

FIRST LECTURE

I shall speak about the study of psychology, but I must warn you that the psychology about which I speak is very different from anything you may know under this name.

To begin with I must say that practically never in history has psychology stood at *so low a level* as at the present time. It has lost all touch with its *origin* and its *meaning* so that now it is even difficult to define the term psychology: that is, to say what psychology is and what it studies. And this is so in spite of the fact that never in history have there been so many psychological theories and so many psychological writings.

Psychology is sometimes called a new science. This is quite wrong. Psychology is, perhaps, the *oldest science*, and, unfortunately, in its most essential features a *forgotten science*.

In order to understand how psychology can be defined it is necessary to realise that psychology except in modern times has never existed under its own name. For one reason or another psychology always was suspected of *wrong or subversive tendencies*, either religious or political or moral and had to use different disguises.

For thousands of years psychology existed under the name of philosophy. In India all forms of *Yoga*, which are essentially psychology, are described as one of the six systems of philosophy. *Sufi teachings*, which again are chiefly psychological, are regarded as partly religious and partly metaphysical. In Europe, even quite recently in the last decades of the nineteenth century, many works on psychology were referred to as philosophy. And in spite of the fact that almost all sub-divisions of philosophy such as logic, the theory of cognition, ethics, aesthetics, referred to the work of the human mind or senses, psychology was regarded as inferior to philosophy and as relating only to the lower or more trivial sides of human nature.

Parallel with its existence under the name of philosophy, psychology existed even longer connected with one or another religion. It does not mean that religion and psychology ever were one and the same thing, or that the fact of the connection between religion and psychology was recognised. But there is no doubt that almost every known religion – certainly I do not mean modern *sham religions* – developed one or another kind of psychological teaching connected often with a certain practice, so that the study of religion very often included in itself the study of psychology.

There are many excellent works on psychology in quite orthodox religious literature of different countries and epochs. For instance, in early Christianity there was a collection of books of different authors under the general name of *Philokalia*, used in our time in the Eastern Church, especially for the instruction of monks.

During the time when psychology was connected with philosophy and religion it also existed in the form of Art. Poetry, Drama, Sculpture, Dancing, even Architecture, were means for transmitting psychological knowledge. For instance, the Gothic Cathedrals were in their chief meaning works on psychology.

In the ancient times before philosophy, religion and art had taken their separate forms as we now know them, psychology had existed in the form of *Mysteries*, such as those of Egypt and of ancient Greece.

Later, after the disappearance of the Mysteries, psychology existed in the form of *Symbolical Teachings* which were sometimes connected with the religion of the period and sometimes not connected, such as Astrology, Alchemy, Magic, and the more modern: Masonry, Occultism and Theosophy.

And here it is necessary to note that all psychological systems and doctrines, those that exist or existed openly and those that were hidden or disguised, can be divided into two chief categories.

First: systems which study man *as they find him, or such as they suppose or imagine him to be*. Modern “scientific” psychology or what is known under that name belongs to this category.

Second: systems which study man not from the point of view of what he is, or what he seems to be, but from the point of view of what he may become; that is, from the point of view of his *possible evolution*.

These last systems are in reality the original ones, or in any case the oldest and only they can explain the forgotten origin and the meaning of psychology.

When we understand the importance of the study of man from the point of view of his *possible evolution*, we shall understand that the first answer to the question: What is psychology? – should be that psychology is the study of the principles, laws and facts of man’s possible evolution.

Here, in these lectures, I shall speak only from this point of view.

Our first question will be – what does evolution of man mean, and second, are there any special conditions necessary for it?

As regards ordinary modern views on the origin of man and his previous evolution I must say at once that they cannot be accepted. We must realise that we know nothing about the origin of man and we have no proof of man’s physical or mental evolution.

On the contrary, if we take historical mankind; that is, humanity for ten or fifteen thousand years we may find unmistakable signs of a higher type of man, whose presence can be established on the evidence of ancient Monuments and Memorials which cannot be repeated or imitated by the present humanity.

As regards *prehistoric man* or creatures similar in appearance to man and yet at the same time very different from him, whose bones are sometimes found in deposits of glacial or pre-glacial deposits, we may accept the quite possible view that these bones belong to some being quite different from man, which died out long ago.

