

9-1-2018

The Unconscious in Sri Aurobindo: A Study in Integral Psychology

Indra Sen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sen, I. (2018). The unconscious in Sri Aurobindo: A study in Integral psychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 37 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2018.37.1.120>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#). This Special Topic Article is brought to you for free and open access by International Journal of Transpersonal Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Transpersonal Studies by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact the editors.

The Unconscious in Sri Aurobindo: A Study in Integral Psychology

Indra Sen

Editorial note: This is a reprint of an archived paper. The original is now part of Sen's body of work, which is kept in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives. Minor edits have been made for APA style; any grammatical inconsistencies are in the original.

The unconscious is the characteristic discovery of Freud, but it has been known before in the West as well as the East to the history of philosophy. And while what has been discovered and demonstrated is enormous and overwhelming, yet it needs careful reevaluation and re-adaptation.

In Western thought the unconscious has ordinarily occurred as a metaphysical principle. Plotinus talks of matter, in contrast to the Spirit as purely unconscious. Leibniz develops it with much force and consistency in the elaboration of his doctrine of monads. A monad is the individual substance, a unit of force and all existence is an organization of such units of monads. However there is a difference in the levels of their development, which is represented by the degrees of clearness and distinctness of their perceptions. Thus we get in the monads the different levels of conscious life, self-consciousness, consciousness, subconsciousness, and unconsciousness. And these represent different levels of experience in man as also the various stages in the evolution of nature, such as inorganic matter, plant, animal and man. In German idealism, where thought or spirit is the reality, matter naturally becomes unconscious thought. Hegel, for example, thinks of it as congealed spirit. Herbert develops a whole philosophy of the unconscious. He finds that a will has to be assumed in nature, but it can only be an unconscious will, which, however, is an intelligent will.

All these conceptions of the unconscious are directly metaphysical and they apply to human nature in that relation only. Their workings in human personality are only elaborated in some measure and in no case do the facts of conflict and repression seem to have been noticed and developed.

The case of Indian Philosophy is, however, different. Here Yoga has been a necessary concomitant discipline for each system of philosophy for the realization of its truths, and therefore, the growth of personality is an indispensable issue for each system. And practically to all disciplines of Yoga the idea of purification or *Chit-Shuddhi* is common. They all emphasize renunciation of desires and the practice of concentration, meditation, and devotion as a means for freedom from craving and the attainment of peace and beatitude. And such discipline has usually to be carried on for long years. In this connection, the doctrine of Karma, which is again a common feature of all Indian systems, is particularly interesting. Karmas or actions are said to be of three kinds: *Sanchit*, *Prarabdha*, and *Sanchiyamana*. They are authoritatively described like this:

(a) *Sanchita* or accumulated Karma of the past is that which remains stored up and has yet borne any effect; (b) *Parabdha* or current Karma which also was acquired in the past but has already begun to bear fruits (such as life in the present body, and all other possessions we already have); (c) *Sanchiyamana* or accumulating Karma which is being gathered in this life. (Chatterjee & Datta, 1948, p. 18, footnote 1)

Here evidently dispositions of actions are implied and they are clearly distinguished into three kinds: those that are being formed now through our present doings; those of the previous formation which are now operative in our life, and those that are there in our personality but which are perhaps more distantly basic to it and exist as a deeper substrate without being directly operative. Evidently the

subconscious and the unconscious facts of personal life are involved here. And then if we remember that man is connected with animal births through transmigration his dispositions will be supposed to contain the experiences of animal life too. We might also recall in this connection that *dwandwa* or duality and division are regarded as a general feature of mental life and that the aim of Yoga is to create a unity out of it. And for this purpose *Karma-Kshaya* or the dissolution of dispositions is considered necessary. When the dispositions of the past have all been allowed to *wear away* and the individual is no longer subject to their impulses then he becomes liberated or free.

This is broadly the traditional Indian account which bears on our subject of the unconscious. In the details of the different processes mentioned above there are naturally differences among different systems of Indian philosophy and yoga. But for our present treatment these differences are not necessary.

This is, however, just an introduction and a background to our contemporary studies of the subject and in this respect the work of Freud is the first to which we turn. Freud landed upon the fact of the unconscious independently in the course of his therapeutic work on cases of hysteria. And his first conception of it probably was that the experience of the past, which caused the trouble, continued to exist. However, with the discovery of the fact of resistance the unconscious became identified with what is repressed. And when it was further found that the resistances themselves could be unconscious facts, then the doctrine of the unconscious underwent a further modification. It was then no longer identified with the Id and the libidinal energy of the repressed infantile sexuality, but even constituted a part of the Ego and Superego. Thus the unconscious in Freud underwent a good deal of modification as the experience and theory of psychoanalysis evolved and advanced. But while the actual delimitation of its sphere and therefore some of its functions underwent change, the essential dynamic character of it has always remained the same. And this was the one decisive contribution of Freud, not only so far as the unconscious was concerned but human personality as a whole.

