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HOW IS A LIVING BODY DIFFERENT FROM A DEAD ONE?
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I. For the past several years, Ed has been asking me to give a talk about the difference between a living body and a dead one. In this lecture, I will tackle that question, but I must begin with a long introduction regarding the nature of matter.
II. What is a being, a thing in the natural world?
    A. Example: any of the things in this room
    B. A thing is:
        1. In some important sense, a unity
        2. Fully definite as to its character
        3. Causally efficacious, energized by the past and energizing the future.
    C. Our question is this: how we go about analyzing the nature of a thing
III. Aristotle defined a thing in terms of substance and form:
    A. Forms are like Plato's ideas, except that they do not exist independently in their own realm, and are never found except in things (*ouisa*). Forms are the active factor, the factor which moves the potentiality for individualization inherent into substance into defined individuality.
    B. Substance, which was for him entirely formless and passive, but had the capacity to individualize as it is acted on by form.
        1. Notice here, the relation of substance to what we moderns call 'energy'
            a) Energy, like Aristotle's substance (hylé) is, in itself, formless. It takes form under the direction of 'physical law,' which is a type of mathematical form
            b) The difference is this:
                1) For Aristotle, substance is passive whereas form is active
                2) For moderns, energy is active whereas form is passive.
    C. In this mode of understanding, substance is the potential for the unity of a natural thing, and form is the factor that brings that unity into actuality.
    D. This grossly simplifies a very interesting and very complex set of ideas, but it will do for our purposes today.
    E. We have been so conditioned by modern ideas about matter, that it is difficult for us to imagine ourselves into Aristotle's world. Doing so, however, gives us a very different perspective on our current ideas.
IV. Beginning in the 13th century, there was an increasing interest in the actual, material world of nature, and a growing respect for the importance of nature as a Divine revelation.

V. This movement of thought was importantly expressed in the ideas of Nicholas of Cusa, who came to see the universe as an infinite, extended 'contraction,' or emanation of God's creative capacity. This universal extension was treated, by Bruno, as infinite substance, or infinite matter. Cusanus and Bruno both saw individual things as 'contractions,' or emanations of universal matter, and so, for the first time, the emphasis shifted from form to matter.

VI. But the way in which this emphasis shifted is very interesting.
   A. Prior to Bruno, it was assumed that the *act* which transforms potentiality into actuality, was an intrinsic part of *form*.
   B. Bruno now makes the *matter* the primary actor.
   C. As we see the power to act shifting from form to matter, it brings this power itself into relief. We are here looking for the dynamic purpose which moves potentiality to causally efficacious actualization.
   D. This factor is what Medieval thinkers named 'soul'
   E. I want to suggest that this is very close to what we mean by consciousness, or personality.

VII. Let us now examine our set of fundamental abstractions:
   A. Our new list is
      1. Substance
      2. Form
      3. Soul (consciousness)
         a) Note that substance is the potentiality for individualization, and Soul is the dynamic individualizing factor.
      4. At this point, Soul is imagined either as belonging to form or to matter. It will only be fully separated out in the 17th Century.

VIII. In the 16th Century, a growing interest in chemical composition led thinkers to an atomistic approach. The general acceptance of atomism led to a re-evaluation of the nature of things, but throughout the sixteenth Century, it was assumed that all entities are movements from potentiality to actuality (i.e., processes), and are 'ensouled' by form. Also, there was an increasing fascination with measurement, and the sentiment that what is actual must somehow be mathematical.

IX. In the 17th Century, an entirely new conception of things, or beings, emerged.
   A. Substance, form and unity are all collapsed into eternally self-existent atoms. These new atoms are not actualizations of potentiality, but eternally already actual, suffering no transition with time.
   B. And the forms characterizing actuality are limited to mathematical forms.
   C. But this synthesis of substance, form leaves the soul, which was previously held to be the actualizing factor, out of the picture. Yet, we have 'soul', or 'personality' or 'consciousness', and any coherent philosophy of nature must acknowledge this.
   D. Both Descartes and Newton envisioned the soul as a separate substance, somehow related to the body, which itself is just a temporary configuration of eternally actual atoms.

X. This 'Cartesian Dualism' leaves us with a number of deep philosophical perplexities.
   A. Some of them are:
      1. First, and most obvious, is the question of how a mental substance can possible have any relevance to a causally closed world of atoms?

2. Secondly, how can we differentiate living matter from dead matter?
3. Thirdly, if we accept an evolutionary scheme, how can we account for emergence of new qualities in evolution?

B. Also, this position has tremendous implications for any discussion of reincarnation and personality survival:
   1. If it were possible to construct any coherent sense for a metaphysical dualism between mind and matter, then reincarnation and personality survival could be explained quite easily. There would be no reason to assume that 'mental substance' dies with the body.
   2. However, the fundamental incoherence of the Cartesian Dualism, combined with a great attachment to post-Newtonian atomism, leads to a rejection of mental substance altogether. This leads either to a complete denial of subjectivity altogether, or to some sort of epiphenomenalism, in either of which reincarnation and personality survival become entirely meaningless.

