

## A KRISHNAMURTI PERSPECTIVE ON INTEGRAL CONSCIOUSNESS\*

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We must work on ourselves, Gebser reminds us, if we are to realize integral consciousness. But how to do this he has left "tantalizingly incomplete."<sup>1</sup> How do we divine a methodology, or to use Feuerstein's term, a "psychotechnology,"<sup>2</sup> especially one suitable to western sensibilities? Could a possible candidate be the "methodless method" of spiritual teacher J. Krishnamurti? The two teachings share some intriguing similarities. And Krishnamurti's non-sectarian (really anti-sectarian) position can support a contemporary non-metaphysical western orientation. Let's explore the question.

In his major work *The Ever-Present Origin*, Swiss cultural philosopher Jean Gebser (1905–1973) presents the theory that contemporary human consciousness has evolved through four major mutations, each of which inaugurated a fundamental change in consciousness structure. Gebser identifies these structures as the archaic, magical, mythical and mental-rational. He claims we are now on the verge of a fifth, the integral. Understanding these modes of consciousness helps us realize who we are and why we act as we do since each previous structure continues within us; we can identify their various traces in our actions and thoughts. So they are both phases in human consciousness evolution and constituents of our present consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

In a very brief and restricted overview, we can say that the archaic reflects our long animalistic development when we could comprehend little other than our existence. Today it is manifest in deep sleep stages, in our fight or flight response, and perhaps in deep hypnosis and drug states.

The magical began some 750,000 years ago in a world experienced as spaceless and timeless. Humans relied on instinct, emotion and a sense of oneness with nature. Identification with clan or family group developed, idols and rituals appeared, along with an awareness of death. But there was still no sense of individual ego. We see the magical active today in sleep, in soporific experiences and in various superstitions that suggest that we can somehow directly influence natural processes.

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<sup>1</sup>.Feuerstein, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup>.Feuerstein, *Gebser Network Newsletter*, Spring 1991.

<sup>3</sup>.Gebser describes his model using structures rather than stages. Some claim that to speak of them as discrete events is misleading. Their view is that the integral structure is something that is present (from the origin) and working itself out in various aspects of our experience and culture rather than as a mode to be realized. There is something to this position. Still, Gebser does speak of radical changes of consciousness, a theme that has been developed by others such as Wilber and Jaynes. I will stay with this latter view since it is more in line with Krishnamurti's thinking. Nor does the less radical position eliminate the possibility of such a drastic consciousness change for the realization of the integral.

The mythical appeared between 12,000 to 20,000 BC and corresponds to the growth of agriculture, cities and, most especially, the acquisition of language. Imagination and introspection appeared. Gebser characterizes the mythical consciousness as involved with polarity and complementarity. We experience it in daydreaming, artistic creation, and involvement with fantasy.

The mental consciousness structure appeared somewhere around 1000 to 500 BC and continues through today. Now there was a sense of the individual ego. Thinking began using abstraction and causality. The world was experienced as three-dimensional. Time became measured. Later, as materialism and scientism developed, this mental structure took on a deficient form that Gebser names the rational. It is this consciousness that most conditions our contemporary way of being in the world. And it is leading to our spiritual bankruptcy. We need a major change.

Gebser postulates that we are on the verge of another major mutational leap to the integral consciousness structure. With it will come a new perception of time as intensity or quality as opposed to measurable quantity. And the integral will be marked by a transparency, a diaphaneity, that will let us be aware of the presence and activity of all the other structures. Gebser says we will attain it by transcending the ego. But how?

Early in this century, as a young boy in India, J. Krishnamurti (1896–1986) was identified by Theosophists as the prophesied great World Teacher. They educated him in England, preparing him to take leadership of the Order of the Star of the East organization. Then in 1929, standing before 3000 devotees, he renounced his leadership and dissolved the movement, stating that truth is a pathless land that cannot be approached by any organization, religion, sect, meditation or teacher–authority, including him; we must look only within ourselves for freedom and enlightenment. Krishnamurti continued to travel and teach—particularly in India, England, the US, and Switzerland—until his death in 1986.

