

## **Science and Esoteric Traditions Group**

### **Regent's College London**

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The Science and Esoteric Traditions group has been meeting regularly for three years and wished through this meeting to convey more widely some of its perceptions and approaches, in particular to examine the interface between science and esoteric knowledge, an issue regarded by the group as crucial to formulating a wider and deeper scientific world-view. A day's meeting could not adequately summarize the group's work over three years, as David Lorimer explained in introducing the meeting, nor can this brief report adequately reflect the depth and range of thought and comments expressed at the meeting. GEOFFREY FARTHING in "Principles of an Esoteric Science", referred to the many named sources of esoteric knowledge, stating that esoteric science collates and advances their various content to move beyond the limits of conventional knowledge. These include alchemy (Newton's papers of his work being now lost), numerology, Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism, astrology and Platonism and the theosophical tradition itself, which embraces the view that there is only one true system of knowledge of reality of cosmic scope. This knowledge is sought and acquired at a price - the price being the transformation of our nature with consequent modulation of our perception. Instruction affords only a "keyhole" view. Each student must find his own entry into the room of understanding. Fifteen postulates\* were described. These included in the order presented:

- that there is a single common origin of all existence, a periodical manifest and a perpetual unmanifest, beyond thought
- consciousness progressively develops through the forms of existence and exists in all manifest forms - there is no "dead" matter
- there is a spirit/substance dichotomy at all levels but these entities are inseparable
- there are seven hierarchical levels of being and seven states of consciousness (and seven "principles" described as the links of consciousness from the physical to the higher planes).

In the subsequent discussion explanation of the meaning was requested and debated of "postulates", "living", "universe", "consciousness" and "esoteric", the latter said to indicate "not obvious", "hidden" (knowledge), "behind the scenes of the physical world".

HERTHA LARIVE described some of her experiential work with esoteric psychology. She was aware from early adolescence that life must be based on principles that must be searched for with the heart, although such knowledge was difficult to prove or to express. She believes that failure to discover such guidance, and thus for the eternal part of us to fail to be "in touch with the divine" leads to experience of isolation. The four precepts of esoteric psychology were:

- that man is a reflection of the divine and the sacred
- that expanded awareness is gained through experience

- that such evolution is governed by certain laws including that of karma and re-incarnation (we draw to ourselves those life experiences which will lead to that evolution)
- that such evolution leads to higher awareness.

In the esoteric view, consciousness is the basic phenomenon underlying all reality. Spirit fuses with matter and, by becoming embodied in matter, permits development. Conventional psychology does not recognise the soul and is based in the concept of the ego, nor does it embrace a concept of higher awareness. In the esoteric view, a "superconscious" is believed to exist potentially for everyone. Esoteric psychology recognizes this and its clinical practice seeks to assist people to follow a path towards such higher consciousness, both in the healthy and the sick, such as cancer sufferers. A change in self-identification with the physical world is sought, moving into an expansion of consciousness associated with an increasing identification with universal principles and values.

In the course of sessions the therapist seeks to be in a "meditational" state of mind. Exercises were referred to which seek the exclusion in the patient of judgement and mentation, and encourage the awareness of symbols and feelings, with subsequent analysis and assessment of the experience. Teaching courses held in this therapy are adjusted to the particular participants. The presentation concluded with the meeting's participation in a conducted exercise of relaxation into meditation in which we were invited to recognize any such experience as referred to above.

PROFESSOR PETER STEWART spoke on "Cosmic Laws and Universal Principles". Esoteric science addresses, in addition to the physical reality in which it becomes manifest, the non-physical transcendental reality, in accordance with the cosmic principle that the essential truth exists and must be sought in its broadest sense, spiritual, moral and physical. Esoteric science moves towards this goal less by the creeps and occasional jumps of conventional scientific progress, but rather by a leap of direct intuitional knowing. Such progress by intuition is, of course, evident in conventional science, as in the work of Poincaré, Einstein and in the engineering of Whittle. Even Newton could be considered an esotericist.

Intuition as a route to knowledge was well established in other endeavours such as dowsing, divining and the remote viewing utilized by US Defence and validated by outcome. Parallels with some modern scientific theory (e.g. so-called "Big Bang" creation/ultimate implosion/re-creation/cosmological theory) can be identified in intuitively derived texts (in this instance the Rig Vedas - Endless creation/re-creation). Discoveries lead to the formation of laws, essentially empirical and at times only descriptive, which may in turn lead to the recognition of universal principles.

The first "Great Organizing Principle" might be considered synonymous with the mind of God - that which can be considered to pre-exist the creation of the universe, since subsequent events unfolded according to laws. Other principles described included:

- archetypes, constituting information in what was described as higher space
- rationality and order, discernible throughout the cosmos and in the esoteric sphere which follows strict laws
- mathematics as the "basis of the cosmos"

- polarity - male/female, light/dark
- stability and change, stability in the unmanifest and change in the manifest
- balance and poise
- cause and effect, including the principle of karma.
- design (eg Fibonacci series reflected in plant leaf and branch patterns)
- Golden section in body and finger proportions
- fractal pattern widely evident in natural entities) and that of operation of the cosmos (of dynamism)
- the "nature of energy": (flow from high to low potential; wave motion; resonance).

