The Awareness Principle and the 'Unconscious'



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THE AWARENESS PRINCIPLE AND 'THE UNCONSCIOUS'

Today's secular high priests of physical science and biological psychiatry, lacking half the cultural learning and historical knowledge of a figure such as Freud – and therefore quite unable to step outside the box of today's over-specialised present-day scientific culture – think of this giant figure and his theories of 'psychoanalysis' as merely oldfashioned and passé. Worse still, they have the audacity to accuse psychoanalysis of being 'unscientific' because it is based on 'unverifiable constructs' such as ego, id, libido, the unconscious etc. In this way they show their own total unawareness of the historical evolution and context of their own most basic concepts - failing to recognise that these themselves are unverifiable constructs. Thus physical-scientific concepts such as 'quanta', 'matter waves', 'dark energy', not to mention its most basic concept – the concept of 'energy' itself - are no less 'unverifiable constructs' than what Freud termed 'the unconscious'. As Heidegger remarked, physics as physics is the object of no possible scientific experiment. Similarly there is no possible scientific experiment that could prove the 'verifiability' of the modern-scientific concept of 'energy' or show its superiority to earlier concepts, not least earlier historical understandings of the word 'energy' itself – long since forgotten and altered and distorted in the scientific march of 'progress'. The same applies to the diagnostic categories of so-called 'scientific' psychiatry most of which are mere arbitrarily constructed labels for groups of vaguely defined symptoms.

The fact that scientific terms are constructs – labels that no experiment can verify – does not mean that they lack meaning. Freud's concept of the unconscious may be no more verifiable than those of so-called 'hard science' but that does not mean it does not have meaning or point to something real ('pointing to' being the very meaning of the German verb bedeuten – 'to mean'). Freud compared consciousness to a torchlight. Yet every act of using that torchlight to single out and focus on something in the larger field of our awareness, risks blinding us to that field. It is comparable to pointing a torch in the dark – reducing our visual awareness field to what the spotlight of the torch happens to be pointed at and focussed on. Freud was well aware however that meaning has not only to do to with some particular element or event in everyday or dream experience that is present in the foreground of our awareness - or that we point at, focus on and single out with the torchlight of our consciousness. Instead he was acutely aware of there being a larger historical, social and personal context to all such singledout elements or events, and of of the way in which the deeper meaning of single elements of events has to do with this larger context. Yet instead of distinguishing our torch-like focal awareness from a guite different type of 'holistic' or 'field' awareness, he stuck to an identification of consciousness with focal awareness – his own favourite tool and still the most respectably scientific tool of investigation. He can be compared to a forensic scientist rigorously searching the psyche in the dark with his torch, always aware that there was something more to be seen than what the torch was currently illuminating - something that could therefore provide new material for 'analysis' and add new dimensions of meaning of the visible. Thus he was forever pointing the acute analytic torchlight of his own consciousness in new and different directions, in order to provide clues to these additional dimensions of meaning. The problem is that no matter how serious and rigorous his scientific 'searching in the dark'

was, he simply did not believe in the possibility of simply switching on the light – thus illuminating the entire room and entire field of awareness within which all things stand out in their immediate interrelatedness. Consequently the Freudian concept of 'the unconscious' maintained connotations of something innately dark, mysterious and potentially threatening, just as its counterpart - the conscious 'ego' - was seen as the holder and controller of the torch of consciousness, albeit an ego fearful of aiming it in particular directions.

Freud's concept of the 'unconscious' arose from his identification of consciousness as such with focal awareness. The idea of consciousness having a holistic or field character – the concept of field awareness was therefore replaced by the notion of an 'unconscious', comparable to a room permanently in the dark unless its invisible contents emerged in our dreams, thus also enabling the waking ego to its turn its analytic torchlight on them. Freud's identification of consciousness with focal awareness however, was no mere personal failing – for it served the purpose of revealing a general human identification of consciousness - at least in Western culture – with the ego and ego-awareness. For ego awareness is precisely a type of focal awareness which, in restricting itself to singling out elements of experience for focussed scrutiny, comparison and reflection, loses awareness of their field or context of emergence and of the other elements in that field - thus making itself 'unaware' or 'unconscious' of them. From this point of view, Freud's 'unconscious' is indeed no 'thing in itself'. But then neither, as physics has now understands, are atoms, or even sub-atomic particles or 'massless' energy quanta. naïve idea that for a concept to be 'scientific' it must refer to some verifiably existing 'thing' persists, despite being a long-outdated understanding of the nature of scientific language - one which Freud's thankfully helped to dispel by showing the symbolic and metaphorical nature both of words and of 'things' themselves (for example his patient's symptoms). Even from the point of view of physics, what any 'thing' is is determined by the larger field or context of its emergence – 'emergence' being the root meaning of the Greek word *physis* from which the modern term 'physics' derives.

