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CHAPTER 14

In the Beginning was Consciousness

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One alone is the Dawn beaming over all this.
It is the One that severally becomes all this.

Rg-Veda, VIII, 58:2

The nameless [Tao] is the beginning of Heaven and Earth,
The named [Tao] is the mother of ten thousand things.

Tao Te Ching, ch. 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Gospel of John, 1:1

But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that He saith unto it: "Be!" and it is.

Quran, 36:81

When we turn to the sacred scriptures of various religions, we discover that in every case the origin of the cosmos and of man is identified as a Reality which is conscious and in fact constitutes consciousness understood on the highest level as absolute Consciousness, which is transcendent and yet the source of all consciousness in the cosmic realm including our own. Furthermore the "in the beginning" is understood not only as belonging to the past but also to the present moment which is the eternal now. That is why "in the beginning" must also be understood as "in principle" as the Latin translation of the opening verse of the Gospel of John asserts, "*in principia erat verbum*." Whether we speak of Allah who commands things to be and they are, or the Tao, or the Word by which all things were made, or Brahman, we are speaking of Consciousness of an ever-living and present and this truth is made especially explicit in Hinduism where the principial Reality which is the source of all things is described as at once Being, Consciousness and Ecstasy. Nor is this unanimity of vision of the Origin of all things as identified with consciousness confined to sacred scriptures. Both Oriental and traditional Western philosophers speak of the same truth. The *tò Agathon* of Plato is not only the

Supreme Good but also supreme awareness of the Good, and *nous* or intellect, so central to Greek philosophy, is of course inseparable from consciousness. Islamic philosophers consider being to be inseparable from knowledge and therefore awareness, and consider cosmic levels of existence also to be levels of knowledge and awareness. As for Hinduism, in its worldview the existence of a thing, even a rock, is also a state of consciousness.

One can then assert safely that in the traditional world there was unanimity concerning the priority of consciousness in relation to what we call "matter" today. The Reality which is seen by all these traditional religions and philosophies to be the origin of things both temporally and in principle is also Supreme Consciousness and can only be reached when human beings are able to elevate their own level of consciousness. Even in Buddhism, which does not speak of an objective Supreme Reality and of cosmogenesis as understood in the Abrahamic and Iranian religions as well as Hinduism, *nirvana* is the supreme state of consciousness and Buddhahood is also inseparable from consciousness. The only exception to this unanimous traditional view in the old days was to be found in certain anti-metaphysical philosophies of the late Antiquity accompanying the death throes of Hellenistic and Roman civilizations and in certain marginal schools of ancient India which were thoroughly rejected by the mainstream orthodox schools of Hindu thought.

The privilege of denying the primacy of consciousness wholesale remained for the modern world, especially with the advent of the materialistic and scientistic philosophies which came to the fore after the Scientific Revolution in the 17th century. Furthermore, this transformation did not take place until the modern idea of matter, not to be confused with its understanding in Greek philosophy and science, was developed with Descartes and Galileo. By taking away from corporeal existence all its qualitative aspects and reducing it to pure quantity, these men, followed by many others, created a worldview in which there was such a thing as pure inert matter divorced totally from life and consciousness but somehow mysteriously known by the knowing subject or the mind. Cartesian bifurcation created a dualism between mind and matter which has dominated Western thought since the 17th century, a dualism which has led many to choose the primacy of matter over mind and the establishment of the view that in the beginning was matter and not consciousness, even if some still hold to a deistic conception of a Creator God.