Denying previous evolution of man we must deny any possibility of future *mechanical* evolution of man; that is, evolution happening by itself according to laws of heredity and selection, and without man’s conscious efforts and understanding of his possible evolution.

Our fundamental idea shall be that man as we know him *is not a completed being*; that nature develops him only up to a certain point and then leaves him, either to develop further, *by his own* efforts and devices, or to live and die such as he was born, or to degenerate and lose capacity for development.

Evolution of man in this case will mean the development of certain *inner* qualities and features which usually remain undeveloped, *and cannot develop by themselves*.

Experience and observation show that this development is possible only in certain definite conditions, with efforts of a certain kind on the part of man himself, and with *sufficient help* from those who began similar work before and have already attained a certain degree of development, *or at least* a certain knowledge of methods.

We must start with the idea that without efforts evolution is impossible; without help, it is also impossible.

After this we must understand that in the way of development, man must become a *different being*, and we must learn and understand in what sense and in which direction man must become a different being; that is, what a different being means.

Then we must understand that *all men* cannot develop and become different beings. Evolution is the question of personal efforts and in relation to the mass of humanity evolution is the rare exception. It may sound strange but we must realise that it is not only rare, *but is becoming more and more rare*.

Many questions naturally arise from the preceding statements: –
What does it mean that in the way of evolution man must become a different being?
What does “different being” mean?
Which inner qualities or features can be developed in man and how can this be done?
Why cannot all men develop and become different beings?
Why such an injustice?

I shall try to answer these questions and I shall begin with the last one.

Why cannot all men develop and become different beings?

The answer is very simple. *Because they do not want it.* Because they do not know about it and will not understand without a long preparation what it means, even if they are told.

The chief idea is that in order to become a *different being* man must want it very much and for a very long time. A passing desire or a vague desire based on dissatisfaction with external conditions will not create a sufficient impulse.

The evolution of man depends on his understanding of what he may get and what he must give for it.

If man does not want it, or if he does not want it *strongly enough*, and does not make necessary efforts, he will never develop. So there is no injustice in this. Why should man have what he does not want? If man were forced to become a different being when he is satisfied with what he is, then this would be injustice.

Now we must ask ourselves what a *different being* means. If we consider all the material we can find that refers to this question, we find an assertion that in becoming a different being man acquires many new qualities and powers which he does not possess now. This is a common assertion which we find in all kinds of systems admitting the idea of psychological or inner growth of man.

But this is not sufficient. Even the most detailed descriptions of these new powers will not help us in any way to understand how they appear and where they come from.

There is a missing link in ordinary known theories, even in those I already mentioned which are based on the idea of the possibility of evolution of man.

The truth lies in the fact that before acquiring any *new* faculties or powers which man does not know and does not possess now, he must acquire faculties and powers he *also does not possess*, but which he ascribes to himself; that is, he thinks that he knows them and can use and control them.

This is the missing link, and *this is the most important point.*

By way of evolution, as described before, that is, a way based on effort and help, man must acquire qualities which he thinks he already possesses, but about which he deceives himself.

In order to understand this better, and to know what are these faculties and powers which man can acquire, both quite new and unexpected and also those which he imagines that he already possesses, we must begin with man’s general knowledge about himself.

And here we come at once to a very important fact.

Man does not know himself.

He does not know his own limitations and his own possibilities. He does not even know to how great an extent he does not know himself.

Man has invented many machines, and he knows that a complicated machine needs sometimes years of careful study before one can use it or control it. But he does not apply this knowledge to himself, although he himself is a much more complicated machine than any machine he has invented.

He has all sorts of wrong ideas about himself. First of all he does not realise that he *actually is a machine.*

It means that he has no *independent movements*, inside or outside of himself. He is a

machine which is brought into motion by *external influences and external impacts*. All his movements, actions, words, ideas, emotions, moods and thoughts are produced by external influences. By himself, he is just an automaton with a certain store of memories of previous experiences, and a certain amount of reserve energy.

We must understand that man can do nothing.

