

## INTRODUCTION TO TWO ESSAYS BY JEAN GEBSER Utrecht Conference on Parapsychology in 1953

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In 1953 and 1954, Jean Gebser was invited to participate in two "International Conferences of Parapsychological Studies" held under the auspices of the Parapsychology Foundation of New York. President of the foundation at that time was the celebrated medium Eileen Garrett. The first conference was held from July 30 to August 5, 1953, in Utrecht, the Netherlands, where a parapsychology institute had recently been established at the University. The second conference took place from April 20 to 26, 1954 at St-Paul-de-Vence in Southern France and was specifically devoted to "Philosophy and Parapsychology," a focus that had been suggested at the Utrecht conference by Jean Gebser who, together with Gabriel Marcel (Paris) and Professor H.H. Price (Oxford), was responsible for the program. Among the participants were the physicist Pascual Jordan (Hamburg) and Aldous Huxley. Jean Gebser's paper for the Utrecht conference was published in a drastically abbreviated and inadequately translated form under the title: "The Conscious and the Unconscious: a Misleading Dilemma" in the conference proceedings (N.Y.: Parapsychology Foundation, 1954). The complete version printed below has been newly translated on the basis of a copy of the official conference summary and the French version published in the *Revue Metapsychique*, No. 29-30, Paris, Mai-Aout and appears here with its correct title: "The Conscious and the Unconscious: a Misleading Choice."

Gebser's presentation at St-Paul-de-Vence was a part of the conference session devoted to "Psyche and Matter: the Validity of the Dualistic Hypothesis" and is here given its correct title that, for unknown reasons, was changed to "Mind and Matter..." in the abridged version later printed in the *Proceedings of Four Conferences on Parapsychology*, N.Y.: Parapsychology Foundation, 1957. As in the case of "The Conscious and the Unconscious" all of the extant versions of "Psyche and Matter" contain errors of various kinds (such as "Schrodinger's and de Broglie's world-mechanics," that came about through a misprint in the German original: *Weltenmechanik* instead of *Wellenmechanik* = wave mechanics). It is presented here in a corrected and unabridged version on the basis of the original German text in Gebser's literary estate that also restores the many references to the relevance of his arguments to parapsychology, all but one of which were removed in the published version of the *Proceedings*. As with all of Gebser's writings, the importance of these two brief essays goes beyond the subject matter at hand.

### THE CONSCIOUS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS: A MISLEADING CHOICE

Jean Gebser (Switzerland)

Among the dominant conceptions in psychology today is the dualistic assumption of a "conscious" as opposed to an "unconscious." As parapsychology has inherited this terminology, we must ask ourselves if it is accurate, since our terminology determines to a certain extent the direction of our thought and may lead us to erroneous ideas and misleading conclusions. We must examine the legitimacy of using the terms "conscious" and "unconscious"; and in so doing, we will discover that we are dealing with a misleading dichotomy, and that the juxtaposition of these terms leads to a falsification of reality.

I need not remind you here of the history of the term "unconscious." It first appeared in scholastic philosophy and later had an important role in the philosophy of Leibniz and his successors. Ever since Freud, the "unconscious" has had a dominant place in the terminology of psychology. In my "Contribution to the History of the Awakening of Consciousness" [*The Ever-Present Origin*], I have attempted to establish that both in human history and in our individual lives we must admit the existence of differing degrees or structures of awareness. I have had to repudiate the terminology of the 19th century that assumed that there was a brightness of consciousness on the one hand, and the darkness of the unconscious on the other. Such a dualistic approach, painting in black and white, seems to us very primitive. It is based on the habit of materialistic natural scientists of forming dichotomies out of simple concepts that are then elevated to the status of axioms or principles, such as "body and soul," "organic and inorganic." Such conceptual pairs have been demonstrated to be unreal alternatives—or, to use the term of sociologist Walther Tritesch, "false" alternatives.

