

Memory

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[Page 1] MEMORY is but a function of the mind, and the answer given to the question, "What is memory?" must turn on the answer given to the larger question, "What is mind ? ". " Is there a Self, an Ego, of which mind, as we know it, is a part; or is mind only an outcome of matter in motion, so that the Self has no real existence ? Is "Mind" anything more than an ever-changing succession of perceptions and congeries of perceptions, and these the outcome of nervous activity responding to stimuli peripheral and central ? Or is it a definite mode of being, with perceptions, *et hoc genus omne*, as material on which it works; with faculties whereby it perceives, reproduces, recollects, conceives; but no more, as a whole, to be identified with its functional activities, than the body as a whole consists of eating, breathing, or digesting? "

The famous argument of *Hume* in the fifth and sixth sections of *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Part IV, will be familiar to the student; but I may here recall the results of his introspection:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are [Page 2] removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death, and could I neither, think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate, after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is necessary to make me a perfect non-entity. If anyone, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can no longer reason with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may perhaps perceive something simple and continued which he calls *himself*; though I am certain there is no such principle in me. But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.

Hume consequently denies the existence of the Self, and explains that the feeling of personal identity arises from the relations between the objects perceived.

But in reading the whole argument it is impossible to remain unconscious of the self-contradictory nature of the expressions used. "When I enter . . . I always stumble upon some perception". What is the "I" that stumbles on a perception, and is able to observe and recognise it ? Is it itself a perception ? If so, of what ? And can one perception in a "bundle" cognise other perceptions in the same bundle, and separating

itself from its peers scrutinise the remainder and recognise them as a bundle ? The argument implies something that observes the perceptions and assigns to each its rightful name and place; despite himself, Hume cannot escape from the consciousness that he is other than his perceptions, and this universal result of introspection, the consciousness of [Page 3] the "I", betrays itself in the very argument aimed at its annihilation. The mind is no more identifiable with its organs than is the brain with the organs of the body of which it is part. It depends on them for its living, and its functioning, but IT IS NOT THEY.

Consider an ordinary perception, say the perception of a chair. Can that perception cognise another, or be anything more than perception of a chair ? If the mind be only a bundle of perceptions, of what nature is the perception that can cognise all the rest, can set itself apart from and above them, and say: "You are a perception of heat and you of cold, you of pain and you of pleasure?" This perception of perceptions is not very different from the Self that is denied. It is the Perceiver, not a perception.

Let anyone experiment on himself; let him shut himself up alone, free from all interruption from without; let him patiently and steadily investigate his own mental processes; he will find that the shifting contents of his consciousness are not he; that he is other than the feelings, the perceptions, the conceptions, that pass before him; that they are his, not *he*, and that he can drive them away, can empty his mind of all save Self-consciousness, can, in the words of Patānjali, become a "spectator without a spectacle".

It may be urged that introspection often yields fallacious results, and that self-observation is the most difficult of all tasks. Granted. So may our senses mislead us, yet they are the only guides to the objective world that we possess. Our recognition of their fallibility does not lead us to refuse to use them but it makes us test their reports to the best of our ability, and compare them with the common sense of our race. And so with the result of the inner senses; we test them, [Page 4] we compare their reports with those of others; and I venture to say that the common sense (I use the words in the philosophical meaning, the *sensus communis*) of mankind reports the existence of the Self, the permanent Ego, amid all the flux of percepts and concepts, and that its existence is as certain as any existence around us in the Object World.