Finally three anthropic principles were stated: the "weak" whereby developed consciousness played no causative part before the appearance of carbon based life; the "strong<sup>2</sup>", which assumes human consciousness played a part in bringing human life into being; the "participating" in which it is proposed that human consciousness contributed to the evolution of the cosmos. The spiritual quest could be seen as the endeavour to recognize then to live by the cosmic laws.

In "Ken Wilber's Perennial Philosophy" David Lorimer summarized some of this author's work from such of his writings as *A Brief History of Everything* and *The Eye of the Spirit*. Reviewing the lineage of anthropology and comparative religion into the trends of the twentieth century, Wilber considers whether a transcendental essence can be identified in varying religions. Drawing a distinction between the esoteric (inner/hidden) and the exoteric (external) he concludes that although it is mistaken to take any human conception for the absolute itself, there is nevertheless a level of human consciousness that can conform or relate to the absolute; but that such an occurrence, or state, probably cannot be expressed successfully in language. Nevertheless, universal structures exist and can be deduced from an interpretation of information and experience. Analysis of mystical and religious experience as merely brain processes however is inadequate, and he proposes there exists a level of reality corresponding to these experiences.

Wilber examines reality by dividing it into four quadrants - interior, exterior, individual, collective. He considers a new integration of these elements is needed for our improved new perception of reality and humanization of science, religion and mystical experience. Perception itself is divided (following St. Bonaventure) into three: the eye of sense, of reason, of contemplation. None can be reduced to the other. A new collective widened awareness can be pursued as follows: in science experience is shared by communication, criticism and comment. The experience and knowledge gained in contemplation, he suggests, can be similarly shared whence it appears there is much common ground in the nature of such experience and in the nature of spiritual progression among individuals. However, the content of that experience varies with the individual. The question is posed - is a "science" (my quotes) of mystical experience beginning to emerge?

Wilber's ability to express fundamental matters in a succinct and vivid way was evident throughout this presentation. Space precludes more than the few following examples: "meditation (involves) dislodgement of the embedded self"; "the perennial wisdom is not a set of doctrines but formless, timeless"; "the separate self is at bottom simply a sensation of

seeking"; "the great search presumes the loss of God and thus totally denies the reality of God's ever present presence". In conclusion, a series of such quotations was read to the meeting with a space between each for reflection.

In the final discussion speakers referred to the difficulty of expressing in words their perception and experience of the esoteric, while repeatedly referring to meditation as the means of access, and intuition or direct experience as the means of perception. It is not surprising that disagreement existed in the use of terms and strenuous calls were made for their clarification and definition and for experiential evidence of positions adopted. PROFESSOR ARTHUR ELLISON raised the question whether the cosmic laws referred to by Professor Peter Stewart were merely creations or manifestations of the human consciousness? Another speaker questioned the validity of the latter's application of the term "hard" science to some lines of esoteric enquiry. Peter Stewart replied that this term was valid in certain work in relation to form and method, rather than content (material currently in press).

There followed a discussion about the use of the term "science" to characterise the procedure advocated by Wilber (described above). Used in the usual sense of the term, the latter is not "science" but members of the Network have come to recognise the limitations imposed on our perception and experience of reality by the orthodox forms of conventional science and thought, and by the traditional western culture. If, as I believe, science is a cultural construct that facilitates understanding and manipulation of the four dimensional frame of reality in which we spend much of our everyday lives, then it does not follow that application of its modes of thought and methods will be appropriate or applicable in attempts to transgress the boundaries of that frame so as to enter a wider reality. Even within the everyday frame there are some entities which science does not or cannot address. It therefore does not seem appropriate for each endeavour to achieve a deeper awareness to carry the Procrustean label "science" with mutilation on both sides. To respond by equating the term "science" with "the search for any truth" is, I believe, to duck the issue. Even when appropriate in this field, the strictly scientific method may sit uneasily as in the case of Jahn's work on the effect of intention on sequences of random numbers, even though in this case confirmatory and entirely validly applied. It may be inappropriate to apply the standard methods of evaluating a form of therapy to an assessment of some forms of healing, even where this is recognised as a possible phenomenon. A revised epistemology is needed - two of the speakers referred to possible avenues.

Finally, the even more problematical and daunting question was raised of whether attempts to perceive and understand any elements of such a wider reality should or even can be achieved, other than from a fundamentally spiritual orientation. This question has I believe acquired increasing immediacy with each decade in recent times and in an ever-widening context. This is not the first time that it confronts the Network in open discussion and we must answer it as we may. These matters continue to be debated but hardly resolved among members of the Network.

In this report it has not been possible for reasons of space (for which I should confess to feeling somewhat relieved!) to attempt to clarify and to expand adequately on their behalf my brief references to the many themes expounded by the speakers.

For those wishing to make use of it, the Science and Esoteric Traditions group has published a bibliography (available from the Network office for £2.50). Cassette recordings of the

individual contributions are available and listed in the current Network audio and cassette leaflet (Tel: 01453 766411).

\* An account and enlargement of these fifteen principles written by the speaker can be obtained from the Network office on receipt of a C5 stamped addressed envelope.

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