

Cosmic Consciousness and Human Excellence

Cosmic Consciousness and Human Excellence:

Implications for Global Ethics

Edited by

Mahmoud Masaeli and Rico Sneller

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PART I:
COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE MODERN TIME

CHAPTER ONE

COSMO-CONSCIOUSNESS: INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

‘Cosmo-consciousness’ (or, ‘cosmic consciousness’) is a term which refers to a state of mind that transcends ‘ordinary’ consciousness. Whereas the latter seems to be individual, if not even someone’s property, the former escapes the boundaries of the single individual; in that respect, it is literally incomprehensible. Yet, ‘cosmic consciousness’ does not only exist as a *notion* – it was introduced by the 19th Century Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke (Bucke, 2015) –; there are, and there always have been, accounts of transpersonal, cosmic *experiences*. As a matter of fact, when reconsidering the history of Western philosophy (let alone of other philosophical traditions), forms of consciousness are discussed that are all-comprehensive and which unsettle ego-boundaries. These ego-boundaries may have imposed themselves throughout the last few centuries as necessary requirements for sound reasoning, self-assurance, or self-contained personhood, but that does not make them inescapable. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has shown that modern selfhood is a product of contingent historical developments. Its empiricist and rationalist constituents, he claimed, are the result of an *act* of expulsion of content (ideas, notions, memories, etc.) and of subsequent inner withdrawal onto the *imaginary* ground zero of pure ‘subjectivity’; only such a pure subject, he continued, would then be capable of ‘objective’ reasoning and/or ‘experiencing’. (Taylor, 1996, Chs. 8-9)

The birth of the modern, rational and autonomous subject has imposed itself with such insistence on modern minds that anything beyond it (such as what could be called ‘cosmic consciousness’) is not only taken to be unreal, but is also literally incomprehensible to it. Therefore, a discussion of cosmic consciousness has a hard time accounting for the reality of such a consciousness. It faces the impossible task of presenting itself to a rival consciousness which is its mortal enemy, and the existence and constitution of which rely on the exclusion of anything expanding its actual shape.

The Soul

Sooner or later, the question of consciousness and its boundaries touches upon the concomitant question of the *soul*. The notion of the ‘soul’ is omnipresent in Western philosophy as of its Greek origins, though its meaning has altered. Gradually, it became the victim of an Aristotelian substance ontology and corresponding logic which can only acknowledge as real those things that exist separately and of their own account. Whereas Plato did not really assign an ontological locus to the soul, keeping it in between the ideal world and its shadows, Aristotle involuntarily paved the way for its decline. Despite his treatise *De anima* (‘On the Soul’), which undermined his substance ontology and fascinated Neo-Platonists, subsequent medieval and early-Modern philosophers felt inclined to only accept as existent those individual objects that obey logical principles (e.g., the identity principle, or the law of the excluded middle). Once a thing called ‘soul’ (*psychè*, *anima*) does not meet these logical standards, it will be easy to dismiss it as a non-reality – which is what happened after Kant’s reduction of the soul to a mere regulative idea or a postulate. 18th and 19th Century materialists claimed to have overcome the notion of the soul in favor of its material substrate. There is no need to elaborate on this development any further here, since we are all too familiar with it today. The modern science called ‘psychology’ incessantly struggles with its object (the ‘psyche’), vainly adjusting this object to the conditions according to which it can count as real. Psychoanalysis, originally driven by materialistic intentions, to its own surprise discovered an (*ana-*chronistic) Unconscious, which not only challenged the axioms of natural science but also of Being itself. This discovery elicited both its excommunication from the ‘science’ of psychology, and its hospitable reception in ‘postmodern’ philosophy (cf Derrida, Girard, Lacan, Irigaray, etc.). The indomitable reality of the psyche (whatever it concretely comes down to) put into question, not only the way it had hitherto most often

been conceived itself, but also *any* form of identification or objectification of whichever entity.

This de-compression of the soul from an object into something other than an object does not surprise those familiar with the history of 19th Century philosophy and its aftermath. For, beyond mainstream materialism, positivism and naturalism, far more exciting perspectives on the soul were opened. While Hegel's philosophy of the Spirit started with de-individuating thinking, Schopenhauer de-individuated willing. Feuerbach did the same to human physical existence. Gustav Fechner (1801-1887) and Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906) took a final step and de-individuated the soul or consciousness. Consciousness, or the soul, they claimed, is open and gives way to transpersonal mindsets. One could call these mindsets cosmo-conscious to the extent that they entail an embrace of Being itself. Obviously, such an all-comprehensive consciousness is not an easy thing to achieve. The unsettling of fixed ego-boundaries, should this take place at all, is not necessarily unimpededly continued until Being as such is brought under the sway of a cosmic consciousness. The realization of the latter may not be more than an abstract limit susceptible to infinite approximation.