But he does not realise this and ascribes to himself the *capacity to do*. This is the first wrong thing that man ascribes to himself.

That must be understood very clearly. *Man cannot do*. Everything that man thinks he does, really happens. It happens exactly as “it rains,” or “it thaws.”

In the English language there are no impersonal verbal forms which can be used in relation to human actions. So we must continue to say that man thinks, reads, writes, loves, hates, starts wars, fights, and so on. Actually, all this *happens*.

Man cannot move, think or speak of his own accord. He is a marionette pulled here and there by invisible strings. If he understands this, he can learn more about himself, and possibly then things may begin to change for him. But if he cannot realise and understand his *utter mechanicalness*, or if he does not wish to accept it as a fact, he can learn nothing more, and things cannot change for him.

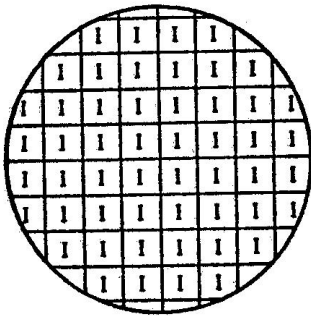
Man is a machine, but a very peculiar machine. He is a machine which, in right circumstances, and with right treatment, *can know that he is a machine*, and having fully realised this, he may find the ways to cease to be a machine.

First of all, what man must know is that he is not one; he is many. He has not one permanent and unchangeable “I” or Ego. He is always different. One moment he is one, another moment he is another, the third moment he is a third, and so on, almost without an end.

The illusion of unity or oneness is created in man first, by the sensation of one physical body, by *his name*, which in normal cases always remains the same, and third, by a number of mechanical habits which are implanted in him by education or acquired by imitation. Having always the same physical sensations, hearing always the same name and noticing in himself the same habits and inclinations he had before, he believes himself to be always the same.

In reality there is no oneness in man and there is no controlling centre, no permanent “I” or Ego.

This is the general picture of man:



Every thought, every feeling, every sensation, every desire, every like and every dislike is an “I”. These “I’s” are not connected and are not co-ordinated in any way. Each of them depends on the change in external circumstances, and on the change of impressions.

Some of them mechanically follow some other, and some appear always accompanied by others. But there is no order and no system in that.

There are certain groups of “I’s” which are naturally connected. We will speak about these groups later. Now, we must try to understand that there are groups of “I’s” connected only by accidental associations, accidental memories, or quite imaginary similarities.

Each of these “I’s” represents at every given moment a very small part of our “brain”, “mind”, or “intelligence,” but each of them means itself to represent *the whole*. When man says “I” it sounds as if he meant the whole of himself, but really even when he himself thinks that he means it, it is only a passing thought, a passing mood, or passing desire. In an hour’s time he may completely forget it, and with the same conviction express an opposite opinion, opposite view, opposite interests. The worst of it is that man does not remember it. In most cases he believes in the last “I” which expressed itself, as long as it lasts: that is, as long as another “I” – sometimes quite unconnected with the preceding one – does not express its opinion or its desire louder than the first.

Now let us return to the two other questions:

What does development mean? And what does it mean that man can become a different being? Or, in other words, what kind of change is *possible* in man, and how and when does this change begin?

It has already been said that the change will begin with those powers and capacities *which man ascribes to himself*, but which, in reality, he does not possess.

This means that before man can acquire any *new* powers and capacities, he must actually develop in himself those qualities which he *thinks* he possesses, and about which he has the greatest possible illusions.

Development cannot begin on the basis of lying to oneself, or deceiving oneself. Man must know what he has and what he has not. It means that he must realise that he does not possess the qualities already described, which he ascribes to himself; that is, *capacity to do, individuality, or unity, permanent Ego*, and in addition *Consciousness and Will*.

It is necessary for man to know this, because as long as he believes that he possesses these qualities he will not make right efforts to acquire them, exactly as a man will not buy costly things and pay a high price for them, if he thinks that he already possesses them.

The most important and the most misleading of these qualities is *consciousness*. And the change in man begins with the change in his understanding of the *meaning of consciousness* and after that with his gradual acquiring command over it.

What is consciousness?