But we shall judge erroneously of the Ego, if we only take into account the everyday mental processes, and limit its extent to the extent of our normal waking consciousness. And I know of no study that can throw more light on our true Self than the study of memory, for its phenomena prove to us that Consciousness is something far wider than the consciousness of the moment, as Energy, in the physical world, is something more than the forces acting at any given instant of time. Analogy is often useful as throwing light into obscure places, and analogy may serve us here. Physicists speak of Energy as kinetic and potential, the active and the latent. So Consciousness may be active or latent, and the latter division is, for each individual, the greater of the twain. We "forget", as the phrase goes, more than we "remember"; but the "forgotten" has not really passed out of Consciousness, though it has become latent, any more than force is absent from the avalanche hanging quiescent on the side of a mountain. The forgotten can be recalled to the active consciousness and revolutionise a life, as the avalanche may be set free and expend its stored-up energy in laying desolate the valley homes. No force can be annihilated on the physical plane, and no experience destroyed on the mental. That which the normal waking consciousness retains depends, according to Schopenhauer, on the Will. Bain and the English school of psychologists would [Page 5] say that it depends on the Attention, but a name for a phase of Will. That which is best remembered is that which has struck us vividly, *i.e.*, arrested and fixed our attention; or that which has been often repeated so that our attention has been frequently directed to it: in every case the

Will lies at the root of the retention. Everything that once enters into Consciousness leaves thereon its trace; the Mind is thereby modified, as Patanjali would phrase it. If this be so, the traces should be recoverable, and on this we must challenge the phenomena of memory.

Let us note, at the commencement, that memory has two chief divisions — Reproduction and Recollection. Reproduction may occur without recollection and then no recognition will ensue. Memory reproduces the image of a past perception: it will appear in consciousness as new, unless recollection accompany the reproduction, and instances of this are on record.

"Maury relates that he once wrote an article on political economy for a periodical, but the sheets were mislaid and therefore not sent off. He had already forgotten everything that he had written, when he was requested to send the promised article. On re-undertaking the work, he thought he had found a completely new point of view for the subject; but when, some months later, the mislaid sheets were found, it appeared, not only that there was nothing new in his second essay, but that he had repeated his first ideas in almost exactly the same words." (Maury, *Le Sommeil et les Rêves*, p. 440, quoted by Du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism*, English trans., vol. ii, p. 13.) Leibnitz is quoted by Du Prel as giving an analogous instance:

I believe that dreams often renew old thoughts. When Julius Scaliger had celebrated in verse all the [Page 6] famous men of Verona, there appeared to him in dream one who gave the name Brugnolus, a Bavarian by birth, who had settled at Verona, complaining that he had been forgotten. Julius Scaliger did not recollect to have heard him spoken of, but upon this dream made elegiac verses in his honour. Afterwards his son, Joseph Scaliger, being on a journey through Italy, learned that formerly there had been at Verona a celebrated grammarian or critic of that name, who had contributed to the restoration of learning in Italy.

The explanation suggested by Leibnitz is that Scaliger had heard of Brugnolus, but had forgotten him; in the dream, reproduction took place but was not accompanied by recollection, so that the name and character of Brugnolus appeared new to Scaliger, and he failed to recognise the dream-presented image. It is impossible to say how much of our dreams may be of this character, and how often the absence of recognition may bestow on them the appearance of revelation. We find ourselves in some place that we have dreamed of, and recognise as real our dream surroundings. Searching our waking consciousness in vain for some record, we rashly conclude that the dream has depicted in some mysterious way an environment unknown to us; whereas it is far more probable that memory has reproduced in our sleeping consciousness the images of perceptions long since forgotten, and, recollection failing, they pass before the mind as new.

To return to the statement that "everything that once enters into Consciousness leaves thereon its trace". In the article on "*Memory of the Dying*", in *Lucifer*, October, 1889, some examples were given of the remarkable reproduction at the end of life of events and surroundings in childhood, and almost everyone must have come across instances of aged persons who recall with extreme vividness the trivial [Page 7] occurrences of their youth. Dr. Winslow (*Diseases of the Brain and Mind*, pp. 286, 287) remarks on some instances in which,

in very advanced life, the faculty of memory exhibits an extraordinary degree of elasticity and a surprising amount of vigour..... A charming illustration of this fact occurs in the life of Nieburhr,

the celebrated Danish Traveller. When old, blind, and so infirm that he was able only to be carried from his bed to his chair, he used to describe to his friends the scenes which he had visited in his early days with wonderful minuteness and vivacity. When they expressed their astonishment at the vividness of his memory, he explained "that as he lay in bed, all visible objects shut out, the pictures of what he had seen in the East continually floated before his mind's eye, so that it was no wonder he could speak of them as if he had seen them yesterday. With like vividness, the deep, intense sky of Asia, with its brilliant and twinkling hosts of stars, which he had so often gazed at by night, or its lofty vault of blue by day, was reflected, in the hours of stillness and darkness, on his inmost soul."