However, since all that is unconscious in us is not repressed he had also recognized another sphere of unconscious experience, which he called *preconscious*. He stated their respective character and mutual relation in these words: "We have two kinds of unconscious—that which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and that which is repressed and not capable of becoming conscious in the ordinary way" (as cited in Rickman, 1937, pp. 278–281). The former is called *preconscious* and the latter *unconscious*. And further he said that "the *preconscious* is presumably a great deal closer to the conscious than the *unconscious*." The discovery of the unconscious resistance in the ego had caused a real difficulty so far as the concept of the unconscious is concerned. Freud further stated,

We have come upon something in the ego itself which is also unconscious which behaves exactly like the repressed. When we find ourselves thus confronted by the necessity of postulating a third unconscious which is repressed, we must admit that the property of being unconscious begins to lose significance for us. (as cited in Rickman, 1937, pp. 278–281).

This is practically the last position of psychoanalysis so far as the place of the unconscious in human personality is concerned. In spite of the vagueness of the general boundaries of the unconscious and the dubious nature of its relation to the conscious, the nature and workings of the *repressed unconscious* was in fact the exact field of mental life which interested Freud the most and because of this he has given us a most detailed and authoritative account. Regarding the sexual nature of it, however, he modified his position a good deal and therefore it is primarily the more essential laws of its workings, the various defense mechanisms of normal life, the meaningful character of dreams and neurotic behavior that constitute his most substantial and lasting contribution. The identification and the characterization of these fundamental processes of the unconscious has really been a crowning piece of scientific work.

Freud was preeminently a scientific observer, but a great theorist too. He speculated on the nature of mental life a good deal as is evident from the

hypothesis he made and remade. However in this respect Jung has been more gifted. His urge to explain things has been much stronger and therefore in Jung we find more consistent hypotheses. For Jung the unconscious is the whole body of experience which is not conscious, and includes the repressed elements and those elements that have ceased to be conscious and those that have been acquired unconsciously. This is only the personal unconscious. There is also a racial or collective unconscious which is in fact more important since the personal unconscious and conscious also develop out of it. It is the inherited factor in the individual which constitutes as it were a general base for life. It consists of the instincts and the *primordial ideas* or *archetypes* that are a powerful determining force in the behavior of mental life.

Libido too becomes with Jung the total vital energy which is not necessarily sexual. What is more, he fully recognizes that it is teleological or forward looking. The libido of the individual is constantly addressing itself to problems that face it and failure in meeting them is the real cause, the rest is only the predisposing cause. He said, "I no longer find the cause of the neurosis in the past but in the present. I ask, what is the necessary task which the patient will not accomplish" (Jung, 1920, p. 232). Here we have a most significant difference between Freud and Jung. Freud had strictly applied the natural science causality to mind insisting that every phenomenon whether psychic or physical must have an antecedent cause. But if mind is a phenomenon marked off from those of physical nature by its goal-seeking or teleological character then the validity of this approach becomes questionable.

To Sri Aurobindo the teleological or forward moving character is the central fact of our consciousness. It is the evolutionary urge of life, generally, that unfolds in the ascending scale of the animal species a progressive growth of consciousness. And such growth takes place out of unconsciousness. Therefore the unconscious is the large evolutionary base from which consciousness emerges, first as a vague sensibility in the animalcule, then as a sense perception in the animal which progressively differentiates out and becomes more complex, and then in man as self-consciousness and thought, and therefore capable of an integration of self and the

world. But this measure of self-consciousness is yet a poor fragment since by far in the greater part of himself he is yet unconscious and correspondingly his integration of personality is incomplete. However if the past course of evolution is any indication then it can be definitely confirmed that the goal of the long evolutionary march must be the attainment of a consciousness fully come to its own. That is to say when the unconscious has been reduced to the vanishing point and the human individual becomes fully aware of himself and capable of acting out of such awareness. An objective consideration of the biological phenomenon and the emergence of consciousness, its progressive growth and its status in man seem to show clearly that the goal of such movement must necessarily be an eventual conquest of the unconscious.