The prevalence of this supposedly scientific materialism, which, however, is not all borne out by science as science and not pseudo-theology or philosophy, gained momentum in the 19th century with

the evolutionary theory of Darwin which itself is an ideology in support of this so-called materialism and also based on it. The penetration of the view that all things begin with matter which then evolves into life and later consciousness into the worldview of the general public in the West has been such that despite the total rejection of the classical view of matter in modern quantum mechanics, there still lingers in the public arena reliance upon a materialistic perspective which reduces ultimately all things to "matter." This reductionism has become part and parcel of the modern and even post-modern mindset. People believe that it is possible to understand a thing only through analysis and the breaking up of that thing to its "fundamental" parts which are material. They are led to believe that the whole is nothing more than the sum of its parts and physicists continue to search for the ultimate particles or building blocks of the universe which the less sophisticated public envisages as minute billiard balls which are then accumulated together to create all the beings of the universe. In such a perspective based on materialistic reductionism both life and consciousness are seen as epiphenomena of material factors whether they be matter or energy. The whole rapport between consciousness and corporeal existence is thus reversed.

In traditional cosmologies Pure Consciousness, that is also Pure Being, descends, while remaining Itself transcendent vis-à-vis Its manifestations, through various levels of the cosmic hierarchy to reach the physical world whereas in the modern reductionist view things ascend from the primordial cosmic soup. Even if certain individual scientists believe that a conscious and intelligent Being brought about the Big Bang and originated the cosmos, consciousness plays no role in the so-called evolution of the cosmos from the early aggregate of molecules to the appearance of human beings on the planet. In the traditional world view, human beings have descended from a higher realm of being and consciousness, whereas according to the modernist perspective so prevalent in present day society, they have ascended from below. These are two diametrically opposed points of view, one based on the primacy of consciousness and the other on the primacy of unconscious and blind material agents, forces, and processes.

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How we view the nature of reality has a direct bearing upon how we live as human beings. For millennia human beings lived in a universe dominated by the idea of the primacy of consciousness over all that is corporeal and material. They fought wars and there was disease but they lived in a world of meaning and beauty. They created traditional

arts of surpassing beauty and lived, to a large extent, in harmony and peace with their natural environment. They knew who they were, where they came from and where they were going. The denial of the supremacy and primacy of consciousness and the substitution of a materialistic reductionism in its place, has given human beings greater domination over nature and certain earthly comforts while, needless to say, creating new discomforts. It has cured many diseases while opening the door to diseases unknown before. And it has been defended as being a way to peace while making possible wars with a degree of violence and lethal effects not imagined in days of old. But most of all it has destroyed the harmonious relation not only between man and God and the spiritual world but also between man and nature by permitting the creation of a science based not on wisdom but on power and its applications as a new technology which has the capability of destroying the very order of life on earth. On the individual level, it has taken away from human beings the ultimate meaning of life and destroyed the home which they considered the universe to be, making human beings aliens within a world view constructed by human minds.

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Let us examine further the consequences of substituting for the primacy of consciousness, the primal reality of matter or matter/energy according to the modern scientistic perspective. By positing matter as the ground of all cosmic reality, and for many the only reality, a reductionism has developed which reduces the spirit to the psyche, the psyche to biological processes, life to the activity of chemical agents and chemical elements to the particles of physics. People continue to speak of finding the "fundamental" building blocks of the universe from which one could build up step by step to the greatest prophets, saints, sages, thinkers, and artists. The reality of higher levels of being is thereby seen as nothing more than phenomena resulting from purely material and quantitative entities and processes. Life is seen as an accident and consciousness an epiphenomenon of life. The universe is depicted as a "dead" one devoid of any life, meaning, soul or consciousness. Consequently human beings are made to feel like an island amidst a vast, threatening ocean of blind and dead matter. They have no home in the cosmos as did their ancestors and feel alienated from all that is not human. Furthermore, this alienation has nothing to do with the alienation of the spiritual human being from the world as understood religiously. Nor is it in any way related to the saying of Christ, "My kingdom is not of this world." The new alienation from

the world resulting from scientistic reductionism is of a very different order. Traditional men and women found their home ultimately in the Divine but they also saw in this world a domain dominated by God and full of souls and spirits which corresponded to different aspects of their nature. They never felt as if they were alone in a universe totally blind to their deepest hopes and aspirations. The modern forms of human alienation whether psychological or social, issue from the cosmic isolation created by a worldview which denies the primacy of consciousness.