In a way, the aforementioned attempts to resituate individuality in a wider, all-comprehensive reality were all heir to Modern philosophy's odd man out, Spinoza. Spinoza had equated God and Nature and relegated 'thinking' and 'extension' to the sphere of (mere) attributes. If "man thinks" (*homo cogitat*), Spinoza had claimed, he participates in divine thinking (*cogitatio*). Spinoza had transmitted pre-Modern (e.g., Neo-Platonic) ideas about thinking and consciousness to Modernity, offering these as an antidote to the more successful Aristotelian substance ontology and logic.

Interestingly, ideas of an ultimately de-individuated consciousness propelled by several 19th Century thinkers – in the wake of Spinoza – were critically met by those who, while sympathizing with many of their premises, were keen on preserving individuality. Carl du Prel (1839-1899) is the main example of a Schopenhauerian thinker who distanced himself from Schopenhauer's and Von Hartmann's impersonal unconscious and made a strong case for an individual soul – however much this individual soul thrives on unconscious layers.

The dispute between defenders and attackers of an impersonal soul, if not of a cosmic consciousness, perpetuated itself in the 20th Century clash

between Freud and Jung. True, Freud largely relied on many Fechnerian insights, such as for example the pleasure principle's expansive nature. (Freud, 1999, p.4ff) Nonetheless, these insights did not affect his basic conviction that a psyche is always individual. Any claim to a supra-individual consciousness, he argues, for example the "oceanic feeling" his friend Romain Rolland (1866-1944)¹ put forward, is likely to be a relapse into an infantile state of unrestricted narcissism. Such a state, Freud continues, might well have enhanced religion. (Freud 1999^a, 422-430) Interestingly, Freud admits that he "cannot discover such a state in himself".² Beyond Rolland's position, Freud is probably also critically assessing Schleiermacher's "feeling of absolute dependence" (*schlechthinniges Abhängigkeitsgefühl*), which was very influential in 19th Century Christian theology, and which was one of the founding principles of Rudolf Otto's famous book *Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy)* from 1917. If we realize that with this notion Schleiermacher was reaffirming Spinozistic ideas, we can conclude that, at least for Modern Western philosophy, directly or indirectly Spinoza will always be the genius at the background of the advocates of cosmo-conscious articulations (Schleiermacher, Hegel, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Fechner, Bucke, James, Bergson, Bohm, Scheler, Karl Joël, Jung, etc.; Skrbina, 2007).

Fields of Application

Instead of giving an overview of forms of cosmic consciousness in the history of ideas, let us rather highlight some possible fields of application.

Nature

The primary field where forms of cosmic consciousness are claimed to manifest themselves is nature. It should be noted, however, that 'nature' is not an objective realm 'within' which human subjects may or may not feel themselves at home. Instead, paradoxical though it seem, 'nature' could well be equivalent with the *experience* that is constituted *while* feeling one with it. "Kosmisches Einsgefühl kann es wesensmässig nur geben," Max Scheler states, "wenn in der Intention der Welt-anschauung die Welt als 'Ganzheit', als ein *Allorganismus* gegeben ist, den 'ein' Leben durchrinnt: also im Falle einer "organologischen Weltansicht". (Scheler, 1948, p.89f)

¹ Freud refers to Rolland's books *La vie de Ramakrishna* and *La vie de Vivekananda*.

² "Ich selbst kann dieses "ozeanische" Gefühl nicht in mir entdecken." Ibid., 422.

Distinguishing the notion of ‘nature’ from any ‘objective field’ that can be researched is not superfluous when trying to understand the idea of a cosmic consciousness. The natural sciences have largely contributed to the objecti-*fication* (i.e., the *making* into an object) of anything studied, thereby rendering an adequate understanding of it fully impossible from the outset. Calling the idea of a cosmic consciousness ‘unscientific’ is therefore not necessarily beside the point; one should not ignore, however, that the word ‘scientific’ relies on a distortion of its correlate’s essential qualities.

The ongoing extinction of these qualities in the 19th Century by the spread of science may well have been incremental to the experience of the *kosmisches Einsgefühl* Scheler is referring to. Testimonies of such a feeling of oneness abound, both in literary texts – especially poetry – and in philosophy. The Romantic period is most renowned for these testimonies. Think of Goethe, Tieck, Schlegel, Novalis, Eichendorff, etc. Obviously, the upsurge of cosmic consciousness in Romantic poetry does not imply that the Romantics had a prerogative in their experienced oneness with nature. Apart from the Neo-Platonist tradition in Greco-European philosophy, examples of literary cosmo-conscious expressions occur worldwide, ranging from medieval Kabbalah (Yehuda ha-Levi, Shlomo ibn Gabirol) to Sufism (Rumi, Hafez, Omar Khayyam) or Hinduism (Ramakrishna). It could be surmised, however, that expressing it is indicative of it being threatened by loss or alienation. What is called ‘science’ today is not necessarily the sole (negative) cause of cosmo-consciousness testimonies; one might also think of other forms of alienation, such as competitiveness and social disparities, or oppression. Obviously, it remains debatable whether the *social* background of cosmo-conscious expressions is merely coincidental to them and leaves their truth-value unaffected, or if this social background determines them all throughout.