In most cases in ordinary language the word “consciousness” is used as an equivalent to the word “intelligence” in the sense of *mind activity*.

In reality consciousness is a particular kind of “awareness” in man, independent from mind’s activity – first of all, *awareness of himself*, awareness of *who he is, where he is*, and further, awareness of what he knows, of what he does not know, and so on.

Only man himself can know whether he is “conscious” at a given moment or not. This was proven long ago in a certain line of thought in European psychology which understood that only man himself can know certain things in relation to himself.

Applied to the question of consciousness it means that only man himself can know if his consciousness exists at the moment or not. That means that the presence or absence of consciousness in man cannot be proven by observation of his external actions. As I said, this fact was established long ago, but the importance of it was never fully understood because it was always connected with the understanding of consciousness as mental process or mind activity. If man realises that up to the moment of this realisation he was not conscious, and then forgets this realisation – or even remembers it – this is not consciousness. It is only memory of a strong realisation.

Now I want to draw your attention to another fact which has been missed by all modern psychological schools.

It is the fact that the consciousness in man, whatever it means, never remains in the same state. It is either there or not. The highest moments of consciousness create *memory*. Other moments man simply does not remember. This more than anything else produces in man the

illusion of continuous consciousness or continuous awareness.

Some of the modern schools of psychology deny consciousness altogether, deny even the necessity of such a term, but this is simply an extravagance of misapprehension. Other schools – if they can be called by this name – speak about *states of consciousness* – meaning thoughts, feelings, moving impulses and sensations. This is based on the fundamental mistake of mixing consciousness with psychic functions. About that we will speak later.

In reality modern thought in most cases still relies on the old formulation, that *consciousness has no degrees*. General, although tacit, acceptance of this idea, even though it contradicted many later discoveries, stopped many possible observations of variations of consciousness.

The fact is that consciousness has quite visible and observable degrees, *certainly visible and observable in oneself*.

First, there is duration: *How long* one was conscious.

Second, frequency of appearance: *how often* one became conscious.

Third, the extent and penetration: *of what one was conscious*, which can vary very much with the growth of man.

If we take only the first two, we will be able to understand the idea of possible evolution of consciousness. This idea is connected with the most important fact very well known by old psychological schools, like for instance authors of Philokalia, but completely missed by European philosophy and psychology of the last two or three centuries.

This is the fact that consciousness can be made continuous and controllable by special efforts and special study.

I shall try to explain how consciousness can be studied. Take a watch and look at the second hand, *trying to be aware of yourself*, and concentrating on the thought, “I am (your name),” “I am now here.” Try not to think about anything else, simply follow the movements of the second hand and be aware of yourself, your name, your existence and the place where you are. Keep all other thoughts away.

You will, if you are persistent, be able to do this *for two minutes*. *This is the limit of your consciousness*. And if you try to repeat the experiment soon after, you will find it more difficult than the first time.

This experiment shows that a man, in his natural state, can with great effort be conscious of one subject (himself) for two minutes or less.

The most important deduction one can make after making this experiment in the right way is *that man is not conscious of himself*. The illusion of his being conscious of himself is created by memory and thought processes.

For instance, a man goes to a theatre. If he is accustomed to it, he is not especially conscious of being there while he is there, although he can see things and observe them, enjoy the performance or dislike it, remember it, remember people he met and so on.

When he comes home he remembers that he was in the theatre, and certainly he thinks he was conscious while he was there. So he has no doubts about his consciousness and he does not realise that his consciousness can be completely absent while he still can act reasonably, think, observe.

For general description, man has possibility of four states of consciousness. They are: *sleep, waking state, self-consciousness* and *objective consciousness*.

But although he has the possibility of these four states of consciousness, man actually lives only *in two states*: one part of his life passes in sleep, and the other part in what is called “waking state”, though in reality his waking state differs very little from sleep.

In ordinary life, man knows nothing of “objective consciousness” and no experiments in this direction are possible. The third state or “self-consciousness” man ascribes to himself; that is, he believes he possesses it, although actually he can be conscious of himself only in very rare

flashes and even then he probably does not recognise it because he does not know what it would imply if he actually possessed it. These glimpses of consciousness come in exceptional moments, in highly emotional states, in moments of danger, in very new and unexpected circumstances and situations; or sometimes in quite ordinary moments when nothing in particular happens. But in his ordinary or “normal” state, man has no control over them whatever.