XI. This new, atomistic view of things reached a certain perfection in the work of Newton, but even during his lifetime, people stopped taking seriously the role of God in his system. Without God, Newton's system becomes quite incoherent – the intrinsic connection between space, time and matter is lost, and the system falls apart.

XII. This modern, post-Newtonian view of nature is a philosophical disaster. But, quite remarkably, the entire tradition of philosophizing about nature – a tradition of natural philosophy that dates all the way back to the Pre-Socratics, died out after Newton. For several hundred years, it became fashionable to assume that the Newtonian synthesis had done away with the need for all further philosophical speculation about nature, and the deep philosophical problems that the post-Newtonian body of ideas suggested could comfortably be ignored.

XIII. The task we have undertaken here, that of accounting for reincarnation and personality survival requires us, once again, to take up the work of developing a coherent understanding of nature. It seems to me that we need to go back to the drawing board, and come up with an entirely new conception of natural things if are going to move forward in our project.

XIV. I have, in my last few lectures at this conference, been trying to show the usefulness of a new understanding of nature which comes from Sri Aurobindo and Alfred North Whitehead. This new understanding starts with the list of factors which we have developed, i.e., Substance, Form and Soul, and arranges them into a new synthesis.

XV. In this synthesis, which is here radically simplified:

A. Things, or natural beings, are seen, once again, as an ongoing, dynamic movement from potentiality to actuality.

B. Forms are eternal possibilities of definiteness, very much like they were for Aristotle, but in this synthesis, and in the modern spirit, they are essentially passive.

C. Substance is creativity, the universal drive to individualize, and it has, in each instance of its operation, a character characterized by the forms which have come to characterize past actuality.

D. Soul is the active factor which enacts purpose, actively individualizes, and regulates the choices through which new forms enter into actuality.

1. Note that previously, the purposeful act had been ascribed either to substance or to form. In this new synthesis, it stands out as an independent factor. This understanding is closer to that of Sri Aurobindo, than it is to Whitehead.

XVI. We owe to Alfred North Whitehead the demonstration that a new conception of nature like the one being proposed is entirely compatible with the findings of post-modern science.

XVII. This approach completely avoids the mind body problem. Since 'mind,' 'consciousness' or 'soul' is the purposeful, individualizing factor in actuality, each actual existent in the universe is inherently conscious, or ensouled. In this synthesis, there is no individualization, no actualization, without the operation of consciousness.

XVIII. There is ample room for 'emergence' in this synthesis, since each entity is always coming into being, and new forms can 'ingress' the creative process at any time.

XIX. With this approach, we can adequately frame the question of 'how is a dead body different from a living one' that Ed has been asking me to answer for several years.

A. Let us recall that we are interested in survival and reincarnation only in the case of living things, and that recent scientific thought has suggested that living things are 'self-organizing.

B. Let us recall, also – I have tried to develop this idea in my previous lecture here – that this new conception of matter allows us to define subtle matter in an entirely new way:

1. Matter is dense, gross, or low grade:
   a) In so far as it is dominated by the conditions of the past out of which it arises
   b) In so far as the consciousness which is involved in its formation considers few possibilities for the future
   c) In so far as it tends to perpetuate past conditions unmodified.
2. Matter is subtle, or high grade:
   a) In so far as it takes the conditions of the past out of which it arises as a starting point for a process of imaginal variation
   b) In so far as it tends to improvise new developments in the creative advance.

C. And let us posit, without justification here, (I have discussed this at length in some of the earlier papers I submitted to the conference) the notion that, in some way, and under some circumstances, higher grade occasion can influence the *choices* that are made by lower grade occasions as they are actualizing.

1. Something like this notion is required, I think, in accounting for any kind of PK.

XX. Now, let us look at life and death in terms of this new understanding of matter. We will do this in the case of a single cell.

A. We begin with a dissipative structure of macromolecules.

B. Let us assume that this dissipative structure can either attract, or cause, a higher grade entity which then involves itself with the dissipative structure such that it:

1. Modifies the behaviors of the macromolecules so that the system of these macromolecules become organizationally closed, i.e., they become a self-organizing cell.

2. Presides over the new system as a unifying consciousness which brings in its own, larger possibilities of form – its new emergent properties.

C. This new way of understanding matter enables us to analyze a living cell into a system of macromolecules and an additional entity, a higher grade entity, which is its 'personality.'

D. As long as that new entity remains involved with the system of macromolecules, that system is 'alive.' At death, that new entity ceases to organize the macromolecules into a self-organizing system, but there is no reason to assume that either the macromolecules themselves, *nor the high grade entity that has presided over them*, goes out of existence. It survives the death of its body, and may re-incarnate at another time.

E. Thus the possibility of survival and of reincarnation is built into this new understand of matter that also resolves other problems of modernity, namely:
   1. The mind-body problem
   2. The problem of emergence
   3. The nature of life
   4. The nature of reincarnation and survival.

XXI. As I can show, it also allows for an intelligent accounting for the other parapsychological phenomena with which we are working.