It is not a matter of mental thought processes being of a conscious nature, whereas psychic experiences and vital manifestations are of an unconscious nature. The differences between them are to be found in the differing degrees or intensity of awareness. I have sought, therefore, to identify the various degrees or structures of consciousness, of which the following three are the most important:

- 1) *The magic structure of consciousness.* It corresponds to deep sleep, does not know of time and space, and has its domain in a one-dimensional world. It is vegetative, instinctual, and vitalistic in nature.
- 2) *The mythical structure of consciousness.* It corresponds to dream states, knows time but not space, and inhabits a two-dimensional world. It is psychic in nature.
- 3) *The mental structure of consciousness.* It corresponds to wakefulness, to life in time and space in a three-dimensional world. It is essentially rational in nature.

We should add that the magic structure was preceded by an archaic structure of zero dimensions, antecedent as it were to any awareness of time and space. And in our times the mental structure seems to be in the process of being superseded by a new structure of consciousness comprising a world of four dimensions.

Parapsychology deals with phenomena that are not merely a part of a vast "unconscious," but are instead specifically linked partly to the archaic and partly to the magic and mythical structures of consciousness. We must realize, for example, that phenomena that originate in the magic structure actually occur in a world lacking the categories of time and space, and their existence is not associated with temporal and spatial factors. This may seem inconceivable to those who cannot detach themselves from the world of causality and who cannot accept the pre-causal or ante-causal relationships described in Jung's study of synchronicity. The phenomena belonging to the magic universe are, in essence, not merely a-causal, "free from the causal nexus," but ante-causal. Their relationship to each other could best be described as "living connections."

The alternative "animism-spiritualism" is another instance of a misleading conceptual pair, like the dichotomies "the here-and-now-the hereafter," or "life and death." Life and death are not two contrasting phenomena, because for the individual they are permanently present as a single indissoluble whole.

It is of decisive importance that we know and are able to distinguish with precision in our research the different realms of reality to which the phenomena under investigation belong; and not as we customarily regard them, but rather according to their inherent nature. Once the differentiation of the structures of consciousness is established phenomenologically, we shall be able to grasp the inner reality of the phenomena. The "black and white" approach, the formula "conscious versus the unconscious" overlook the distinctions between consciousness in its wakeful state as distinguished from dreams, from deep sleep, and so on. The undifferentiated approach leads the researcher from false alternatives and dichotomies to false conclusions; the attempt to use the strong light of our diurnal consciousness to explore the "unconscious" is comparable to employing a blowtorch to investigate the structure of a snowflake.

It is the nature of magic phenomena to be secret, occult, and hidden. Any attempt to "clarify" them is an attempt that will destroy them. Every effort to penetrate into the world of the magic structure by means inappropriate to this structure will only lead to confusing results and misinterpretations. We can reduce somewhat the degree of falsification if we admit in our research Heisenberg's law of indeterminacy. This means that in every experiment in which we employ methods connected with the factor of space, while dealing with a world in which time and space do not exist, we will produce results that are approximate and imprecise.

In our investigations of parapsychological phenomena we must strive to take into account the structure of the particular domain to which they belong. Only then will we be able to approach reality and obtain results superior to those obtained by using the misleading "conscious vs. the unconscious" hypothesis.

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## **PSYCHE AND MATTER: THE VALIDITY OF THE DUALISTIC HYPOTHESIS**

Jean Gebser

When dealing with the problematic pairing of the terms "psyche" and "matter" it is useful to begin by emphasizing again the degree to which the old dualistic hypothesis has lost its validity. In psychosomatic medicine, for instance, it has been abandoned completely. At the Utrecht conference I noted that we should be speaking of the various degrees or intensities of consciousness rather than of the false alternative of the "conscious" as opposed to an "unconscious." The same is true of the juxtaposition of "psyche" and "matter," both in psychosomatics and in philosophy itself; Professor Price's remarks on this subject were so trenchant that I do not need to elaborate further.

I would prefer instead to address an issue that we might define as the structural change in our perception of reality—a change evident everywhere today. It can be characterized in three words: the overcoming of dualism. This fact, it seems to me, is of particular value for parapsychological research, especially as the abandonment of the dualistic hypothesis is evident not only in the natural sciences, but in the prevailing attitudes of today as well.