Yet more remarkable as a proof that that which has passed out of ordinary consciousness is not destroyed, are the many cases on record describing the strange revival of memory, just ere consciousness becomes latent, which is one of the most marked phenomena of drowning. I select the following from Du Prel (vol i, pp. 92, 93):

At the approach of death, also, the extraordinary exaltation of memory, connected with a change in the measure of time, has been frequently observed. Fechner relates the case of a lady who fell into the water and was nearly drowned. From the moment when all bodily movements ceased till she was drawn out of the water, about two minutes elapsed, during which, according to her own account, she lived again through her whole past, the most insignificant details of it being represented in imagination. Another instance [Page 8] of the same mental action in which the events of whole years were crowded together, is described by Admiral Beaufort from his own experience. He had fallen into the water, and had lost (normal) consciousness. In this condition "thought rose after thought, with a rapidity of succession that is not only indescribable, but probably inconceivable by anyone who has not himself been in a similar situation". At first the immediate consequences of his death for his family were presented to him; then his regards turned to the past; he repeated his last cruise, and an earlier one in which he was shipwrecked, his schooldays, the progress he then made, and the time he had wasted, even all his small childish journeys and adventures. "Thus travelling backwards, every incident of my past life seemed to me to glance across my recollection in retrograde succession, *not*, however, in *mere outline*, as here stated, but the picture *filled up* with every minute and collateral feature; in short, the whole period of my existence seemed to be placed before me in a *kind of panoramic review*, and every act of it seemed to be accompanied by a consciousness of right and wrong, or by some reflection on its cause or its consequences. Indeed, many trifling events, which had long been forgotten, then crowded into my imagination, and with the character of recent familiarity." (Haddock, *Somnolism and Psychism*.) In this case, also, but two minutes at the most had passed, before Beaufort was taken out of the water.

The approach of death, like extreme old age, will sometimes revive in the memory the impressions of childhood to the obliteration of more recent habits. Dr. Winslow (*loc.cit.*, p. 320) quotes Dr. Rush as recording a statement of the Rev. Dr. Muhlenberg, of Lancaster, U.S.A.,

who alluding to the German emigrants over whom he exercised pastoral care, observes, "people generally pray shortly before death, in their native language. This is a fact which I have found true in innumerable cases among my German hearers, although hardly one word of their [Page 9] native language was spoken by them in common life and when in health".

Passing attacks of disease will alter the contents of memory in the most remarkable way, so that the view seems well nigh forced upon us that the consciousness retains *all* impressions, but that the threshold, below which all is latent, shifts, as it were, up and down, now letting some images appear in the active consciousness and now others. The following three illustrative cases are from Dr. Winslow's work.

Dr. Hutchinson refers to the case of a physician who had in early life renounced the principles of the Roman Catholic Church. During an attack of delirium which preceded his death, he prayed only in the forms of the Church of Rome, whilst all recollection of the prescribed formulæ of the Protestant religion was effaced and obliterated from the mind by the cerebral affection. A gentleman was thrown from his horse whilst hunting. He was taken from the field to a neighbouring cottage in a state of unconsciousness, and was subsequently removed to his own residence. For the period of a week his life was considered in imminent danger. When he was restored sufficiently to enable him to articulate, he began to talk German, a language he had acquired in early life, but had not spoken for nearly twenty-five years A gentleman had a serious attack of illness. When restored, it was found that he had lost all recollection of *recent*, circumstances, but had a lucid memory as to events that had occurred in *early life*; in fact, impressions that had long been forgotten were again revived. As this patient recovered his bodily health, a singular alteration was observed in the character of his memory. He again recollected *recent ideas*, but entirely forgot all the events of past years.