Another challenge to the truth-value of a cosmic consciousness has already been hinted at: Freud’s assumption that cosmo-consciousness (or, in his friend Romain Rolland’s words, oceanic feeling) relies on an infantile, or even an intrauterine state that has somehow been preserved in our psychic life, as a prenatal memory. Since most contributions in this book tend to make a case for the veridical nature of a cosmic consciousness, it will not be overdone if we take additionally take a closer look at Freud’s critique. Where dogmatism is to be eschewed, we had better stimulate the reader’s own reflective imagination.

“These views,” Freud affirms at the beginning of his famous text ‘Civilization and its Discontents’, “expressed by my friend [i.e., Romain Rolland] whom I so greatly honour and who himself once in poetry described the magic of illusion, put me in a difficult position. I cannot discover this ‘oceanic’ feeling in myself. It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings [*Es ist nicht bequem, Gefühle wissenschaftlich zu bearbeiten*]. One may attempt to describe their physiological signs [*Anzeichen*]. Where that is impossible — I am afraid the oceanic feeling, too, will defy this kind of classification — nothing remains but to turn to the ideational content [*Vorstellungsinhalt*] which most readily associates itself with the feeling. If I have understood my friend aright, he means the same thing as that consolation offered by an original and somewhat unconventional writer to his hero, contemplating suicide; ‘Out of this world we cannot fall’. So, it is a feeling of indissoluble connection [*Gefühl der unauflösbaren Verbundenheit*], of belonging inseparably to the external world as a whole [*der Zusammengehörigkeit mit dem Ganzen der Außenwelt*]. To me, personally, I may remark, this seems something more in the nature of an intellectual judgement [*intellektuellen Einsicht*], not, it is true, without any accompanying feeling-tone [*Gefühlston*], but with one of a kind which characterizes other equally far-reaching reflections as well. I could not in my own person convince myself of the primary nature of such a feeling [*An meiner Person könnte ich mich von der primären Natur eines solchen Gefühls nicht überzeugen*]. But I cannot on that account deny that it in fact occurs in other people. One can only wonder whether it has been correctly interpreted and whether it is entitled to be acknowledged as the *fons et origo* of the whole need for religion.” (Freud, 1930; Freud 1999^a, 422f).

Several issues draw our attention here. First, Freud admits his incapability to interpret the oceanic feeling as an original mind-set. Yet, he also does not want to deny its presence in others. The fact that Freud “cannot convince [himself] in [his] own person” may testify to both his intellectual acumen and his incapacity (unwillingness) to give in to it. To do justice to Freud, we should leave both options open here, for it would be somewhat unfair to merely *claim* that the criticist of one’s own position is *incapable* of sharing it. What is striking, however, is Freud’s assertion that feelings are hard to deal with in a scientific way. They may be authentic and yet remain scientifically intractable. Since the physiological concomitants (*Anzeichen*: ‘indications’, ‘indicatives’) of an oceanic feeling are absent, Freud continues, we should focus on the representations (*Vorstellungsinhalt*) by which they are accompanied. Freud’s comparison with the consoling *statement* that “we cannot fall out of this world” brings the initial ‘oceanic feeling’ more and more into the sphere of the *judgmental* – thereby both

making it tractable and susceptible to psychoanalysis, and alienating it from itself. What else could the ‘scientist’ have done?

At this point, Freud makes two observations. The first is that the boundaries between our self-consciousness on the one hand, and unconscious feelings on the other, are fluid and undeterminable: “the ego’s cognizance of itself is subject to disturbance, and the boundaries between it and the outer world are not immovable [*ist auch das Ichgefühl Störungen unterworfen und die Ichgrenzen sind nicht beständig*].” (Ibid., 424) The second observation is that our self-consciousness is not original, but the upshot of an inner maturing process: “the adult’s sense of his own ego cannot have been the same from the beginning. It must have undergone a development, which naturally cannot be demonstrated, but which admits of reconstruction with a fair degree of probability [*die sich begreiflicherweise nicht nachweisen, aber mit ziemlicher Wahrscheinlichkeit konstruieren läßt*].” (Ibid.) Both observations are related, to the extent that, as Freud suggests, the oceanic feeling (or, cosmic consciousness) could be nothing more than a return of an infantile state in which the ego-boundaries are not yet fixed: “Thus we are entirely willing to acknowledge that the ‘oceanic’ feeling exists in many people, and we are disposed to relate it to an early stage in ego-feeling [*eine frühe Phase des Ichgefühls*].” (Ibid., 430) Since feelings are rather indicative of strong needs than expressive of experienced plenitudes, Freud argues, the oceanic feeling (‘cosmic consciousness’) testifies to a lack.