This is, however, a general evolutionary consideration. Sri Aurobindo's more important approach to the problem of personality is that of practical yoga. Now yoga is essentially a process of becoming conscious of oneself. It involves a persistent looking within and a thorough self-exploration leading to a complete self-discovery and self-integration. It is also in itself a non-moral and non-religious discipline, though moral and religious life do make of it for their own advancement. But strictly speaking it demands a matter-of-fact attitude towards personality in the achievement of its highest integration. However yoga too is a generic term and it covers a variety of disciplines of self-development. But in any case the method of yoga propounded by Sri Aurobindo is a strict scientific discipline demanding a completely matter-of-fact approach to personality and the course of its evolution.

Yoga is indeed a long discipline, but there cannot be anything more thorough than this in the exploration of personality. And if introspection is our only method of direct knowledge of ourselves, then we have ultimately to depend upon it for a sure knowledge of personality. And yoga is exactly the discipline which primarily depends upon introspection as the method of its operation. However it has to be raised to such a pitch of efficiency that self-observation becomes a constant and spontaneous inner activity and not a deliberate process of special occasions.

Obviously such exploration and the results of it will have to be at the first instance an individual matter. That is a limitation of introspection and the phenomenon of consciousness. But its verification consists in others being able to repeat the process and the experience. And we do in fact possess a good body of corroborated evidence so far as the findings of Sri Aurobindo are concerned. This evidence is firstly of those who have tried to follow his yoga and secondly of other masters of yoga. Evidently in the case of the other masters of yoga whose recorded experiences we possess on account of the difference of approach the results too are in many respects different. Yet we notice some interesting agreements as to the facts of personality even when the methods are very divergent. Sri Aurobindo's yoga, which he calls *Integral Yoga* since it employs all the resources of energy of personality and aims at the most complete integration and transformation of personality, is essentially a psychological process, a striving and movement of consciousness itself to enlarge, widen, deepen and integrate itself. The minimum motivations of yoga for Sri Aurobindo are the will to become aware of oneself and grow to the fullest stature of life. The realization of the Soul, the true Self or God or Divine, are expressions to convey a status of such fully aware and perfect life.

The method of yoga is indeed difficult but if human personality has to become an open book it can only be through it since all other approaches involve observation of effects and inferences as to mental causes. The clinical approach of Freud is a most painstaking procedure and he has indeed collected an enormous amount of facts of neurotic behaviors yet his writings bristle up with too many hypotheses which are painful uncertainty's. The essential principles of the psychoanalytical science are mostly hypotheses and inferences which however to a yogic introspection can be direct knowledge of conscious facts.

The yogic method has a further limitation of its own. We today ask for detailed observation of changes. Yoga does not give these. What it gives is the method, the general principles of growth and the results and all these can be repeated, re-experienced, and verified. But a report of the details of personal experience is usually not given. That

involves, as it were, for the individual participant a visitation of the method. But that may not be an insurmountable difficulty, though the past traditions of it have desired this observance of it. However the more important thing is the result achieved in the form of the knowledge of personality and that is fully available and so also is the method.

We have dwelt quite at length on the characteristic approach of Sri Aurobindo to the problem of personality and considered its relative merits and difficulties. We must now return to our subject of the unconscious. We have already said that the facts of evolution show us that consciousness emerges in the animalcule as a weak trend in the midst of general unconsciousness. This goes on progressively becoming a stronger influence as the organic life evolves until in man we find it capable of much creative and determining power. However even at this stage it wields only a small part of personality since a much greater part of it is controlled and guided in an unconscious way. We have also said that the past course of evolution does point to its future trend and possible culmination which must be a further growth of consciousness and the progressive diminution of unconsciousness until life becomes all-conscious.

Now man, or for that matter any animal by virtue of being a stage in an evolutionary process with a past and future, would in the conscious organization involve, as it were, three distinguishable spheres:

- Its actual consciousness dealing with its environment and showing capacity for variation and further growth;
- The unconscious which involves its past course of evolution; and
- The experiences made and the habits and reactions acquired which are now more or less automatic.

In this we must be able to distinguish several layers, as it were, representing the personal past experiences of the species, of the previous animal history, and the general unconsciousness of the inanimate nature which constitutes the physical basis of organic life. But the future possibilities too must be represented in the organism as present

potentialities and they would generally represent a quality of consciousness superior to the present or any represented in the unconscious. In fact, the general prospective attitude of consciousness may be the overt expression of these possibilities and the pressure exercised by them on the organism. This naturally must be a distinct sphere from the unconscious, and being qualitatively a higher fact, may be called the superconscious. Western psychologists, whether Freud or Jung, or any other, regard all that is not conscious as unconscious and do not distinguish between the unconscious that represents the past, and the unconscious that may represent the future. And this is so in spite of their recognizing evolution, teleology, and the perspective attitude of consciousness. In fact Jung (1946), who recognizes yogis as “past masters” (p. 26) in wholeness, describes their goal, the state of *Samadhi*, as unconsciousness which is otherwise described as chaotic. Surely a consciousness which possesses the quality of wholeness is a distinct phenomenon not to be confused with the chaos of the unconscious.