Another class of proofs on the permanence of impressions of the consciousness, may be drawn from. **[Page 10]** the recorded cases of the exaltation of memory which frequently accompanies disease and abnormal conditions of the nervous system. Da Prel has collected a large number of instances, from which I take the following:

Coleridge mentions a maid-servant who, in the delirium of fever, recited long passages in Hebrew which she did not understand, and could not repeat when in health, but which formerly, when in the service of a priest, she had heard him deliver aloud. She also quoted passages from theological works, in Latin and Greek, which she only half understood, when the priest, as was his custom, read aloud his favourite authors on going to and from church. (Maudsley, *Physiology and Pathology of the Soul*, p. 14.) A Rostock peasant in a fever, suddenly recited the Greek words commencing the Gospel of John, which he had accidentally heard sixty years before, and Benecke mentions a peasant woman, who in fever uttered Syriac, Chaldean and Hebrew words which when a little girl she had accidentally heard in the house of a scholar. (Radestock, *Schlaf and Traum*, page 136) . . . A deranged person, who was cured by Dr. Willis, said that in his attacks his memory attained extraordinary power, so that long passages from Latin authors occurred to him. (Reil, *Rhapsodien*, page 304.) ... A girl of seven employed as neat-herd occupied a room divided only by a thin partition from that of a violin player, who often gave himself up to his favourite pursuit during half the night. Some months later, the girl got another place in which she had already been for two years, when frequently in the night, tones exactly like those of the violin were heard coming from her room, but which were produced by the sleeping girl herself. This often went on for hours; sometimes with interruptions, after which she would continue the song where she had left off. With irregular intervals, this lasted for two years. Then she reproduced also the tones of a piano which was played in the family, and afterwards she began to speak, and held forth with **[Page 11]** remarkable acuteness, on political and religious subjects, often in a very accomplished and sarcastic way; she also conjugated Latin, or spoke like a tutor to a pupil. In all of which cases

this entirely ignorant girl merely reproduced what had been said by members of the family or visitors.

I have quoted this last case in order to draw attention to the significant fact, that sleep may cause the shifting of the threshold, as well as sickness or insanity.

Dr. Winslow gives some cases of extraordinary memory, characterising incipient brain-disease, and he also records many curious instances of "double consciousness", in which the patient practically lives a double life, remembering in each state only those incidents which occurred in it. Here, again, we seem to be confronted with the shifting threshold as the only tenable hypothesis.

Persons under hypnotism frequently exhibit an extreme exaltation of memory, repeating long passages read to them but once, recalling with accuracy long past and trivial events, describing minutely the insignificant occurrences of many successive days. Many instances of this kind will be found by the student in Binet and Féré's *Animal Magnetism*, and in Dr. Richer's *Etudes sur la grande Hystérie*.

With this rough survey of the field of memory in our minds, we must seek for some hypothesis which will resume the facts, and which, tested by fresh experiment, will explain other memory phenomena. I put Hume's hypothesis out of court, and proceed to consider the Materialistic and Theosophical theories of memory, to answer the question whether memory is a function of matter in motion, or a faculty of the Self, the Ego, functioning *through* matter, but not resultant from it. [Page 12]

The Materialistic Theory of Memory. — According to this theory, memory, like all other mental functions, is the result of the vibrations of nerve-cells, and may be expressed in terms of matter and motion. When a stimulus from the Object World sets up a vibration in a sense-organ, that vibration is propagated as a wave from cell to cell of the nervous chain till it reaches its appropriate centre in the cerebrum. There arises the perception, the outcome of *mental* activity. This nervous action, once set up, tends to repeat itself more easily with each similar stimulus, the nervous energy following the path of least resistance, and each recurrence of the similar vibration making easier further repetition. Such a vibration having once been set up, it may recur in the absence of the external stimulus, and we have *the idea* in lieu of the sensation-perception. Whenever the nerve-cells vibrate as they vibrated under the first stimulus, the idea recurs, and this recurrence is termed memory. Now when the vibration is first set up it is at its strongest, and it is argued that this intensity of vibration lessens, until it is not sufficient to affect the consciousness. Mr. James Ward writes (*Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. xvii, No. 2, quoted by Sully):