Krishnamurti explains that somewhere evolution took a wrong turn so that human beings are messed up. We have psychological problems because we identify with our illusory ego—our false sense of self, our constructed and conditioned "I" and "me." This ego is formed and sustained by thought, by thought that is continually going on in our heads whether or not we are aware of it (what some eastern practices term the chattering monkeys). Thought is memory, which is the past. We miss reality—the what *is*—the living present—because we are always dwelling in the past and in the future—in our memories, desires, hopes and fears. We inhabit a self-mediated pseudo-reality.

It is so difficult for us to be free of this mind, this thinking, this ego, since we have been conditioned to accept a dualistic mode of thinking that separates the thinker and thought, the observer and the observed, the experiencer and the experience. We imagine ourselves as something which *has* a thought or experience. What we don't realize is that there is no one acting or receiving the thought or experience. We *are* the experience, the thought. "The observer is the observed."

Krishnamurti offers the illustration of suddenly seeing a beautiful sunset. At that instant there is direct experiencing, in the present. But almost as instantaneously, our mind/ego responds by naming the experience as "beautiful." (Language is a prime conditioning agent keeping us from the present.) We become aware that

something we consider an "I" is having something we label a beautiful experience. Thought and memory have intervened. The illusory ego is once again reinforced as real.

When we judge, evaluate, criticize, or condemn ourselves or our actions, we are making the split into one who judges and one who is judged. Whenever we try to achieve some personal psychological goal for ourselves—some improvement or change—we are trapped in this dualistic thinking, separating what is from what should be. And producing internal conflict thereby. Any goal or endeavor to change this only keeps us trapped in the dualistic thinking that reinforces the ego. This is why Krishnamurti decries any method or attempt to make his teaching into a method. Doing so only traps us in our existing condition. You can't ask "how," Krishnamurti iterates.

(Krishnamurti makes an important distinction between survival/technical thinking, knowledge and memory and psychological thinking, knowledge and memory. Obviously the former is needed to live day to day. It is not the problem. Our difficulty lies in the psychological arena.)

To counter our need and suffering, Krishnamurti brings a message of individual freedom. (He doesn't ignore the social, but believes that social change—true revolution—can only be achieved if first there is individual change: "You are the world.") He claims that this freedom can come only from within ourselves; trying to attain it by some system, practice, meditation, discipline, teacher or guru only enslaves us to the authority or the desire for achievement. Once realized, this freedom brings peace, joy, tremendous creative energy, and, he maintains, the only real love.

While Krishnamurti's vision of an enlightened being and of transcending the ego is not unlike that of some eastern practices (cf. Taoism, Zen), he resists any attempt to label what he advocates as a practice or method since he sees these as producing enslavement and conformity. He constantly warns about digesting others' ideas, including his own. He denies reading any philosophy or spiritual teachings since he feels these would only drive him further away from the freedom that each of us can only achieve for ourselves.

Krishnamurti bases his teaching on his own personal experience—he found out this truth for himself, he experienced the profound change he urged on others. I don't doubt that he went through such an experience or that he was sincere in sharing this possibility with others.

Then, what is this liberating methodless method, this non-technique? It is looking to yourself and simply being aware of the activity of your mind. Watch its movement. Do not name what is happening, nor judge or evaluate it. Don't try to change it. Only attend. Do so without hope of change or achievement, without goals or ambitions, for with these there is again the ego and its dualisms. Be choicelessly aware. And then, by itself, the change will suddenly come. And you will find yourself living in the now, free from the conditioned construction of the ego.

By passively observing the mind/ego, you become aware of its falsity. You come at the true from the false since a positive approach only offers another a goal to attain, another trap.