Thus three distinct spheres have to be recognized in human personality: the conscious, the unconscious, and the superconscious. They must naturally be interconnected, being part of a continuous evolutionary process. Yet for a precise knowledge of their interrelationships and also of their nature and function, we have to rely upon an introspective exploration of our personality.

Introspective exploration is the characteristic yogic method for the study of personality. We have said before that in yoga the individual starts by becoming more and more conscious of himself. He observes and identifies his motives. He looks at them dispassionately and impartially, he objectifies them, disassociates himself from them. This is just scientific observation and in the cases of psychological data, self-disassociation is a condition of dispassionate observation. In the practical way this affords to the yogic practitioner a progressive detachment and liberation from his impulses and desires. Now this process goes on for a long time so that self-observation becomes capable of action in life while observing himself. This self-vigilance of yoga is usually accompanied by exercises in concentration

which discipline attention and further strengthen such self-vigilance and the will to grow. The process, on the whole, is prospective in outlook and involves integration of personality. But there are two aspects of the work, a negative and a positive. On the negative side a working off of the old fixations takes place, a surging up of the past experiences which have to be identified and disassociated from. On the positive side the will to grow becomes stronger more so in consequence of the releases from the past fixations and a general integration results. This process in course of time leads to an experience of a consciousness qualitatively new in character which Sri Aurobindo (1935) called the “psychic consciousness” (p. 28; see also Sri Aurobindo, 1949, pp. 806–809). The psychic is to Sri Aurobindo the central fact of human personality which guides and governs its evolution. The *Soul* is a metaphysical substance supposed ever to remain the same but the psychic is a principle of evolutionary life like the mind. Now the psychic consciousness is essentially marked by a quality of wholeness, a higher degree of limitation than the mental and a clear sense of inwardness. This will naturally has to be recognized as a superconscious factor in personality. This is, however, the first in this direction and a further pursuit leads to the discovery of other yet high qualities of consciousness (Sri Aurobindo, 1949, pp. 808–809).

Most disciplines of yoga naturally seek these higher qualities of consciousness and therefore attend to the unconscious only to the extent they feel obliged to that is they seek purification of its topmost layer from where experiences do easily surge up to the plane of consciousness and for the rest they are content to take even a general suppressive attitude. However Sri Aurobindo’s pursuit is a complete integration and transformation of consciousness, and therefore, while the superconscious interests him for its wholeness quality and harmonizing function, the unconscious interests him as the vast realm of personality which needs harmonization. He regards both these spheres as virtually infinite in extent and gives a detailed account of the successive ranges of them (Sri Aurobindo, 1949, pp. 249–268).

In the exploration of the unconscious the first thing is the general attitude towards it. Evidently

the attitude must not be suppressive; it should be of exploration, discovery, and integration. For this a general forward looking attitude is necessary. Sri Aurobindo (1948) asked for a general *uplook* in the whole personality which so far as the unconscious is concerned has the effect of making it progressively deliver up its contents (p. 38). If this intention deeply settles down in the nature then in place of the general suppressive and repressive attitude an opposite tendency begins to be operative. Besides that, to the extent that the matter-of-fact attitude of yoga succeeds in replacing the moral and religious attitude the unconscious gets a better chance of throwing up its contents on to the conscious plane or the dream consciousness. Besides these attitudes which enable the unconscious to come up to the conscious plane more and more there has to be a motive of intentional diving into the unconscious with a view to become conscious of its contents. Sri Aurobindo (1941) stated, "The process of rising up the lower movements into the full light of consciousness in order to know and deal with them is inevitable, for there can be no complete change without it" (p. 121). In another context he said,

The *subconscient* is the *inconscient* in the process of becoming conscious; it is a support and even a root of our inferior parts of being and their movements . . . to penetrate there to bring in light and establish a control is indispensable for the completeness of any higher life, for any integral transformation. (Sri Aurobindo, 1949, p. 655).

We must now undertake the exact characterization of the unconscious and a description of its sphere and its nature as we find it in the psychological system of Sri Aurobindo. But we might first note that he prefers the terms *subconscient* and *inconscient* to *subconscious* and *unconscious*. The reason is that their essential dynamic character is more directly represented by the former set of terms. Further, the term *unconscious* implies a denial of consciousness, whereas in fact we mean only a lower degree of consciousness. *Inconscient* more accurately suggests its object. The *inconscient* is that range of personality where unconsciousness is *involved*,

and the *subconscient* is that which is in the process of becoming conscious. It is "a degree of our being in which *inconscient* struggles into a half consciousness" (Sri Aurobindo, 1949, p. 380).