What, now, do we know concerning this central image in the intervals when it is not consciously presented?. Manifestly our knowledge in this case can only be inferential at the best. But there are two facts, the importance of which Herbart was the first to see, from which we may learn something: I refer to what he calls the rising and falling of presentations. All presentations having more than a liminal intensity rise gradually to a maximum and gradually decline; and when they have fallen below the threshold of consciousness altogether, the process seems to continue; for the longer the time that elapses before their "revival", the fainter they appear when revived, and the more slowly they rise. This [Page 13] evanescence is most rapid at first, becoming less as the intensity of the presentation diminishes. It is too much to say that this holds with mathematical accuracy, although Herbart has gone this length. Still it

is true enough to suggest the notion that an object, even when it is no longer able to influence attention, continues to be presented, though with even less and less absolute intensity, till at length this intensity declines to an almost dead level just above zero.

Put into the materialist language this would be that the nervous elements vibrate at first strongly, and continue to vibrate, with less and less vigour, until the vibration is insufficient to affect the consciousness, and the image sinks below the threshold. The vibrations go on, still diminishing, but not *ceasing*; if they cease, the image is beyond revival; if they continue, however feebly, they may be reinforced and once more rise to an intensity which lifts them above the threshold of consciousness. Such reinforcement is due to association. As Sully puts it very, clearly (*Outline of Psychology*):

In order to understand more precisely what is meant by the Law of Contiguous Association, we may let A and B stand for two impressions (percepts) occurring together, and *a* and *b* for the two representations answering to these. Then the Law asserts that when A (or *a*) recurs it will tend to excite or call up *b*; and similarly that the recurrence of B (or *b*) will tend to excite *a* . . . The physiological basis of this contiguous association seems to be the fact that two nerve structures which have repeatedly acted together acquire a disposition to act in combination in the same way. This fact is explained by the hypothesis that such a conjoint action of two nerve centres somehow tends to fix the line of nervous excitation or nervous discharge when one centre is again stimulated in the direction of the other. In other words the paths of connection are formed between the two regions. But it may be doubted whether [Page 14] physiologists can as yet give a satisfactory account of the nervous concomitants of the associative process.

Lewes defines memory on the physiological side as "an organised tendency to react on lines previously traversed". (*The Physiological Basis of Mind*.) And Herbert Spencer relates each class of feelings to its own group of cells (vesicles) in the brain. He says:

If the association of each feeling with its general class answers to the localisation of the corresponding nervous action within the great nervous mass in which all feelings of that class arise — if the association of this feeling with its sub-class answers to the localisation of the nervous action within that part of this great nervous mass in which feelings of this sub-class arise, and so on to the end with the smallest groups of feelings and smallest clusters of nerve-vesicles; then to what answers the association of each feeling with predecessors identical in kind? It answers to the re-excitation of the particular vesicle or vesicles which, when before excited, yielded the like feeling before experienced; the appropriate stimulus having set up in certain vesicles the molecular changes which they undergo when disturbed, there is aroused a feeling of the same quality with feelings previously aroused when such stimuli set up such changes in these vesicles. And the association of the feeling with preceding like feelings, corresponds to the physical re-excitation of the same structures. (*Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1.)

We are then to regard memory as the result of the re-excitation of vesicles in the brain — the theory is clear and definite enough. Is it true?