Freud's pioneering work was not indeed a 'discovery' of the unconscious - as if it were some object or 'thing it itself'. Yet his construct of 'the unconscious' pointed to a significant connection between ego-centred focal awareness on the one hand and the 'unconscious' memory or forgetting that results from lack of field awareness on the other. For if consciousness is nothing more than focal awareness, a mere torchlight capable of illuminating or singling out only one thing or group of things at a time, then it is only natural that when we switch its focus to some other thing, the first thing can easily be forgotten. For lacking a broader field awareness we cannot retain simultaneous awareness of all the elements within it, thus making them appear as 'unconsciously' forgotten elements or unconscious 'memories' (the same thing). And since ego-awareness never has the light switched on, does not have the character of an all-embracing field awareness, it is only natural that this field-awareness should be felt by the ego, and seen by Freud, as something intrinsically dark or 'unconscious' – never capable of being fully brought to light, and thus capable of concealing repressed elements of the soul or psyche within it. The dark Freudian unconscious then, became a secular equivalent of the religious concept of Hell. Significantly, this is a word sharing roots with the German adjective 'hell' - meaning 'bright'. How then does the light of awareness come - through a process of forgetting - to take the form of something dim, dark or 'hellish' of which the ego is unaware or 'unconscious'? In 'The Singularity of Awareness' Michael Kosok describes the process as a four-stage one:

"We all single out a given ... element of interest, playing, learning, testing, ignoring its context and even childishly forgetting it by dismissal, if only for a moment, like a game of 'make believe'. But then the simple act of ignoring too often leads to a state of ignorance where we "forget that we have forgotten", as the psychologist R.D. Laing so astutely observed. We can see in this simple scenario the beginning of three steps in seed form. The first is fragmentation, which makes possible the activity of 'singling' out elements from a background – to highlight them into view for contrast or comparisons. This may not seem like any kind of serious fragmentation, but it lays the foundation for shifting to focal awareness in contrast to holistic awareness. It is interesting to note that in a recent study where Western children were compared to Oriental children in their mode of perception of a pond of fish, Western students immediately focussed on the biggest fish, and only later took into consideration some contextual material. The Eastern students, from the very beginning, described the ongoing holistic pattern of fishes, water and other elements as a singular structure, in which the biggest fish were not that outstanding."

"After fragmentation, then comes dissociation, which means that an act of ignoring takes place, and what is now a background ... becomes dissociated from what is focussed on as the important foreground and takes on a minimal value. [Memory] may return in a dream state, or it may simply return within direct awareness. But now the third state enters and this is where dissociation becomes hardened. It is where we not only forget but "forget that we have forgotten" and, as a result, a genuine delusion sets in – together with covering illusions ... This is where one begins not to be aware directly – face-to-face – but through a glass darkly."

The 'darkness' lies in an awareness of a differentiated world of separated or singled out elements or structured complexes of such elements – yet without any sense of the singular unifying light that first brings them to light and embraces them all. This, in terms of many religious philosophies is the 'divine light'. It is understood both tantric metaphysics and in terms of The Awareness Principle as the very light of awareness itself, a light without which 'no-thing' – including light itself – could appear or 'come to light' within awareness. Kshemaraja:

Every appearance owes its existence to the light of awareness. Nothing can have its own being without the light of awareness. "Remember what the true 'glasses of divine light' see: each distinction and particular form, term or being is fully distinct and unique throughout the entire field of presence, without conflict. However it requires the appropriate centre of vision (the 'eye that is single') to see and experience this Sacred universe of light and love as a truly awesome universe beyond captivity, expressing ranges from the deepest states of tenderness to the highest states of ecstasy. The 'eye that is single' is the depth of awareness that goes beyond the dim awareness that is glued to the shallow surface of existence in which all that happens is defined through opposition." Michael Kosok (ibid.)