Now, while the *inconscient* is the general base of our personality and is, therefore, likely to be only incipiently differentiated, the *subconscient*, which has become *half conscious* and is in the course of becoming conscious, is bound to show sufficiently marked differentiations. Sri Aurobindo undertakes to characterize these with much care and attention. He first pointed out that our consciousness itself consists of three distinguishable ranges. There is a *mental awareness*, a *life awareness*, and a *bodily awareness*. He said, the "mind identifies itself to a certain extent with the movements proper to physical life and body, and annexes them to its mentality, so that all consciousness seems to us to be mental" (Sri Aurobindo, 1949, p. 499). He argued that,

If we draw back, if we separate the mind as witness from these parts of us, we can discover that life and body, even the most physical part of life, have a consciousness of their own, a consciousness proper to an obscurer vital and to a bodily being, even such an elemental awareness as primitive animal forms may have. (Sri Aurobindo, 1949, p. 499)

Of course in them, "there is no organised self-consciousness, but only a sense of action and reaction" (Sri Aurobindo, 1949, p. 499). This consciousness of our life and body parts, said Sri Aurobindo (1949), "we may justly call *submental*, but not so justly the *subconscient* part of our being" (p. 499). We perceive it as,

A nervous and sensational and automatically dynamic mode of consciousness, a gradation of awareness different. The true *subconscient* is other than this vital or physical substratum; it is the *inconscient* vibrating on the borders of the *unconscious*. (p. 499)

Elsewhere he described it fully in these words:

We mean by the *subconscient* that quite submerged part of our being in which there

is no waking conscious and coherent thought, will, or feeling, or organized reaction, but which yet receives obscurely the impression of things and stores them up in itself and from it too all sorts of stimuli, of persistent habitual movements, crudely repeated or disguised in strange forms can surge up into dream or into the waking nature. For it, these impressions rise up most in dreams in an incoherent and disorganized manner, they can also and do rise up into our waking consciousness as a mechanical repetition of old thoughts, old mental, vital and physical habits or an obscure stimulus to sensations, actions, and emotions which do not originate in or form our conscious thought or will and are even often opposed to its perceptions, choices, or dictates. In the subconscious there is an obscure mind full of obstinate *samskaras* formed by our past, and obscure vital full of the seeds of habitual desires, sensations, and nervous reactions, a most obscure material which governs much that has to do with the condition of the body. (Sri Aurobindo, 1935, pp. 11–12)

We have obviously three chief differentiations in the subconscious: the *mental subconscious*, the *vital subconscious*, and the *physical subconscious*. And each one of these is distinguishable by virtue of their contents and action on the waking personality. Sri Aurobindo recognized moral personality as a synthesis of three factors: body, life, and mind, which are also successive emergences in the process of cosmic evolution. Now a clear recognition of the distinctive properties and functions of these serves as a great advantage in the hands of Sri Aurobindo in explaining many processes of normal personality. Ordinarily we recognize man as a mind in a body, and *Life* as a distinctive factor we do not recognize. But surely human mind is an emergence in life which carries its own native propensities and impulsions. It must evidently be an advantage to recognize and know it as distinct, though we will remember that mind influences and reforms it in a certain measure. Similarly the material body and its inertia, *tamas*, is a factor to recognize. As the basis

of life and mind, it will certainly determine them in certain ways, which we must know.

While each of these three spheres of the subconscious are distinguishable and exercise distinct influences on the waking consciousness, yet as a general fact the subconscious processes a number of common characteristics. It is obscure, disorganized, and chaotic. All the experiences of conscious life lapse into it, where they are retained and from where they tend to rise up again. It also carries in it the experiences of the racial past, the experiences of man in his march towards civilization and culture, as also these of the animal prehistory. Jung's primordial ideas or archetypes are the chief contents of our racial history, whereas the instinctive urges are of the animal pre-history. Consciousness is the organizing principle of life. We find that as consciousness advances in evolutionary progress organization also increases. It is therefore the lower degree of consciousness of the unconscious which must be responsible for its relative disorganization, impulsiveness, mechanical necessity, and lack of capacity to change. It is sheer persistence of the past, representing the principle of conservation of life's goods. A unified will can evidently not be found in the subconscious. The various impulses and propensities of it act individually and show very little organization among them. Egoism is the general rule of the subconscious life. From such rank egoism and the divided state of will naturally arise all sorts of aberrations and perversions of will which are the basis of the so many un-understandable abnormalities of the human personality. In this connection Sri Aurobindo (1949) formulated a principle of all life and behavior when he said, "Nothing can endure if it has not a will in our nature, a sanction of the Purusha, a sustained pleasure in some part of the being even though it be a secret or a perverse pleasure to keep it in continuance" (p. 353).