In the natural sciences, Einstein has done away with the former dualism of energy versus mass/matter, just as psychosomatic medicine has eliminated the former antithesis of body and soul. The dualistic distinction between "organic" and "inorganic" is largely irrelevant for quantum biology; and the validity of the dichotomy of "subject" and "object" has been questioned by existential philosophy, as well as by Gabriel Marcel in his remarks at this

conference, and also by the conclusions drawn by Arthur March and Heisenberg from their observations of atomic processes. Planck's quantum theory, Schrodinger's and de Broglie's wave mechanics, Bohr's principle of complementarity, and Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy all have implications that do not correspond to the dualistic attitude. These examples will not be explored further here because of space limitations, since we wish to avoid a popularizing treatment of these discoveries that would merely manipulate cliches lacking the requisite terminological precision.

In summary, let us simply note as a fact that the dualistic principle has to a great extent lost its validity. The supersession of dualism in the natural sciences has had far-reaching consequences, most evident in the altered relationship to the phenomenon of time, notably in a structurally novel valuation of "time." Indeed, it would seem that the question or problem of time is preeminent; and this relates to the abandonment of the dualistic principle because certain aspects of chronological time have been traditionally viewed as antitheses: for example, past and future, in which the past denotes events that have already occurred, the future events that have not yet taken place.

What is, then, the new and novel conception of what has been traditionally called "time"? Time, for traditional dualistic thinking, was a chronologically ordered progression; for the new attitude—itself an outgrowth of the change in the structure of our thinking—time is an integral realization. Stated more precisely: time is not only a sequence of past, present, and future, i.e., divided time, but also the interplay of the three aspects that make up the essence of the pre-existing whole. (To preclude any misunderstanding, we would caution that the work "pre-existing" in this context should not be given a deterministic or fatalistic sense, just as the term "the whole" must not be understood as postulating a form of neo-monism or holism. "Pre-existing" refers to the "pre-existent" design of life: the given structure that always includes potentialities and consequently an element of indeterminacy.)

Because we have been dealing the past two days with the question of "pre-cognition"—a question closely related to our conception or estimation of time—and will be addressing tomorrow the question of "survival" after death—again a problem of time—my remarks can perhaps serve as a bridge between these two discussions.

My assertion that "time" is no longer regarded as a sequence, but as a pre-existent whole is corroborated by numerous instances both in the natural sciences and in statements by the outstanding poets of our time—the seismographs of our age. This seems to me to be portentous. And what is of particular significance for parapsychological research is the fact that the structure of the present-day "spirit of the times" is very accommodating to discussions of parapsychology. I am using the term "spirit of the times" in Schelling's sense as the basic mood or current of an entire era.

My assertion that time is today no longer exclusively regarded as a sequence of events or a dualistic antithesis of past and future, but as the "pre-existent whole" is borne out by several quotations. First, there is the familiar quotation by Eddington: "Events do not happen; they are just there, and we come across them. The 'formality of taking place' is merely the indication that the observer has on his voyage of exploration passed into the absolute future of the event in question; and it has no important significance."

## Two Essays by Jean Gebser

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At first glance there is something incomprehensible, even frightening about this statement for the traditional manner of thinking. We do not need to take into account here that Eddington's statement is a consequence of Einstein's conception of a four-dimensional space-time continuum (that Heisenberg and others corroborated by their discoveries of the spatio-temporal structure of sub-atomic processes). If we restate Eddington's remark in every-day language it simply means that the future is always present.

At very nearly the same time that Eddington made his statement (1923/24), a famous German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, expressed the very same thought in his own way: "Wishes are the memories coming from our future." Mme. Lou Albert-Lasard, who first made this statement of Rilke's known, remarks that Rilke intended this to mean "that to a certain extent the future is already contained in the past, and what we call the future is as effective as what we call the past. Both, united together in us, form the complete present.

A first indication—that we must include here—of the fact that the future could be a co-creator of the present can be found in the writings of Nietzsche. Several years after Nietzsche, there is a verse of Stephane Mallarme: "The star ripens from the morrow." And shortly before the turn of the century, analytical psychology discovers the possible presence of the future in the occurrence of dreams.