Human beings are in need of meaning as much as they are in need of air to breathe and food to eat. Modern materialistic reductionism has not only resulted in chemically infested food and polluted air, but also the loss of meaning in its ultimate sense. There can in fact be no ultimate meaning without the acceptance of the Ultimate in the metaphysical sense. It is indeed a great paradox that human consciousness in modern times has produced a view of the cosmos which has no room for consciousness. And when human beings do seek to find consciousness in the objective world, or experience what they consider to be encounters with conscious beings outside of the human realm, they are marginalized and condemned to the category of hallucinating men and women in need of psychiatric care. When our ancestors could encounter angels and even lesser beings in nature, and when such encounters were acceptable within the *Weltanschauung* in which they lived, they did not encounter "aliens" in the modern sense nor did they feel the need to do so. Nor were they marginalized as abnormal in the societies in which they lived. And the conscious beings they did encounter were not alien to them.

The denial of the primacy of consciousness also resulted both directly and indirectly in the desacralization of nature and the reduction of nature to a pure "it," to a commodity to be used by human beings as they deemed necessary. The care for nature was turned into its rape as the prevalent view of nature became ever more impervious to its spiritual qualities, its mystery, its innate harmony and beauty. All those aspects of nature, celebrated over the centuries by sages, saints, poets and artists, became subjectivized and made to appear as being objectively unreal. Turned into a commodity to be used by the ever growing avaricious appetite of modern humanity as consumer, the natural environment soon began to suffer, leading to the environmental crisis which now threatens the web of life on earth. Even today few want to accept the direct relation between the materialistic view of nature and the destruction of nature on the unprecedented scale that we observe everywhere on the globe today.

The materialistic world view and the denying of the primacy of consciousness have also had a direct bearing on the weakening of ethical norms and practices. In all civilizations morality was related to religion and a philosophical world view in which good and evil, right and wrong had a cosmic as well as human dimension. We can see clear examples of this rapport not only in the Abrahamic religions, but also in Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. Ethics is always related in one way or another to metaphysics. In denying the primacy of consciousness in favor of the material, the modern paradigm has weakened the objective cadre for human ethics not only by marginalizing and weakening religion, but also by reducing the cosmos to a purely "material" reality in which good and evil have no meaning any more than does beauty. *À la* Galileo and Descartes all such categories are relegated to the subjective realm and banished from objective reality. Ethics is thereby weakened wherever this world view has flourished and secularized ethics based on such a truncated view of reality has never been able to gain widespread acceptance. Moreover, all this has occurred at a time when human beings are in the greatest need of an environmental ethics which would appeal to the vast majority of the human family, most of whom still closely identify ethics with God, with sacred laws and teachings of various religions. Nor is the need for ethics confined to the environment. It is also of the utmost importance to emphasize ethics in the dealing of human beings with each other when, thanks to modern technology, weapons of war and conflict have become lethal to a degree beyond imagination.

If in the beginning was only the soup of molecules, then our deepest yearnings and aspirations, our deepest feelings, our sense of love, beauty, justice and goodness are all ephemeral subjective states caused by blind evolutionary forces and truth has meaning only when operationally defined. What we call our humanity is only an illusion. What is real is what we experience of the outside world seen only as a domain of material entities and forces in various interactions and processes which are totally indifferent to our humanity. To deny the primacy of consciousness is in fact to confirm knowingly or unknowingly our own inhumanity and to admit that all that we consider to be the deepest elements of our thoughts, emotions, and even spiritual states are ultimately illusory and unreal, being reducible to material agents and forces. It is to surrender ourselves to the sub-human, which in fact we see manifesting itself, by no means accidentally, to an ever greater degree in the human order as it pulls humanity with ever greater speed downwards toward the abyss.

