, like a melody, as well as in space. If you look at a tapestry through a magnifying glass you will see the individual threads, but not the pattern: If *you stand away from it* you will see the pattern but not the threads. My guess is that in the nervous system we are looking at the threads while with the mind we perceive the patterns, and that one day we shall discover how the patterns are made out of the threads.

(W. Russell Brain in *The Physical Basis of Mind*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1950)

At this point you might like to hear again the quotation from *The Gradual Sayings* which was read last Monday:

... Suppose, monks, a pool of water, turbid, stirred up and muddied. Then a man who has eyes to see stands upon the bank. He could not see the oysters and the shells, the pebbles and the gravel as they lie, or the shoals of fish that dart about. Why not? Because of the turbid state of the water.

Just so it is impossible for that monk of whom I speak to understand with his turbid mind either his own profit or that of others... or to realize states surpassing that of ordinary man, the excellence of True Knowledge and of Insight. What is the cause of that? Monks, it is the turbid nature of his mind.

But suppose, monks, a pool of water, pellucid, tranquil, and unstirred. Then a man who has eyes to see, while standing on the bank, could see the oysters and the shells, the pebbles and the gravel as they lie, and the shoals of fish that dart about. Why so? Because of the untroubled nature of the water, monks.

Just so *it is* possible for that monk of whom I speak to understand with his untroubled mind both his own profit and that of others; *it is* possible for him to realize states surpassing those of ordinary man, the excellence of True Knowledge and of Insight. What is the cause of that? Monks, it is the untroubled nature of his mind.

## PART 2

It is of course the idea of Totality or Wholeness which is inherent in the religious conception of God; but many people today want to escape from religious doctrines and religious language. It is contained also in the word *Consciousness* which, by derivation, means Knowing altogether and at once; and in the word *Conscience* which means Feeling altogether and at once. The relation of a part to a given Whole is basic to the System's '*Doctrine of Cosmoses*'; for each cosmos is an atom of the cosmos next above. So we see that whereas the analytical sciences are travelling along a narrow horizontal band studying more and more 'ultimate' particles or units; the Systems

concerned with the development of man study only the wholeness of man, the *One*, the Atman, which is the ever-receding wholeness behind each human organism.

This 'Wholeness' cannot be approached by intellectual or analytical methods such as scientific experiment. It can be reached only through increasing devotion to that Ideal, accompanied by the daily practice of alerting and control of the Attention.

We would like you therefore this week not to be thinking primarily of recording observations; but to be devoted to the setting up of a state of Attention and trying to make it last *for its own sake*; always with the ideal of Wholeness, in mind. But if observations come, record them; we should be grateful for the best of them for use in the proposed book which might be called: *An Introduction to Normal Psychology: Study in Integration of the Mind*.

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