The first difficulty that arises is the limited space available for the containment of these vesicles, and the consequent limitation of their number. It is true that their possible combinations may be practically infinite

in number, but this does not much help us; for they are to vibrate continually, however feebly, [Page 15] so long as an idea is capable of revival, and a vesicle vibrating simultaneously in some thousands of combinations would be in a parlous molecular condition. For all these combinations must exist simultaneously, and each must maintain its interrelated vibrations without cessation. Now, is this possible? It is true that from the vibrating strings of a piano you may get myriads of combinations of notes; but you cannot have all these combinations sounding from the strings at the same time, some loud and some soft, some forcible and some feeble. By keeping the loud pedal down you may keep some combinations going for a short while, while you produce fresh vibrations; but what is the effect? A blurred confusion of sounds, causing an intolerable discord. If we are to explain memory under the laws of matter in motion, we must accept the consequences deductible from those laws, and these consequences are inconsistent with the facts of memory as we know them. Any attempt to represent clearly in consciousness the physical concomitants of memory as merely the outcome of vibrating nervous elements will prove to the student the impossibility of this hypothesis. The brain is a sufficiently wonderful mechanism as the organ of mind; as the creator of mind, it is inconceivable.

Du Prel (*Philosophy of Mysticism*) helps us to realise the difficulties enveloping the Materialistic hypothesis. On this hypothesis "memory would depend on material brain-traces, left behind by impressions; by the act of memory such traces are continually renewed, re-chiselled as it were, and so there arise well-worn tracks", (Herbert Spencer's "lines of least resistance") "in which the coach of memory is conducted with especial facility". And he adds; [Page 16]

The deductions from this view had already been drawn by the materialists of the last century. Hook and others reckoned that, since one third of a second sufficed for the production of an impression, in 100 years a man must have collected in his brain 9,467,280,000 traces or copies of impressions, or, reduced by one third for the period of sleep, 3,155,760,000; thus in fifty years, 1,577,880,000; further, that allowing a weight of four pounds to the brain, and subtracting one pound for blood and vessels, and another for the external integument, a single grain of brain substance must contain 205,542 traces . . . Moreover our intellectual life does not consist in mere impressions; these form only the material of our judgment. These brain atoms do not help us to judgment, notwithstanding their magical properties, so that, we must suppose that whenever we form a sentence or a judgment, the impressions are combined, like the letters in a compositor's box, these atoms, however, being at the same time, compositor and box.

There is another result that would follow from Memory being only the outcome of vibrating cells. Memory is the faculty which receives the impress of our experiences and preserves them; many of these impressions fade away, and we say we have forgotten. Yet it is clear that these impressions may be revived. They are therefore not destroyed, but they are so faint that they sink below the threshold of consciousness, and so no longer form part of its normal content. If thought be but a "mode of motion", memory must be similarly regarded: but it is not possible to conceive that each impression of our past life, recorded in consciousness, is still vibrating in some group of brain cells, only so feebly that it does not rise over the threshold. For these same cells are continually being thrown into new groupings for new vibrations, and these cannot all coexist, and the fainter ones be each capable of receiving fresh impulses which may so intensify their motion as to [Page 17] raise them again into consciousness. Now if these vibrations=memory, if we have only matter in motion, we know the laws of Dynamics sufficiently well to say that if a body be set vibrating, and new forces be successively brought to act upon it and set up new vibrations, there will not be in that body the coexistence of each, separate set of vibrations successively impressed upon it, but it will vibrate in a way differing from each single set and compounded of all. So

that memory, as a mode of motion, would not give us the record of the past, but would present us with a new story, the resultant of all those past vibrations, and this would be ever changing, as new impressions, causing new vibrations, come in to modify the resultant of the whole. If the reader have in mind the phenomena of memory given in the earlier part of this essay; if he note that these seem to imply that we forget *nothing*, *i.e.*, that every vibration caused throughout life persists; if, remembering this, he once more attempts to represent clearly in consciousness the brain-condition required by this theory, is it too much to say that he will be compelled to admit that it is inconceivable ?

Nor can we forget that there is a certain race-memory, wrought into our physical organisms, which still further complicates the work accomplished by these overburdened vesicles. This unconscious memory of the body, derived through physical inheritance, cannot be wholly thrown out of account when we deal with cell-vibrations.