It takes commitment and intensity. Approach it directly, immediately, urgently, without reflection, Krishnamurti counsels, as if you suddenly came across a dangerous cobra.

It takes a silent mind to do this. But not a mind made silent by forced practices, by concentration or repetitions; such is not freedom. Rather, discover the silence for yourself. Catch it in those brief moments between thoughts.

In an analogy to a pendulum, Krishnamurti says that as our normal state of consciousness swings between the past and future there are infinitesimal intervals of complete stillness at the extreme of each swing. Catch these, and they will impel the change to freedom.

And when the change happens, it happens instantly, completely, totally. Krishnamurti would undoubtedly endorse the description (but not the reference) of being like a new creation, old things passed away, all things become new.

Then there is no more ego center. There is no (psychological) past or future, so (psychological) time ceases. Experiencing goes on without any—one to have an experience, any—thing to be so labeled as an experience, or any—one doing the labeling. Now you inhabit reality, you live with what is.

Krishnamurti refers to this experience as a mutation—a major change in consciousnesses. He even suggests that it brings about a physical change in the brain. It is an evolutionary leap of Gebserian proportions.

Krishnamurti's theory has appeal. While it has much in common with eastern traditions, it is free of sectarian or doctrinaire baggage. It is compatible with a materialist philosophy (although Krishnamurti wouldn't approve). By addressing issues around social and personal ego construction, it is relevant to contemporary poststructural and Foucauldian analyses of the construction of the subject, meaning, and our sense of reality. Also, it can fit with the emerging view of the brain/mind as a federation of "minds."

Nor is his "method" so suspect. The idea of being passively aware as a way to achieve change is as common in contemporary mind/body work as it was centuries ago with the Taoist notion of *wu wei*, "not doing." One aspect of Gestalt therapy is making the client aware of an activity—a pattern of behavior, a body posture, a tone of voice—and having the client stay with that awareness, not trying to change it, but just being aware of it and letting the natural therapeutic result occur. Myrolfers (who do structural integration deep body massage) have the same message. Simply be aware of a body condition (such as a tendency for a leg to rotate outward, or a shoulder to be carried high). Don't try to change it. Don't force. From simple awareness, change will result.

Krishnamurti has the same message. Change—freedom—enlightenment—is not something that can be forced. It cannot even be invited. Simply be aware. And of itself, without urging, the change will happen.

He strongly believed his message. He felt he had discovered the key to free the captives. It impelled his teaching. He knew it worked from his own experience.

Then, could Krishnamurti's methodless method possibly be a candidate for a psychotechnique to invoke Gebser's integral structure of consciousness?

Let's consider some similarities—the superficial as well as the significant.

Both Gebser and Krishnamurti recognize the need to transcend the ego/self and the importance of letting this experience happen rather than trying to make it a goal. (Gebser declares that only an apersonal, ego-free individual can perceive the apersonal.<sup>4</sup>) Both speak of the importance of silence (of the mind) that accompanies this transformation. Both speak of memory as always time-bound. Gebser says that turning away from memory is turning toward freedom—it could be a quote from Krishnamurti.<sup>5</sup> Both claim that love, energy and creativity come when the ego is transcended. And both share a sense that there is "something" underlying and operating through creation. For Gebser this is the ever-present origin. For Krishnamurti it is the ground or universal Mind. (But he doesn't speak of it often; it is less important to his pragmatic agenda than the origin is to Gebser's broader theory. Krishnamurti speaks of it more as something he has glimpsed than a deduction he has worked out.)

More to the point is their shared concern with time.

Gebser speaks of the integral structure of consciousness as freedom in time. It is the concretion of time as the spiritual blends with consciousness. It produces a new relationship to time as intensity—qualitative rather than quantitative. Krishnamurti says much about (psychological) time. For him, mind, memory and the ego are products of time, just as time is a product of the mind and memory. The experiencer is the result of time. For most of us, the past is our present. Freedom means being released from time. (Psychological) time ceases for the ego-free person. Only then can we know the timeless. Reality is of no time, it is timeless. There is only the immediate present. Eternity is the new, the moment. Transformation can only be in the now, from moment to moment. For Krishnamurti, to be cut off from the past (memory) does not mean that we don't recognize it, but that our mind has no direct communion with it. We are free from its conditioning influence.