Let us see how Freud concludes his discussion of the oceanic feeling and its contribution to the rise of religion (as Rolland claims):

“Surely a feeling can only be a source of energy when it is itself the expression of a strong need [*Ausdruck eines starken Bedürfnisses*]. The derivation of a need for religion from the child’s feeling of helplessness and the longing it evokes for a father seems to me incontrovertible, especially since this feeling is not simply carried on from childhood days but is kept alive perpetually by the fear of what the superior power of fate will bring. I could not point to any need in childhood so strong as that for a father’s protection. Thus, the part played by the ‘oceanic’ feeling, which I suppose seeks to reinstate limitless narcissism [*Wiederherstellung des uneingeschränkten Narzißmus*], cannot possibly take the first place. The derivation of the religious attitude can be followed back in clear outline as far as the child’s feeling of helplessness [*Bis zum Gefühl der kindlichen Hilflosigkeit kann man den Ursprung der religiösen Einstellung in klaren Umrissen verfolgen*]. There may be something else behind this, but for the present it is wrapped in obscurity [*Es mag noch anderes dahinterstecken, aber das verhüllt einstweilen der Nebel*].” (Ibid., 430)

Freud's main urge in this passage is to speculate about the origin of religion – which he locates in the child's feeling of impotence and its need for paternal help. The oceanic feeling, however, *reacts* to the experienced (infantile) helplessness. For lack of effective paternal assistance, the person may relapse into the pre-Oedipal stage of (imagined) omnipresence, in other words, unrestricted Narcissism. The only non-reductive solution Freud leaves open is as vague as it is inconclusive: "There may be something else behind this, but for the present [*einestweilen*] it is wrapped in obscurity." Whether the forms of cosmic consciousness discussed in this volume are indeed examples of a relapse into infantile Narcissism as a way to deal with a lack of paternal (divine) help, or if there is "something else behind [them]", is something the readers should continuously ask themselves. Provided the idea of a cosmic consciousness makes sense, nothing would be more harmful to it than a mind-set that claims to be cosmic while in fact being nothing but a purely imaginary solution to an unbearable world.

'Ethics'

So far, we have discussed nature as the primordial field of application for a cosmic consciousness. We have claimed that 'nature' should not be seen as an objective realm, but rather as the domain where oneness can be experienced with 'that' – whatever it is – which transcends ego-boundaries. In order to not fully confuse our habitual ways of defining things, let us for the sake of clarity call this sphere 'impersonal'. Having a cosmic experience would then come down to undergoing a process in which personal, i.e., appropriated, appropriable feelings and affects gradually give way to non-appropriable feelings and affects. In case this would stretch the meaning of the words 'feeling' and 'affect' too far, we could also speak here of 'states' ('states of consciousness').

Reserving the term 'nature' for the 'impersonal' aspects of cosmo-consciousness, we suggest that the term 'ethics' be applied to the more *personal* aspects. Obviously, we would then have to reconceive of ethics; not in terms of a mere reflection on desirable human behavior, but rather in terms of an *in-depth* account of interhuman relations. What could possibly be meant by this? We want to argue that, beyond the *pleasure* people can provide each other with and the *utility* they can offer each other, there may also be a dimension in social life that suggests an unconditional type of relation. The latter relies on a demand or an inner drive that can only be *negatively* defined, i.e., as *not-(only)-useful*, or as *not-(only)-pleasant*. Whether such a dimension exists, in other words,

whether ethics is not a mere optimization of utility or pleasure (as several moral philosophers claim), is debatable. Even those who believe that it exists do not necessarily pave the way for a cosmo-consciousness. Kant, Hermann Cohen (1842-1918) and Levinas (1905-1995), for example, are three outstanding ethical thinkers whose radical definition of ethics emphatically excludes pleasure and utility as its determining principles. Their conception of ethics, though, would never entail a properly *cosmic* consciousness; it is thoroughly determined by notions of alterity and otherness that seem to exclude it.

Our concern here, however, will be only with those thinkers who have explicitly conceived of 'ethics' as the main field on which a hidden *unity* between human beings, if not between humans and nature at large, can be experienced. Let us call their account 'cosmo-ethical'. In light of the previous section it can hardly surprise us that, at least in the Modern period, such cosmo-ethical thinkers all implicitly or explicitly perpetuate Spinoza's monism. For them, the essence of moral experience and ethical injunction is an inner awareness of the agent's unity with the one he feels responsible for. Schopenhauer's ethics, for example, exemplifies this awareness. (Sneller, 2016) Compassion (*Mitleid*), Schopenhauer asserts, is the only – non-imperative – foundation of morality. It is not a law, it is primarily an affection or a feeling which can be prepared for. It is the "big mystery of ethics" (*grosse Mysterium der Ethik*), its "original phenomenon" (*Urphänomen*) and its "boundary stone" (*Grenzstein*). It mysteriously arises as a phenomenon in human life and action, as the "last foundation of morality in human nature itself". In fact, compassion is not ethical, but metaphysical – which connects it to cosmic consciousness. (Schopenhauer, 1986)

Other examples of this cosmo-ethical thinking can be found in Schelling (Schelling, 2001/1809), Gustav Fechner (1801-1887) (Fechner, 1851), T.H. Green (1836-1882) (Green, 2004/1884), Carl du Prel (1839-1899) (Du Prel, 1885 and 1888), Hans Driesch (1867-1941) (Driesch, 1927), or Ludwig Klages (1872-1956) (Klages, 1974). However differently, they all conceive of ethics as an increasing awareness of a supra-individual development, or at least a social concatenation *beyond* individual selfhood.