As regards our ordinary memory or moments of memory, we actually *remember* only moments of consciousness, although we do not realise that this is so.

What memory means in a technical sense, and different kinds of memory we possess, I shall explain later. Now I simply want you to turn your attention to your own observations of your memory. You will notice that you remember things differently. Some things you remember quite vividly, some very vaguely and some you do not remember at all. *You only know that they happened.*

You will be very astonished when you realise how little you actually remember. And it happens in this way because you *remember* only the *moments when you were conscious*.

So, in reference to the *third state of consciousness*, we can say that man has occasional moments of self-consciousness leaving vivid memories of circumstances accompanying them but he has no command over them. They come and go by themselves, being controlled by external circumstances, and occasional associations or memories of emotions.

The question arises: Is it possible to acquire command over these fleeting moments of consciousness, to evoke them more often, and to keep them longer, or even make them permanent? In other words, *is it possible to become conscious?*

This is the most important point, and it must be understood at the very beginning of our study that this point even as a theory has been entirely missed by all modern psychological schools *without an exception*.

For with right methods and the right efforts man *can acquire control of consciousness*, and can *become conscious of himself* with all that it implies. And what it implies we in our present state do not even imagine.

Only after this point has been understood does serious study of psychology become possible.

This study must begin with the investigation of obstacles to consciousness in ourselves, because consciousness can only begin to grow when at least some of these obstacles are removed.

In the following lectures, I shall speak about these obstacles, the greatest of which is *our ignorance of ourselves*, and our wrong conviction that we know ourselves at least to a certain extent and can be sure of ourselves, when in reality we do not know ourselves at all and cannot be sure of ourselves even in *smallest things*.

We must understand now that psychology really means *self-study*. This is the second definition of psychology.

One cannot study psychology as one can study astronomy; that is, apart from oneself.

And at the same time one must study oneself as one studies any new and complicated machine. One must know the parts of this machine, its chief functions, the conditions of right work, the causes of wrong work, and many other things which are difficult to describe without using a special language, which it is also necessary to know in order to be able to study the machine.

The human machine has seven different functions:

1. Thinking (or intellect).
2. Feeling (or emotions).
3. Instinctive function (all inner work of the organism).
4. Moving function (all other work of the organism, movement in space, and so on).
5. Sex (the function of two principles, male and female, in all their manifestations).

Besides these there are *two more functions* for which we have no name in ordinary

language and which appear only in higher states of consciousness; one – *higher emotional function*, which appears in the *state of self-consciousness*, and the other, *higher mental function*, which appears in the *state of objective consciousness*. As we are not in these states of consciousness we cannot study these functions or experiment with them, and we learn about them only indirectly from those who have attained or experienced them.

In the religious and philosophical literature of different nations there are many allusions to the higher states of consciousness and to higher functions. What creates an additional difficulty in understanding these allusions is the lack of division between the higher states of consciousness. What is called *samadhi* or *ecstatic state* or *illumination*, or, in more recent works “cosmic consciousness”, may refer to one and may refer to another – sometimes to experiences of self-consciousness and sometimes to experiences of objective consciousness. And strange though it may seem we have more material for judging about the highest state; that is, *objective consciousness*, than about the intermediate state; that is, *self-consciousness*, although the former may come only *after* the latter.

Self-study must begin with the study of the four functions: thinking, feeling, instinctive function and moving function. Sex functions can be studied only much later; that is, when these four functions are already sufficiently understood. Contrary to some modern theories the sex function is really posterior; that is, it appears later in life when the first four functions are already fully manifested and is *conditioned by them*. Therefore, the study of the sex function can be useful only when the first four functions are fully known in all their manifestations. At the same time it must be understood that any serious irregularity or abnormality in the sex function makes self-development and even *self-study* impossible.

So now we must try to understand the four chief functions.

I will take it for granted that it is clear to you what I mean by the intellectual or *thinking function*. All mental processes are included here: realisation of an impression, formation of representations and concepts, reasoning, comparison, affirmation, negation, formation of words, speech, imagination, and so on.