The Theosophical Theory of Memory. — Here I must guard myself; I cannot really put the Theosophical theory, for I do not find it set out in any work that I have read. I can only suggest a theory, which seems to me, as a student of Theosophy, to be fairly deducible from the constitution of man as laid down [Page 18] in Theosophical treatises. We learn to distinguish between true individuality, the Ego, and the temporary personality that clothes it. The Ego is the conscious, the thinking, agent. It is this Ego of whom the mind forms part, one of whose functions is Memory. Every event that occurs passes into the consciousness of the Ego and is there stored up: the Past is thus, to it, ever the Present, since all is present in consciousness. [All is present in eternal ideation, *Alaya* the universal soul and consciousness — we are taught; and the Higher Ego (*Manas*) is the first-born of *Alaya* or *Mahat*, being called *Mānasaputra* “Son of the Mind”] But how far this Ego can impress its knowledge on the brain of the physical organism with which it is connected, and thus cause this knowledge to enter the consciousness of the person concerned, must, in the nature of the case, depend on the condition of the organism at the moment, and the laws within which it works. What we call the threshold of consciousness divides what is “remembered” from what is “forgotten”. All above the threshold is within the personal consciousness, while all below this threshold is outside it. But this threshold belongs to the personal consciousness, and — here is the significant point — varies with the material conditions of the moment. It is movable, not fixed, and the contents of consciousness vary with the movement of the threshold. Thus:

[Page 19] Let A B represent the consciousness of the Ego; let C D represent the threshold of consciousness of the person: of all above C D the person will be conscious, and it will be impressed on the material brain: of all below C D he will be unconscious. But if C D be movable upwards and downwards, the contents of his consciousness will vary with its movement, and he will remember or forget according as the idea is above or below this dividing line. [We have to exclude from this the impressions of a purely physical nature, such as enter into the category of *animal* perception and memory. Such impressions reach the Human Ego, and it cannot fail to note them; but they do not impress themselves indelibly on its consciousness, and can never, therefore, follow the Ego to Devachan]

Now the condition of the organism is constantly varying, but there are two states of consciousness which occur in every one and are

clearly distinguishable — the waking consciousness and the dream consciousness. The contents of these differ to a remarkable extent, and they work under curiously different conditions. The waking consciousness works under conditions of time and space: the dream consciousness is free from them; it can live through years in a second of time, it can annihilate space in its movements. In the dream, the place of the dreamer depends on his thought; he *is* where he thinks himself. Not only so, but the dream consciousness often retains events erased from the waking. Let the reader run back a few pages and note the curious phenomena of reproduction without recollection in the dream state. Is it an impossible theory that when the senses are closed to the Object World, when the bodily functions have touched their lowest activity, then the Ego may be able to impress on this negative organism far more of its own contents than it can impress upon it in its more vigorous [Page 20] state ? Does not it seem as though that which is below the threshold of the waking consciousness becomes that which is above the threshold of the dream consciousness, and as though the double life of waking and sleeping is but the activity of the one Ego working under contrasted physical conditions ?

If this be not so, we seem to be driven to the conception of a duality at the very centre of our being: each man is not one, but twain, in the innermost recesses of consciousness.

On the other hand, the theory for which I contend, leaves the individuality single, varying in its manifestations according to the physical conditions through which it works; and all the strange cases of double consciousness, which have so perplexed the physiologist and the psychologist, together with the phenomena of somnambulism, mesmerism, hypnotism, and similar conditions, fall into line as severally belonging to one of the two states of consciousness, the dream and the waking, the Ego working equally in either but conditioned in turn by each.

"Ordinary sleep", as Du Prel says, is "a condition intermediate between waking and somnambulism, the latter being only its exaltation". In this connection these facts are to be noted: if we sleep lightly and dream, we remember our dreams; if we sleep more soundly, we sometimes remember the dream vividly on waking, but in an hour or two we have completely forgotten it and cannot revive the memory, try as we may; in deep sleep we dream, as has often been discovered by closely watching a person wrapped in profound slumber, but no trace remains on our waking memory. In somnambulism, which is closely allied to this deep sleep, no memory persists, as a rule, into the waking state. A person who is a somnambulist lives a double life: sleeping, he remembers his sleep [Page 21] experiences and sometimes his waking ones; waking he remembers only his waking life. Occasionally, but comparatively rarely, the golden bridge of memory spans the gulf between the waking and the somnambulant consciousness, dream sometimes interposing as connecting link between the two. It must be remembered that a somnambule, left to himself, will pass into ordinary sleep before awaking, and when this is the case dream may carry on memory of the somnambulant into the waking state.