If consciousness in its highest sense is not the alpha of cosmic and human existence, it cannot, metaphysically speaking, be its omega

either. By denying the primacy of consciousness, modern materialism has also cast doubt on the reality of the immortality of the human soul and the afterlife. Today in the West even many religious people do not take eschatological realities seriously. Besides the most tragic consequences for the human soul who denies such realities, the weakening of belief in eternal life also has a direct consequence on how we live in this world and more particularly, upon the destruction of the natural environment. If life on this earth is the only life we have, then we should do everything possible to live a worldly life as fully as possible. For most people such a life means hedonism and consumerism to the extent possible. A few agnostics might be satisfied with "the life of the mind," but for most people loss of fear of the infernal states and hope for paradise results in giving full vent to their sensual passions and their gratification which result in ever greater expectation of material "benefits" from their environment with catastrophic consequences for the natural world as well as for the human agent within that world.

The consequences of the loss of the vision of the Sacred Origin of the cosmos and denial of the primacy of consciousness are so many and so multifarious that they cannot all be mentioned here. And yet, opposition to this view is so strong within the citadel of the modern scientistic paradigm, that even scientific arguments for intelligent design of the universe, which implies of course the primacy of intelligence or consciousness, are brushed aside in dogmatic fashion by many high priests of the pseudo-religion of scientism. Despite this negative situation, the truth of the primacy of consciousness must be asserted whenever and wherever possible. And there are signs that more and more perspicacious people are awakening from their "dogmatic slumber" and realizing this truth.

If the truth of the primacy of consciousness cosmically and ontologically as well as microcosmically were to be reasserted and accepted on a wide scale again in the contemporary world, human life would become different qualitatively and many of the obstacles facing humanity today would be removed. Human life would have meaning beyond transient psychological states and evanescent sensuous experiences. Human life would also regain the aspect of ultimacy which all religions believe it possesses. The reason for the sacredness of human life would become clear and the quality of sacredness would have an ontological basis rather being mere sentimentality as it is today when seen in the context of a strictly scientistic point of view. And the intimations of immortality would be seen as a blinding reality rather than sentimental wishful thinking combined often with doubt.

Were we to accept the truth that "in the beginning was consciousness" and that "it is now as it was at the beginning," we would no

longer feel as aliens in a dead and forbidding cosmos, as accidents in a lifeless universe. Far from being aliens, we would feel once again at home in the cosmos as did traditional men and women over the ages. Our rapport with animals, plants and even the inanimate world would change from one of strife and need for control and domination to one of harmony and equilibrium with a much greater possibility of intimacy with more human beings than the current mind-set makes possible.

Finally we would regain the cosmic dimension of our existence. Our deepest values, our attraction to and yearning for beauty, peace and justice, and the experience of love itself on all levels would not be seen as being simply subjective states devoid of any objective reality but on the contrary as corresponding to cosmic and ultimately metacosmic realities. And our ethical actions and norms, far from being simply based on standards set by merely human decisions and agreements, would be seen as having a divine origin and cosmic correspondences and as being much more real than simply convenient accommodations created by human societies for their survival or selfish interests.

If human beings were not to live below the human level, but were to realize the full possibility of being human, they would grasp intuitively the truth of the assertion of the primacy of consciousness. Their own consciousness would be raised to a level where they would know through direct intellection that the alpha and omega of cosmic reality cannot but be the Supreme Consciousness which is also Pure Being and that all beings in the universe possess a degree of consciousness in accord with their existential state. They would realize that as human beings we are given the intelligence to know the One Who is the Origin and End of all things, who is *Sat* (Being), *Chit* (Consciousness), and *Ānanda* (Bliss), and to realize that this knowledge itself is the ultimate goal of human life, the crown of human existence, and what ultimately makes us human beings who can discourse with the trees and the birds as well as with the angels and who are on the highest level the interlocutors of that Supreme Reality who has allowed us to say "I" but who is ultimately the I of all I's.

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