It is intriguing to see how authors such as Hans Driesch root their ethical views in biology and morphogenesis. By 'morphogenesis' a process of embryonic growth is meant in which a simple form develops into a multifarious yet equilibrated, stable unity. After having hypothesized in his *Philosophy of the Organic* (Driesch, 1921) about an 'entelechia'

determinant functioning as a warrant of organic unity in each developmental process, Driesch continues speculating about a supra-personal process, one that does not stop with the individual organism but extends towards continuously higher unities (social clusters, communities, societies, global unity of mankind). To ward off the predictable counter-argument of modern world wars, growing global chaos and increasing international tensions, Driesch comes up with the interesting idea of a “timeless becoming”, i.e. the process in which a form is built that remains unaffected by temporal consecution.

“The reflective treatment of anything supra-personal gives the impression as if a *totality*, in a fully enigmatic, *singular compartmentalization*, and mixing with *coincidence*, had to pervade a *material-temporal* manifestation, as though it were a ‘level’, and thus come into being [*Die denkhafte Behandlung alles Überpersönliche erweckt den Anschein, als müsse ein Ganzes in völlig rätselhafter einzelhafter Zerspaltung und mit Zufall sich vermengend durch eine stofflich-zeitliche Ausprägung wie durch eine »Stufe« werdend hindurch.*]” (Driesch (1917, p.312))

Let us briefly examine Driesch’ theories as explained in his *Wirklichkeitslehre*. In this remarkable book from 1917 Driesch uncovers the all-transcending movement which is first found at the very moment of *introspection*. Once taking a look inside our own minds one cannot avoid, Driesch argues, proceeding from self-awareness to a deeper level that we could call ‘soul’.³ This *Seelenwirkliche* (‘soul reality’), he cautiously notes, still has the character of a postulate, of an ‘as if’. We cannot simply take it for granted. The only way, however, we can get any further, Driesch argues, is by a *Sprengung* (‘blasting’) of the categories of logic. The reality of the soul exceeds the tools (categories) by means of which the self operates.

How does this process or progress (from a – punctual – *self* to an – extended – *soul*) take place, in concrete terms? Any ego, Driesch contends, has reflective knowledge. This can hardly be denied. People know things, they think, and have ‘science’. Conjoined with *past* knowledge the ego is extended towards a self. In its prospective relation to the *future*, this self becomes a soul. In other words, the soul, according to Driesch, is a self that encompasses both its past and its future consciousness.

³ “Zum Begriff *Seele* gelange ich ja über den Begriff *Mein Selbst*”. Driesch, 1917, p.17.

Interestingly, the development does not stop there. It continues *beyond* the individual soul. Let us consider Driesch' argument in some more detail. First, a conspicuous perception of the realm of nature reveals 'objects', Driesch affirms, that obey to a common, non-mechanical process of becoming a total or a whole: *human bodies*. Secondly, he continues, *my own* body takes a *particular* place among these bodies. How? Because somehow the dynamics of my mind corresponds to dynamics of my body; there seems to be a 'psycho-physical parallelism', which is remarkable. Thirdly, Driesch argues, *other* organisms (men and animals) must by *analogy* also be taken to be psycho-physical persons, i.e., combinations of both soul and body. (Whether or not Driesch is somewhat premature in drawing this analogical conclusion should be left open to question here. Should it be further corroborated, one would have to resort to its vitalist foundations, otherwise it would definitely fail.). Fourthly, Driesch suggests, the existence of psycho-physical persons might refer to a significant, meaningful determination in the realm of reality. And finally, he conclusively assumes, there may well be a *transpersonal* becoming of a whole, transcending the boundaries of the individual psycho-physical person. The biological term for this is *phylogeny*, but it is easy to see that in a metaphysical and ethical context, such a term assumes an almost cosmopolitical outlook.⁴

Thus, individual introspection brings Driesch from individual ego to supra-individual community. The development from one into the other is not temporal; it should be taken as a timeless becoming. This atemporal process rather affects our awareness of it than physical being itself. A conception of *ethics* ensues which comes more or less down to this always growing awareness. A cosmic consciousness will be its final goal."

Spirituality and Exceptional Experiences

Having discussed nature and ethics as two fields *on* which cosmic experiences may be discerned, let us in conclusion make a few remarks as to *how* such experiences can be rendered. The current interest for spirituality betrays, we believe, an increasing susceptibility to cosmic consciousness (unless Freud is right and we should equate it with a regression into a pre-Oedipal state). Following the hypothesis that there is a truth -value in cosmic consciousness, let us also assume that the search for spirituality nowadays testifies to an implicit awareness that our

⁴ Cf Driesch, 1917, p.309.

prevailing consciousness is limited and in principle open to being expanded – until it reaches the limit of cosmic being itself. However, since cosmic being must necessarily be infinite (otherwise it would only be fragmentary and not cosmic), we could equally say that there are no limits to cosmic consciousness. Cosmic consciousness, while perhaps conceptually implying intellectual totalitarianism and all-comprehensiveness, cannot totalize anything at all. Rather, we should say that it is not governed by intelligence; if that were the case, it would be characterized by a conceptual grasp of things. It seems as though cosmic consciousness experiences are overwhelming, and essentially affective in kind.