Du Prel puts very clearly the existence of what he calls the "transcendental consciousness", which has much in common, though it is not identical, with the Theosophical Ego.

There can be no right theory of remembering, without the right theory of forgetting. The phenomenon of alternating consciousness shows that very clearly. It is only when we know what becomes of an impression when it is forgotten, that we can answer the question whence it comes to memory. Now what is the process of forgetting ? It is a disappearance from the

normal sense-consciousness. There can be no destruction of the impression, or its reproduction would be impossible. Excluding the brain-trace theory, there must be a psychical organ, preserving *the faculty of reproduction*, even if the impression, as *product* of its earlier activity, should be destroyed. This organ, lying beyond the self-consciousness, belongs to the unconscious. If, however, this organ had simply the latent faculty of reproduction, and did not rather draw into itself and preserve unchanged the impression as product, we should have again within this organ to distinguish between the conscious and the unconscious. The hypothesis would thus explain nothing, the difficulty being merely pushed back and transposed. There is therefore no alternative but to say that this organ is not in itself at all unconscious, but only so from the standpoint of the sense-consciousness; that it is not merely a latent faculty of [Page 22] reproduction, but takes up into *its* consciousness the impression, as the latter disappears from the external Consciousness. By this admission of transcendental consciousness, the possibility of memory is explained by the mere transposition of the psychophysical threshold with every retreat of the boundary between the sense and the transcendental consciousness. If a forgotten impression sank into a real unconscious, it would not be apparent how in memory this unconscious should suddenly become again conscious. The forgotten, therefore, cannot thereby cease to belong to a consciousness, and since forgetting is the disappearance from the sense-consciousness, we must admit the existence of a second. And so, to say that an impression is forgotten means that it has passed over from the sense-consciousness to the transcendental.

The answer to this that would leap to the lips of the Materialist is that the impression "goes" no-whither, any more than motion "goes" anywhere when a wheel is stopped. But this obvious answer leaves out of account important facts of the case. The motion is changed into another form of physical energy, as heat, caused by the friction which stops it, and the wheel cannot reproduce its motion; the new impulse to move must come from a living force without it. Now the impression *is* revivable, without any external impulse, by Self-action, and the materialist theory of memory implies its continued production by ceaselessly vibrating vesicles, albeit the vibrations be not vigorous enough to attract attention.

If we admit the existence of the Ego, personal memory would be the power of the physical brain to receive impressions from it; to respond, so to speak, to the subtler vibrations of, perhaps the "thought-stuff" of which Clifford dreamed. Comparing the vibrations of our gross forms of matter with the vibrations of the ether, we can reason by analogy to a form of [Page 23] matter as much subtler than the ether as that is subtler than the nerve-matter of our brain. There indeed may be the possibility of vibrations such as are necessary to make our thought processes conceivable. At present, this can only be a hypothesis to us, but it is a hypothesis which throws light on this obscure subject, and may be provisionally accepted, until further researches prove or disprove it.

Here will find their justification all attempts to refine and increase the sensitiveness of the nerve matter of the brain, for increased delicacy will mean increased possibility of responding to the hyper-ethereal vibrations — that is, it will enable the Ego to impress on our personal consciousness more and more of the contents of its own. By this theory we can understand the exalted mental faculties of the somnambulist, the tension of the nervous system rendering it more sensitive, *i.e.*, more responsive. By this also the danger of ignorant striving after this abnormal condition, the nervous elements becoming exhausted by over-rapid discharge and excessive strain. "Great wits to madness often are allied" is only too true; the sensitiveness that is genius may easily pass into the hyper-sensitiveness that is insanity.

And so we reach the practical conclusion — to walk warily in these little-trodden realms, because there is danger; but to walk, because without courage to face the darkness no light can come.