The divided state of the subconscious will naturally involve among its own impulses conflict and struggle, apart from the conflict and struggle they would have with the idealistic elements of our conscious personality as represented by morality, religion, and social life. This leads to the phenomenon of disguises and symbolism. Sri

Aurobindo gave a vivid account of the egoism of the impulses of the subconscious that constitute our *life part* or *vitality*. He said,

Our vital being is not concerned with self-knowledge but self-affirmation, desire, ego. It is therefore consistently acting on mind to build for it a mental structure of apparent self that serve these purposes; our mind is persuaded to present to us and to others a partly fictitious representative figure of ourselves that supports our self-affirmation, justifies our desires and actions, and nourishes our ego. This vital intervention is not indeed always in the direction of self-justification and assertion; it turns sometimes towards self-depreciation and a morbid and exaggerated self-criticism: but this too is an ego-structure, a reverse or negative egoism, a poise or pose of vital ego. For in this vital ego there is frequently a mixture of the charlatan and mountebank, the poser and actor; it is constantly taking up a role and playing it to itself and to others as its public. An organized self-deception is thus added to be an organized self-ignorance; it is only by going within and seeing these things at their source that we can get out of this obscurity and tangle. (Sri Aurobindo, 1949, p. 476)

What has been stated above by way of the characteristics of the subconscious may in good part be agreed to by Freud and Jung. But on the question of the essential nature of the energy that fills the subconscious, Freud would insist that it must be sexual. He does extend the meaning of the term sexual, by making it co-extensive with all pleasure-seeking, yet sexual feeling and relation of the adult human life seems to him to be the typical seeking and activity of human life as a whole. Sri Aurobindo's approach to the understanding of personality is twofold: first, that of yogic introspection, and secondly that of examining it as a product and process of general evolution. Both ways he found that sex as a human experience and activity is one among many qualities of experience and reactions. When our introspection becomes dispassionate enough and we are able to observe impulses as mental facts we can recognize that

it is a distinct impulse from others and that the weakening of the force of sex resulting in an effective transformation of it. This transformation is not merely canalization into other channels, but a change of the essential attitude and experience. The introspection should reveal that it is not the old egoistic seeking in search of new objects in place of the old ones, but qualitatively a new seeking itself, essentially integral in character.

Evolutionally considered, life seems clearly to work for the growth of consciousness. From amoeba to man there is a general rise in consciousness. If that is so, then the goal is a consciousness, more and more integrated and capable of self-organization and self-direction, and all the different individual qualities of experience and behavior are the means and instruments of the various stages of evolution to serve this end. Sex would thus become such an instrument and in fact it is one that appears at a particular level of animal evolution and is carried over to man as a heritage. In man, however, through the additional development of ideational activity sex receives a further enrichment and complication. And in a cultural epoch where the general sex suggestion might happen to be strong it will naturally become powerful and tend to dominate personality. But that would not entitle us to affirm that sex is basically fundamental to human nature. Hunger is, even as it is, a stronger motive than sex. In the face of hunger sex is not capable of self-affirmation.

Therefore the subconscious is not in its energy essentially sexual. It is a force of *half consciousness* emerging from the inconscient and tending towards fuller consciousness. As obscure consciousness it acts in division and produces conflict, struggle, disguise, and deception. Inertia is the stronger trend of its nature and therefore it acts primarily by mechanical necessity. However, since it is dynamic in character and seeks fuller consciousness it can be organized, integrated, and mastered.

But how is that to be done? Freud did not admit of the possibility of consciously working on one's unconscious with a view to modify or change it. Sublimation was unconscious activity that produced canalization into other channels of

the libidinal energy of the unconscious. This was all the change that was possible. Besides this the psychoanalyst can help to raise the unconscious contents to consciousness in the patient and thereby achieve a normal balance in personality. It is this latter change that had primarily interested Freud and which he investigated in great detail. In this connection his basic principle is that the unconscious content by being made conscious automatically becomes harmless. The cure is achieved by our just becoming conscious of the unconscious cause of trouble.