The second function is feeling or emotions: joy, sorrow, fear, astonishment, and so on. Even if you are sure that it is clear to you how, and in what, emotions differ from thoughts I should advise you to verify all your views in regard to this. We mix thought and feelings in our ordinary thinking and speaking; but for the beginning of self-study it is necessary to know clearly which is which.

The two functions following, *instinctive* and *moving*, will take longer to understand, because in no system of ordinary psychology are these functions described and divided in the right way.

The words “instinct”, “instinctive”, are generally used in the wrong sense and very often in no sense at all. In particular, to instinct are generally ascribed external functions which are in reality moving functions, and sometimes emotional.

Instinctive function in man includes in itself four different classes of functions:

First: All the inner work of the organism, *all physiology*, so to speak; digestion and assimilation of food, breathing, circulation of the blood, all the work of inner organs, the building of new cells, the elimination of worked out materials, the work of glands of inner secretion, and so on.

Second: The so-called five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and all other senses such as the sense of weight, of temperature, of dryness or of moisture, and so on; that is, all *indifferent* sensations – sensations which by themselves are neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

Third: All physical emotions, that is, all physical sensations which are *either pleasant or unpleasant*: All kinds of pain or unpleasant feeling such as unpleasant taste or unpleasant smell, and all kinds of physical pleasure, such as pleasant taste, pleasant smell and so on.

Fourth: All reflexes, even the most complicated, such as laughter and yawning; all kinds of physical memory such as memory of taste, memory of smell, memory of pain, which are in reality inner reflexes.

Moving function includes in itself all external movements, such as walking, writing, speaking, eating and memories of them. To moving function also belong those movements which in ordinary language are called “instinctive” such as catching a falling object without thinking.

The difference between the instinctive and the moving function is very clear and can be easily understood if one simply remembers that all instinctive functions without exception are inherent and that there is no necessity to learn them in order to use them; whereas on the other hand, none of the moving functions are inherent and one has to learn them all as a child learns to walk, or as one learns to write or to draw.

Besides these normal moving functions, there are also some strange moving functions which represent useless work of the human machine not intended by nature, but which occupy a very large place in man’s life and use a great quantity of his energy. These are: formation of dreams, imagination, day-dreaming, talking with oneself, all talking for talking’s sake, and generally, *all uncontrolled and uncontrollable manifestations*.

The four functions – intellectual, emotional, instinctive and moving – must first be understood in all their manifestations and later they must be observed in oneself. Such self-observation, that is, observation on the right basis, with a preliminary understanding of the states of consciousness and of different functions, constitutes the basis of self-study; that is, *the beginning of psychology*.

It is very important to remember that in observing different functions it is useful to observe at the same time their relation to different states of consciousness.

Let us take the three states of consciousness – sleep, waking state, and possible glimpses of self-consciousness, and the four functions – thinking, feeling, instinctive and moving. All four functions can manifest themselves in sleep, but their manifestations are desultory and unreliable; they cannot be used in any way, they just go by themselves. In the state of waking consciousness or relative consciousness, they can to a certain extent serve for our orientation. Their results can be compared, verified, straightened out, and although they may create many illusions, still in our ordinary state we have nothing else and must make of them what we can. If we knew the quantity of wrong observations, wrong theories, wrong deductions and conclusions made in this state, we should cease to believe ourselves altogether. But men do not realise how deceptive their observations and their theories can be and they continue to believe in them. It is this that keeps man from observing the rare moments when their functions manifest themselves in connection with glimpses of the third state of consciousness; that is, of self-consciousness.

All this means that each of the four functions can manifest itself in each of the three states of consciousness. But the results are quite different. When we learn to observe these results and their difference, we shall understand the right relation between functions and states of consciousness.

But before even considering the difference in function in relation to states of consciousness, it is necessary to understand that man’s consciousness and man’s functions are quite different phenomena, of quite different nature and depending on different causes and that one can exist without the other. *Functions can exist without consciousness, and consciousness can exist without functions*.

The above is the text of the first lecture of six printed in the book *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution* by P. D. Ouspensky.