The Awareness Principle is the simple recognition that awareness cannot – in principle – cannot be reduced to a property or function of any thing, being or self that we are aware of. Freud saw 'the unconscious' as the private property of the individual psyche. Jung sensed something wrong here, and thus introduced the notion of a 'collective unconscious'. Neither recognised the essential 'mistake' at stake here, one long recognised in Indian philosophy, namely the basic veiling delusion (Anavamala) that awareness can in any way be seen as private property - whether of the individual or 'collective' psyche. There is no more any such thing as 'my' unconscious, 'yours' or 'ours' than is any such thing as 'my' awareness, 'yours' or 'ours'. On the contrary, awareness itself and as such is that singular reality which both manifests itself in infinite individual and collective forms. It is awareness that individualises or 'individuates' itself, just as it is awareness that collectivises itself in the form of shared cultural identities and 'archetypes'. Awareness is also that 'eye that is single' – the 'third eye'. In practice, Freud – perhaps even more than Jung - was aware of what he himself could only explain as a type of direct 'telepathic' communication between the unconscious of the patient and that of the psychoanalyst. Yet the very question concerning the scientific verifiability of 'telepathy' begs the question. For the question is already based on a pre-conception that awareness or subjectivity, whether in the form of 'consciousness', the 'preconscious' or 'subconscious', or 'the unconscious', is the private property of localised individual subjects, bounded by the individual psyche or their physical body. In contrast, The Awareness Principle recognises the non-local or field character of awareness, and thus also its *innate* function as a communicative medium.

By its very nature, the nature of our silent feeling awareness of ourselves and of others - whether spoken or unspoken - automatically communicates to others, whether or not they shine the torchlight of their ego-awareness on it and are therefore 'conscious' of it. Since as beings we are not separate in the first place, but instead inseparable, individual expressions of a singular field of awareness, there is no need of any mechanism of telepathic transmission between individuals to explain the innate inner communication of awareness that occurs between individuals. Being the very medium out of which our most private sense of ourselves and others first arises, awareness is also the medium through which it constantly communicates.

If people get lost in thoughts or emotions, in their work or domestic chores, or in focussing on any element whatsoever of their everyday activity and experience - forgetting its larger context - then they may be 'conscious' but they are not fully aware. The mystery of 'the unconscious' can never be unraveled unless we understand its depths not as depths of 'unawareness' but of awareness - not the narrow focal awareness of the ego, but all that the ego makes itself unaware or 'unconscious' of through that narrowness of focus – this 'narrowness' (German Enge) being both the root meaning of the word anxiety (German Angst) and its real-life foundation. It is the ego that 'keeps itself in the dark' and therefore 'anxious' - never switching on the light of field awareness but instead constantly pursuing its own ever-more

detailed probings and 'analyses', whether personal or scientific, of what its torchlight focuses on in the dark.

In contrast 'enlightenment' means 'turning on' the light of awareness. Doing so, we experience the 'unconscious' not as something dim or murky but as a larger, field of illumination – a superconsciousness transcending the narrow ego boundaries of ordinary consciousness. Along with the experience of this 'superconsciousness goes the experience of a superself. This is not a Freudian-style 'superego' made up of internalized social mores or parental judgements. Indeed it is not any self we can be aware of. Instead is that eternal self or 'I' - and that single 'eye' – that does not 'have' or 'possesses' but is awareness. This eternal, universal and divine self, the 'Atman' in Indian terms, is one we can come to know only by being it - by 'being awareness'. It was named in the very first of the 'Shiva Sutras' – the scriptural aphorism or 'threads' (Sutra) that form the revelatory foundation of the tantric metaphysics and psychology of Kashmir Shaivism. For the Sutra reads simply - 'Chaitanya-atman' - which can be translated as 'Awareness-Being-Self' or 'Awareness is the Self'. It is our unconsciousness of this truth - the truth that awareness is not only the essence of 'the unconscious' but also the essence of 'self' - that is the basis of all theories of 'the unconscious' and the key to their deeper significance.

The flip side of 'un-consciousness' is a sustained awareness of the 'un-', of all that ordinary normal consciousness, with its narrowed focus, tends to consistently ignore, forget and in turn forget that it has forgotten, identifying its own truly 'unconscious' state of *unawareness* as 'ordinary' or 'normal' consciousness - and even taking this ordinary consciousness as a benchmark both of mental health of and 'scientific' knowledge. This is the basic error that Freud challenged, unlike today's haughty scientists and psychiatrists who remain stuck in it. Since

his time however, the latter have persisted in their search for a material or biological or evolutionary basis for 'consciousness', whilst never pausing to consider the basic paradox - made explicit through The Awareness Principle – namely that since it is a singular field of subjectivity and not some subject or object within that field, awareness cannot be explained by any thing or collection of things that we single out and focus on within that field - including the human brain and its 'hard-wiring'. The aim of articulating The Awareness Principle will be fulfilled even if all it does is to show how so-called 'hard' science' has, in reality, the weakest and least solid of philosophical foundations, thus undermining its attacks, not only on Freud and psychoanalysis, but on a whole range of alternative scientific and spiritual world views with a far longer tradition and far firmer foundations – albeit long forgotten ones.