Sri Aurobindo's position regarding this entire subject of change of nature, and that means the change of the unconscious, is very different; not only change and modification, but a transformation of it is possible. And in fact the whole history of yogic and religious effort in the West as much as in the East shows that a transformation of personality from the normal egoistic form to a supernormal universalistic form is possible. This has been the general ideal of these aspirations and it has been achieved in any number of cases.

However, the processes leading to such change have been many and their attitudes towards the subconscious too are various. We have seen that to Sri Aurobindo, the raising of the lower movements into the full light of consciousness is inevitable. A conscious penetration of the subconscious is necessary for an integral transformation of nature. As he said,

A descent into the subconscious would not help us to explore this region for it would plunge us into incoherence, or into sleep or a dull trance or a comatose torpor. A mental scrutiny or insight can give us some indirect and constructive idea of these hidden activities; but it is only by drawing back into the subliminal, or by ascending into the *superconscious*, and from there looking down or extending ourselves into these obscure depths that we can become directly and totally aware and in control of the secrets of our subconscious physical, vital, and mental nature. This awareness, this control is of the utmost importance. For the subconscious is the Inconscient in the process of becoming

conscious; it is a support and even a root of our inferior parts of being and their movements. It sustains and reinforces all in us that clings most and refuses too change, our mechanical recurrences of unintelligent thought, our persistent obstinacies of feeling, sensation, impulse, propensity, and uncontrolled fixities of character. The animal in us, the infernal also, has its lair of retreat in this dense jungle of the subconscious. To penetrate there, to bring in light and establish a control, is indispensable for the completeness of any higher life, for any integral transformation of nature. (Sri Aurobindo, 1949, pp. 654–655)

The superconscious is the domain of the higher integration of personality and the subliminal is another domain that consists of the universal mental, vital, and physical, and of which our mental-vital-physical personality is a particular individuation. Now Sri Aurobindo's insistence is that from a status of these two parts of personality we are able to deal with the subconscious more effectively. Without these contacts if we descend into the subconscious we run the risk of losing ourselves into its obscurity. In another context Sri Aurobindo (1941) stated,

First one should make the higher mind and vital strong and firm and full of light and peace from above; afterwards one can open up or even dive into the subconscious with more safety and some chance of a rapid and successful change. (p. 120)

This position is perfectly intelligible. After all our purpose is integration of the subconscious. Then we must naturally enter into it with a clear and strong will to integrate it and that means retaining our contact with those parts of the personality where this will is the strongest. In this connection it will be interesting to recall that Freud (1949) recognized the will to be cured (pp. 52–57) in the patient as a necessary factor for the success of the cure. Evidently a will for integrated living is necessary for the achievement of integration in the unintegrated part. Sri Aurobindo clearly recognized that this will is the integrating force and

it is with its help that we can venture to organize the subconscious.

Here we might also examine another position of Freud when he said that by becoming conscious of our unconscious content we are relieved of the harmful effects of the latter. This takes no account of the "will to be cured" that is an essential factor. Sri Aurobindo (1947) however explicitly recognized that "awareness by itself is not enough. There must be a will and a Force that make the consciousness effective" (p. 322).

A conscious organization of the subconscious is thus a perfect possibility. It is a verifiable experience. However, it needs a proper technique and method the essential point of which is that while we dive into the unconscious we do not simply let ourselves go there, but in full awareness retain the will to organize and integrate it.

We would consider here yet another difference of functional importance between the psychological systems of Freud and Sri Aurobindo. The object of the therapeutic efforts in psychoanalysis, said Freud (1933) "is to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the superego, to widen its field of vision and so extend its organization that it can take over new portions of the id" (p. 106). The id represents "the untamed passions," the superego "the norms of behavior without regard to difficulties coming from the id and the external world," whereas the ego is "reason and circumspection" itself, which between the wild id and the uncompromising superego seeks to act intelligently in the external world. This is the normal situation of the human personality and this seems to be for Freud final too.

Now the ego is obviously the best part of personality because it possesses organization and *coherence* and is adjusted to reality. It is the principle of integration in personality. The id and the superego, on the other hand, are unadjusted to reality and are governed by their own wishes and ideas.

Now this is, on the whole, a correct analysis of the normal personality. However it may be observed that the differences between the three parts are in a way one of degree rather than of kind. The id is governed by its wishes, it is egoistic

and self-centered. The Superego is governed by its ideas and ideals; it too is egoistic and self-centered. But the ego too, which takes account of reality, is egoistic and self-centered, because it accepts reality in order to pursue its own ends more intelligently. It has, as it were, a sense for the means and that is all the difference between it and the other two.

This view of personality evidently does not see the larger evolutionary purposes that are at work. It does not recognize that the growth of life is moving in the direction of a fully integrated personality since this analysis does not make for full integration. Even if the inner differences between id, the superego, and the ego are harmonized, the integrated ego will yet be set against the non-ego of the external world which will really show a lack of adjustment with reality.