It is not improbable that Krishnamurti's experience corresponds to what Gebser describes. However, this presupposes that both are in touch with some sort of universal truth, and this needs skeptical examination.

Gebser presents problems. The very totalizing scope of his work makes it suspect. It is all too neat, too pat. It fits too easily. His epochs correspond too tidily with our space/time dimensions, with figural signs, with all the characteristics Gebser defines for his schema. Such structuralist universalizing has been strongly critiqued by Lyotard, Foucault and the postmodernists for whom all such grand pronouncements are suspect. Any classification scheme is arbitrary and conditioned by one's present perspective. (For example, while Ken Wilber's model may build on Gebser's, Wilber posits additional future consciousness structures. Are his speculations any more, or less, credible? Interestingly, Wilber criticizes both Gebser and Krishnamurti for what he sees as their confusing the pre-subject/object and the trans-subject/object. Wilber prefers the notion of attainable higher spiritual states. Not that Wilber has any more convincing a schema, but isn't it rather arrogant to declare the integral as the last, culminating stage beyond

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<sup>4</sup>.Gebser as quoted in Feuerstein, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup>.Gebser, p. 324.

which there is nothing more?) For all its exhaustiveness, Gebser's theory could well be a magnificent chimera. I recall something I read long ago about a psychiatrist treating a patient who had delusions of being in contact with a distant planetary civilization. The patient had worked out an elaborate history and culture for this planet. It was so detailed that it proved highly engrossing—for both patient and psychiatrist. The crucial therapy moment came in a session in which the psychiatrist was getting so carried away by his involvement in the fictional planetary world that the patient had to call him on it (and thus begin the road to giving up the delusion). It is easy to get caught up in Gebser. But could it be merely a grand delusion?

I wonder whether Gebser would have written differently if he had read *Neuromancer*, McLuhan, and of the coming of digital electronics, virtual identities and virtual realities, smart drugs and brain implants.

Krishnamurti also presents difficulties. He undoubtedly had a powerful experience which gave him personal freedom of consciousness. This impelled him to dedicate himself to carrying his good news of release. But it appears that from some seventy-years of his teaching, few if any others have realized this experience. What value is a message of freedom that is only idiosyncratic to the proclaimer? Doesn't this suggest the possibility of a private delusion?

Krishnamurti never completed college (perhaps in part because Oxford wasn't anxious to have a proclaimed Messiah). He prided himself on not having read philosophies or religions or "knowledge." He claimed this kept his mind free from the conditioning of others' words. However, with broader knowledge he might have been able to better contextualize and assay his thought. He is dogmatic and severe with ideas different from his own. If he were more knowledgeable and open, he might have integrated similar teachings (such as Zen satori). It may well be that in spite of the dangers he points out, dependence on a system or guru might be useful at certain moments in one's spiritual growth. But Krishnamurti does not permit this. Also, he has the tendency to speak authoritatively in areas that seem far from his experience. Many of his "facts" are at best problematic, at worst they are simply wrong. (For example, he claimed that an ego-free person would not have to dream. Later he modified this position when it was pointed out to him that research seemed to belie this.)

Krishnamurti is too much the evangelist; he does not confront his own assumptions and hidden agenda. But for all these criticisms, the bottom line is: does it work? Based on his success rate, we can doubt it. But . . . what if he is just a contemporary prototype? What if his insight has yet to be realized? And what if Krishnamurti's experience is that which Gebser theorized, glimpsed, described? In spite of all the difficulties—and they are many—I submit this may be an open question. \*

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