How, then, to philosophically corroborate them? Had we not better leave them to religious or literary discourse instead of allowing them to ‘infect’ the conceptual purity of science? It is our claim that cosmic consciousness cannot be argued for, strictly speaking, nor can it be conceptually determined. But this does not imply that we ought to entirely neglect it in our intellectual labor. Instead, provided that cosmic consciousness make sense, any thinker who wants to meaningfully contribute to global reflection should speak *out of* it or *as from* it. Or, if this is preferred, we could equally say that such a thinker should be rooted, when thinking, in a form of *spiritual* awareness that he cannot understand, let alone comprehend. Human thinking and acting should be guided by a spirituality that cannot really be articulated, but only implicitly phrased. Any form of intellectual expression that is barred from access to this spirituality, however intelligent, can ultimately only manifest the impasse in which it ends up itself. On the contrary, any thinking that at each step opens new horizons and perspectives, however fallible it is, thrives on a profound inspiration, the source of which can well be an awareness of an interconnected cosmic whole.

Perhaps the time has come to re-appreciate Kant’s famous dictum that concepts without perceptive experience are blind.

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CHAPTER TWO

RICHARD MAURICE BUCKE AND THE MODERN STUDY OF COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS

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Executive Summary

The existence of god has nothing to do with religions. This statement is perhaps one of the principal conclusions of this chapter, anticipated here, to the perspective brought by Richard Bucke in his study of the evolution of the human mind and the phenomenon of cosmoconsciousness. Historically, the human experience with cosmoconsciousness has become a vehicle for messages and content for the founding of various religions. This chapter was written on the primary basis, among others, of the book *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*. In the book, Bucke relates his personal cosmic consciousness experience and his life trajectory, the analyzes made by him, the hypotheses and methodological effort, all of which diverge from any religious approach. Along with the account of personal experience, the high point of the book is the comparative analysis between the historical personalities supposedly candidates for recording the category of the same phenomenon. The purpose of this chapter is to present new possibilities, some developed by Bucke and others from current research, for the study of the phenomenon of cosmoconsciousness for the evolution of human consciousness. These possibilities are treated in a sensible, profound, self-experimental, rational and methodological way, differing from primitive, mystical or contemplative approaches. The signs brought by Bucke regarding the possibility of exceptional experience, the evolution of human consciousness and the understanding of the Cosmos in their maximal conceptions are innovative, striking, and challenging for science and philosophy.

Keywords: Cosmoconsciousness, expansion of consciousness, illumination, parapercept, percept, paraphenomenology, paraphenomenon, parapsychic phenomenon, self-consciousness, self-research

Introduction

Cosmic consciousness (cosmoconsciousness) and the expansion of consciousness are phenomena recorded under different names at various points in the history of humanity. These manifestations have always been associated with more evolved human qualities. Moral nature and perceptual abilities seem to be two fields of human attributes with a central role in the development of these phenomena.

The applications of human maturity derived from such experiments have been subjects of the highest interest in mystical and religious studies throughout history. It is not difficult to observe the connection between historical personalities who have reported exceptional experiences and the creation of a new religion or mystical ideology.

However, in recent centuries, some researchers and philosophers have brought new reflections on studying these phenomena, and gradually it was possible to construct a new vision, with universal perspective to investigate the vast possibilities in the evolution of the human being and the understanding of the Cosmos.

First of all, the phenomenon of cosmic consciousness brings transcendent and permanent consequences to the person who experiences it. These signs may be among the most valuable to indicate possible directions to humanity.

This chapter discusses the phenomenon of cosmoconsciousness, or cosmic consciousness reported since antiquity and examines the contributions of Richard Bucke who inaugurates the systematic study on cosmoconsciousness by the legitimacy of personal experience and allows creating a bridge to move from mysticism towards science.

The force of the authentic phenomenon that occurred with an intellectualized man of elevated moral nature and sensitivity is the first object of the present study. It seems that there is a possibility to demonstrate that, in this case, the phenomenon did not occur randomly and we may try to understand the construction of the life trajectory that made this manifestation possible.

In addition to taking a step in understanding the phenomenon, the purpose of this study is also to discuss some foundations, procedures, and methods for advancing research and personal development towards the expansion of consciousness. This author approaches this possibility through the proposition of the Paraphenomenological Methodology (Schlosser, 2009). However, the focus will only address the fundamental dynamics between mental images of perception and imagination. The operation of these mental images allows proposing a hypothesis about the category of intellect appropriate for the development of the phenomena of expansion of consciousness and cosmoconsciousness.

This chapter will also present a range of modern perspectives in an attempt to investigate and understand the expansions of consciousness. The cosmoconsciousness exceptional experience category invites us to enter new horizons in the research of consciousness and in the studies of parapsychic phenomena.

The entire discussion will be around the legacy of Richard Bucke and a few other personalities who have followed these studies. Let's see what it's all about!

I – Who is Richard Maurice Bucke and What Is His Contribution?