Despite the surprising similarity of the statements by Eddington and Rilke, the similarity could be merely coincidental. Even the anticipatory statements by Nietzsche, Mallarme and C.G. Jung could be just another coincidence. But then why do two of the greatest poets of our times, the Spanish poet Jorge Guillen and T.S. Eliot, each in his own way, express around 1939, the same thought? Guillen, doubtless the most significant Spanish poet of our century, writes: "*Donde estan, cuando ocurren? No hay historia. / Hubo un ardo que eseste ardor. Un dai/Solo, profundizado en la memoria, / A su eterno presente se confia,*" the sense of which is: "The events—where are they, when do they take place? There is no so-called history. There was a glowing, and this is still glowing. A single day, deeply engraved in our recollection, entrusts itself to the eternal present." And T.S. Eliot writes; "The things that are going to happen have already happened."

Professor Jordan has mentioned an observation of Heisenberg's that, to my mind, takes on an additional contour with respect to Eliot's remark. In the context of observations of the behavior of mesons, Heisenberg stated:

In very minute space-time regions, i.e., in those on the order of magnitude of elemental particles, space and time are strangely obliterated in such a way that we can no longer even correctly define the terms 'earlier' or 'later' in such minute units of time. Of course in the world of macrophenomena nothing in the space-time structure would be altered; but we must reckon with the possibility that experiments with events in extremely minute space-time realms will show that certain processes appear to take place contrary to the temporal sequence required by the laws of causality.

This observation of Heisenberg's was made in 1952 during a lecture series on "The New Perception of the World" at the Institute of Commercial and Social Sciences in St. Gallen, Switzerland that was devoted to my thesis of the "aperspectival world." In a subsequent discussion with Heisenberg it was noted that his statement must be understood as a recognition of a spatio-temporal structure in which time has not yet unfolded or "fanned out"—comparable to that one-dimensional structure of which I spoke in the first part of *The Ever-Present Origin*. We are dealing here with a time that could be defined as the

"germ of time," whose particular energy and behavior is revealed by the observation of mesons. For this reason it is important to emphasize that in the remarks of both Heisenberg and T.S. Eliot the accent is on the non-definability of "earlier" or "later."

All of the statements cited here are indications of our altered relationship to time. This relationship has found a valid expression in Aldous Huxley's novel *Time Must Have a Stop*. The final pages of his book, devoted to "mnemosyne" and the "present," are an unequivocal indication that the time that "must have a stop" is chronological time. In other words, we must stop regarding time as being only chronological and instead familiarize ourselves with the way time has been understood and expressed in the statements of Nietzsche, Mallarme, Jung, Eddington, Rilke, Eliot, Guillen, Heisenberg, and Aldous Huxley, among others. The agreement between statements about time that resulted from scientific discoveries, and those that occurred spontaneously and authentically to poets, can be considered a further corroboration of this new relationship of our day to time.

With the altered relationship to time a basic structural transformation of our thinking has become a reality. The extent of this structural transformation will be evident if we carry our deliberations on the new attitude to their next logical conclusion: wherever "time" is no longer considered as a sequence, but as a pre-existing whole, the great fears, anxieties, despair, and nihilism of our era will no longer be a problem. Life is then no longer a "being unto death" (Heidegger) or a mere passage toward a nihilistic future. We are then no longer condemned to "annihilating nothingness" (Heidegger), but instead begin to share in the wealth of meaningfulness and certainty—definite new forms of security and freedom from fear and anxiety. And it is precisely this wealth of meaningfulness that could become evident through parapsychological investigations and research.

Anyone able to regard his or her own life and existence as an integral whole within the context of the whole, like the physicists, psychologists, and poets mentioned above, anyone able, as they were, to accept the future as the present, is accepting his or her own destiny. And acceptance of one's destiny means freedom. And this freedom, once gained, has a remarkable corollary: that our freedom to affirm our destiny can be transformed to a great extent into a freedom from our destiny. (And it should be evident that in this transformation the potentiality for shaping ourselves is not excluded, but underscored, and that full acceptance of our responsibilities is required.)

It may perhaps be noted in passing that the new attitude towards time is not foreign to Christian belief. Until now it has been, of course, an article of faith, since God knows neither past nor future, but is ever-present. I believe it to be a notable achievement of our age that it has been able to transform an article of faith into verified knowledge. And it is perhaps of significance for parapsychological studies that the consciousness of our age is abandoning the dualistic mode of thought and laying the foundations of a new relationship to the question of time.

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