Sri Aurobindo saw full integration clearly indicated in our normal personality as also in the process of general evolution. And that becomes the principle inspiration of his psychological study of personality. This inspiration itself reinforces the normal prospective attitude of mind and therefore the exploration of the future possibilities, the superconscious, becomes a special interest. However the exploration of personality has to be integral and it must naturally start from the waking consciousness and spread out in all directions without losing the total perspective of the general forward movement of consciousness. Now such exploration reveals to us on the one hand, the raw impulses all-insistent about their objects and then those that have in course of experience become moderated in their nature and which accept the objective facts and conduct themselves intelligently in relation to them. Evidently here is a movement in the direction of impersonality and a progressive acceptance of and identification with the other, the reality. And that is how the actual integration proceeds. Now the exploration of the superconscious also reveals states and processes more universalized and essentially marked by this quality of wholeness, as referred to before in connection with the *Psychic being* and the other states that follow its development. Here evidently we will have to see how far personality

has accepted and become identified with reality and lives in accord with it, or how far it is yet self-centered and egoistic. Either will show the measure of the integration of the personality. Now since the basis here is total integration which is the natural direction of the growth of personality, the psychoanalytical distinctions of id, ego, and the superego become secondary because they are in their nature self-centered and egoistic. They have all to go and make room for a consciousness that is completely in accord with reality. Here reality too will not mean a set of concrete situations, but total reality. However, it will primarily be a matter of attitude. The individual person will seek and accept reality as it is and as it may be, giving up his egoistic insistence and prepossession, yielding a personality that could show a complete inner integration as well as complete adaptation with reality as a whole. And it is, according to Sri Aurobindo's reading, nature's clearly indicated purpose in evolution.

This paper on the unconscious in Sri Aurobindo has sought to present the subject in a comparative relationship with a psychoanalytical position and has considered a number of related and contributory issues. We can now once again cast a glance at the lengthy discussions that have been presented, and recall the essential points of view on the unconscious we have been considering. Firstly, the general approach to personality here has been comprehensive, evolutionary, and introspective. And in each one of these respects the attempt has been to be as thorough and whole hearted as possible. Its distinction of body, life, and mind as the three principle factors of personality too are of special help in unraveling the complex processes of personality. The unconscious itself has been affirmed as essentially dynamic, a half-consciousness emerging out of a yet lower degree of consciousness and seeking fuller consciousness. It consists of three principal spheres, the mental, the vital, and the physical, and there are, as it were, many layers of personal, human, and animal experiences in them. As obscure consciousness it involves lack of organization and coherence, and is therefore impulsive and divided. That gives rise to conflict, struggle, repression, deception,

and disguise, and the various apparently un-understanding abnormalities of behavior. But since it is by its own nature seeking fuller consciousness it can be organized and integrated. But in doing so the higher parts of personality where organization and integration already exist are the proper means.

This view of the unconscious seems to be well placed in the total view of personality and bears a relation of proper proportion to the waking consciousness and the superconscious. It also gives a new therapeutic approach to the disorders of personality and is capable of yielding a new technique of treatment. However it is for the future to substantiate this view of the unconscious and of personality by the detailed methods of collection of data and verification of modern science.

References

- Aurobindo, Sri. (1935). *Lights on yoga*. Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Aurobindo, Sri. (1941). *Bases of yoga*. Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Aurobindo, Sri. (1947). *Letters of Sri Aurobindo: First series*. Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
- Aurobindo, Sri. (1948). *The synthesis of yoga: Part I*. Madras, India: Sri Aurobindo Library.
- Aurobindo, Sri. (1949). *The life divine*. New York, NY: Sri Aurobindo Library.
- Chatterjee, S., & Datta, D. (1948). *An introduction to Indian philosophy*. Calcutta, India: Calcutta University Press.
- Freud, S. (1933). *New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis*. New York, NY: Carlton House.
- Freud, S. (1949). *An outline of psychoanalysis*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Jung, C. G. (1920). *Collected papers on analytical psychology* (2nd ed.; C. E. Long, Ed., Trans.). London, UK: Balliere, Tindall and Cox.
- Jung, C. G. (1946). *The integration of the personality* (S. M. Dell, Trans.). London, UK: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner.
- Rickman, J. (Ed). (1937). *A general selection from the works of Sigmund Freud*. London, UK: Hogarth.

About the Journal

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies, published by Floraglades Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at www.transpersonalstudies.org, and in print through www.lulu.com (search for IJTS).