Few people in the history of humanity have built a bridge with such robust and detailed components between exceptional personal experience and the wide-ranging research of the same phenomenon resulting in a magnificent book. Richard Bucke starts from the expanded examination of transcendent personal experience with the cosmic consciousness, carefully analyzes diverse personalities supposedly subject to the same category of experience throughout history and proposes a new vision for human possibilities.

Bucke makes a point of presenting himself as an ordinary man. In fact, he had a dramatic life if analyzed by an outside observer. But it was this man who had transcendent experiences, of the same category as Gautama Buddha, Jesus the Christ, Plotinus, Mohammed, and many others.

In addition to the value of the quality of the experiences sought by Bucke, he wrote a book with methodological status to study the phenomenon of cosmoconsciousness entitled *Cosmic Consciousness: a Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*, published in 1901, the year before his

death. Even today, this book can perhaps be considered the main reference in the study of the phenomenon of cosmoconsciousness.

In the first part of the book, Bucke details the most important experience of his life, narrating the illumination occurred in 1872, in London in the early spring, at the beginning of his thirty-sixth year. Perhaps this experience was facilitated by the natural and spontaneous exercise of consciousness expansion resulting from his involvement in reading poetic texts with two friends earlier that evening.

Here is Bucke's account of cosmic consciousness, referring to himself in the third person:

“He and two friends had spent the evening reading Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Browning, and especially Whitman. They parted at midnight, and he had a long drive in a hansom (it was in an English city). His mind, deeply under the influence of the ideas, images and emotions called up by the reading and talk of the evening, was calm and peaceful. He was in a state of quiet, almost passive enjoyment. All at once, without warning of any kind, he found himself wrapped around as it were by a flame-colored cloud. For an instant he thought of fire, some sudden conflagration in the great city; the next he knew that the light was within himself. Directly afterwards came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe. Into his brain streamed one momentary lightning-flash of the Brahmic Splendor which has ever since lightened his life; upon his heart fell one drop of Brahmic Bliss, leaving thenceforward for always an after taste of heaven. Among other things he did not come to believe, he saw and knew that the Cosmos is not dead matter but a living Presence, that the soul of man is immortal, that the universe is so built and ordered that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all, that the foundation principle of the world is what we call love and that the happiness of every one is in the long run absolutely certain. He claims that he learned more within the few seconds during which the illumination lasted than in previous months or even years of study, and that he learned much that no study could ever have taught (Bucke, 1905, p. 7-8).”

This exceptional experience of Bucke inaugurates the movement of a type of self-research to understand what was going on in his life, trying to situate this understanding in the context of other occurrences in humanity throughout history.

In a sense, the investigation of the phenomenon was guided by a scientific purpose, going far beyond a stagnant attitude towards the possibility of

remaining in mystical contemplation or assuming a mission in ideological or religious leadership.

The new possibility was about accepting the challenge of treating personal experience with rationality, based on the evidence of the experienced facts and the evidence and casuistic found in several other historical accounts. Bucke was a man with a scientifically-minded look at human nature and his history in the practice of medicine, especially in psychiatry, enabled him to speculate and seek structuring foundations in the study of mind and consciousness. Scientific influence also helped him to widen the boundaries in the study of human morality and spirituality.

But perhaps these processes of self-research and self-knowledge were already being prepared by paths difficult to interpret since Bucke's birth, without his knowing it himself.

Bucke's singular consciousness and his personality made up a unique mosaic that makes us think if it provided some condition conducive to the manifestation of cosmic consciousness and the productions that he achieved in life.

Perhaps the most well-organized historical documents and data about Bucke can be found in the archives of Western University (Western Libraries), Ontario, Canada, in the city of London, where he grew up and died. Here is a summary of the main aspects of this fascinating life trajectory.

Richard Maurice Bucke (1837-1902) was born in Methwold, Norfolk, England, the son of Rev. Horatio Walpole Bucke (1802-1856), a parish curate, and his wife Clarissa Andrews Bucke (1797-1845). The parents and their seven children emigrated to Canada when he was a year old, settling near London, Ontario. Little Bucke never went to school, and his literacy, education, and teaching in Latin were the responsibility of his father who owned a vast library that had influenced his son very early on. He was an autodidact in the broadest sense of the term.

Despite his father's religious orientation, he never, even as a child, accepted the doctrines of the Christian church and Bucke (2017, p. 6) tells how early he thought Jesus was just a great, good man. On the other hand, even from a very young age, he has always had a deep interest in the affairs of the human soul, spirituality, and themes of this kind.

Bucke's consciousness already showed signs of expansion shortly after he became literate. The reading of poems stimulated him throughout his life. He says that before the age of ten, he sometimes experienced "a sort of ecstasy of curiosity and hope". Intermediate and gradual expansions of consciousness can manifest in many ways. Expanded self-perception of high feelings in children may be a relevant sign. This kind of phenomenon accompanied Bucke at various times until the climax in 1872 described in the above account.

The death of the mother at age eight and a feeling of dissatisfaction due to the circumstances of the teenage life made Bucke leave home at the age of sixteen in search of new possibilities. In this movement, he even uses the words "to live or die as might happen". For five years he wandered long stretches of the United States, sought work literally from north to south and from east to west, acting on farms, railroads, steamboats and in the placer diggings of Western Nevada. He suffered starvation, freezing, and once fought for his life half a day with Shoshone Indians on the banks of the Humboldt River in Utah.

This pilgrimage made some writers of biographical notes give him the label of an adventurer, but above all other important features and traits of personality such as willpower, modesty to take on any work, love of freedom and the ability to take the initiative and take life in his hand. We cannot forget that a sensitive person manifested these traits from infancy and interested in the depth of human consciousness.

A severe accident seems to have been a turning point for Bucke to start recycling in his life months later. The brief description of the episode recorded in the official biographical sketch found at Western University is transcribed below.

"In 1856 Bucke traveled to the Sierra Nevada where he joined forces with the prospectors Allen and Hosea Grosh. Hosea died within the year of blood poisoning, and in 1857 Bucke and Allen Grosh were lost in a snowstorm. They went 5 days and 4 nights without food or fire until they arrived at a small mining camp. Grosh died of exhaustion and exposure, while Bucke recovered, despite losing one foot and part of the other to severe frostbite (Western Archives, 2017, p.4)."

Bucke lost his father at age 19, in 1856, in the midst of his absence. The set of experiences of suffering could shake up most people, but found in that young man an already expanded consciousness, above average, and the young man's response was to make recycling decisions. It seems that

he decided to return to a life centered on the study of human morality and the care of people.

By speculation, one might venture to say that the snow survival effort, coupled with the sensitivity developed in childhood and other positive traits of his personality, helped him to resume humanitarian and spiritual tendencies. The present hypothesis in this chapter sheds light on the possibility that these earlier circumstances constituted the main propitiating basis for the course that led Bucke to meet the experience of cosmoconsciousness in 1872. We can also speculate whether there were moments of spiritual elevation and significant expansions of consciousness regarding existential values accompanying the survival effort in the snow.

Bucke returned to Canada in 1858. Beginning adulthood, he inherited the small property of his deceased mother and this money allowed to him to spend some years studying. Bucke entered McGill University's medical school in Montreal, where he graduated with honors in 1862, at age 25, with the thesis entitled *The Correlation of Vital and Physical Forces*. In the years 1862-63, he completed his post-graduate studies in London (University College) and Paris (*Collèges des Médecins*) where he specialized in psychiatry.

He returned to Canada in 1864 and married Jessie Maria Gurd in 1865. He settled down to practice medicine in Sarnia, Ontario, for the next ten years. Bucke and his wife had eight children.

Bucke was appointed Medical Superintendent at the *Provincial Asylum for the Insane*, the new mental hospital in Hamilton in 1876. He was transferred to the *Asylum for the Insane* of the Ontario Hospital in London where he remained in the position of superintendent for twenty-five years until his death in 1902. He was very successful in the profession he chose. He pioneered several practices, published several articles, and presented many lectures in associations of medicine and psychology.

Bucke was a co-founder of the University of Western Ontario School of Medicine. He was appointed Professor of Nervous and Mental Illness in 1882 and was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. Bucke gave the opening lecture of the year at McGill University upon request of the faculty of medicine in 1891. He became chairman of the Psychological Section of the British Medical Association in 1897 and was also elected president of the American Medical-Psychological Association in 1898.

The professional trajectory already demonstrated that his personality had a great capacity to offer contributions and it was based on Bucke's deepened humanitarian sense. His development in medicine advanced in parallel with the development of research on personal experience with the phenomenon of cosmoconsciousness that occurred in 1872 and continued to materialize the book that he was writing step by step.

The encounter with Walt Whitman's thought, and then with him personally, was decisive for the enrichment of Bucke's consciousness, probably also to precipitate personal experience with the phenomenon of cosmoconsciousness and indeed to define methodological options in the book *Cosmic Consciousness*.

Bucke read Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in 1867 and met Whitman for the first in Camden, New Jersey in 1877. It seems that there was a potentiating effect of Whitman's expansions of consciousness, conveyed by poetry, acting on the psychic phenomena manifested by Bucke and on his own written material. Bucke was very sensitive to the contents and meanings of those readings. The succession between reading and the experience of cosmoconsciousness that occurred in 1872 draws attention to this hypothesis.

Again, Bucke's scientific and analytical sense prevailed, translating this friendship into the biography with the title *Whitman* published in 1883 and becoming his literary executor to take care of his posthumous publications. Before that, Bucke had already advanced in depth on other aspects of human consciousness in the book *Man's Moral Nature*, published in 1879.

Here is the dedication to Whitman in *Man's Moral Nature*:

I dedicate this book to the man who inspired it – to the man who of all men past and present that I have known has the most exalted moral nature – to Walt Whitman (Bucke, 1879, p. v).

Like Whitman, Bucke saw the sense of life directly linked to the value of consciousness, and this applied to the people around him. Great friendships and ease relationship with other great personalities represented milestones in his life. There was dialogue with different thinkers of his time and Bucke also became a reference to several others who succeeded him.

Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky (1878-1947), the spokesman for George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866-1949), devoted himself to this study in the book