

Krishnamurti's Spiritual Development: A Jaynesian Perspective

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Jaynes' book . . . on the face of it, . . . is preposterous, and I have found that in talking with other philosophers my main task is to convince them to take it seriously when they are very reluctant to do this.
- - Daniel Dennett (1986)

§1. Introduction

This paper will be an exercise in interpreting some of the major events and extraordinary experiences in the life of the global philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986; from here on abbreviated as K) in terms of the theoretical framework developed by the maverick Princeton psychologist Julian Jaynes (1920-1997). Besides the terse, demanding and transformative philosophy for which Krishnamurti is rightly and globally known, there is the lesser known but equally fascinating record of his spiritual and mystical experiences before, during and after he was intimately associated with the Theosophical Society. A sequence of about a dozen of his major experiences can be neatly interpreted within a Theosophical framework (Schuller, 2023b), but a more secular explanation is also possible within the framework coming from Jaynes' innovative and controversial study, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976; abbreviated as OoC from here on).

The structure of the paper is as follows. It opens with a skeletal explanation of Jaynes' theory of four inter-connected hypotheses (§2.1); eight aspects of so-named J-consciousness (§2.2); and some more technical terms developed by the anthropologist and Jaynes scholar Brian Mc Veigh (McVeigh, 2018: 33-6; §2.3). The last and most important section is an interpretation of K's sequence of extraordinary experiences within that framework (§3).

§2.1. The Jaynesian Paradigm in Four Hypotheses

Jaynes himself and his exegetes often start with laying out four basic ideas which will give both an historical and systematic overview of his innovative research programme (Kuijsten in Jaynes, 2012: 8-20; Rowe, 2012: 96-97; etc.).

1) *J-Consciousness*. This technical term refers to our modern sense of individuality and interiority, and can be named “introspectable inner mind space”, in which an analogue “I” can move around a metaphoric “me” in different scenarios to figure out and evaluate possible actions in order to cope with unfamiliar situations, or to sojourn in while daydreaming or emotionally fretting about one’s past or future. Some of these interior experiences are accompanied by strong emotions of desire or fear or their derivatives (Jaynes, 1976: 65ff, 204ff & 447-52).

2) *The Bicameral Mind*. During the Bronze Age, individuals and groups, when in stressful, non-routine situations, were directed by Auditory Command Hallucinations (ACH) to successfully navigate the dangerous unknown. These commands originate in the right brain hemisphere (RH) and are received in the left hemisphere (LH). Recipients experience such commands as coming from outside themselves as if coming from different, more authoritative beings like their ancestors, intermediaries or gods. (Jaynes, 1976: 84ff & 452-3).

3) *Periodization*. Jaynes thinks he can date the switch from the bicameral mind to modern consciousness between 1,800 and 800 BCE, with a period of intensity and acceleration between 1,200 and 1,000 BCE at the dramatic collapse of the Late Bronze Age, when the clash between Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations was so intense and complex that the bicameral mind faltered and J-consciousness rose in that area of the world as a more viable alternative (Jaynes, 1976: 453-4). More precise dating can be accomplished with further analyses of written records by noticing the frequencies of ‘mind words’ either indicative of a bicameral or modern mentality (McVeigh, 2018: 45ff).

4) *The Double Brain*. Many of the experiences and phenomena connected with the bicameral mind and J-consciousness can be located in specific parts of the brain, for which detection there were no adequate instruments developed yet in 1976. Jaynes, by deduction from then current research, already had specific areas in mind like Wernicke’s area in the left hemisphere (LH), where speech is processed and subjectively experienced, and its corresponding area in the right hemisphere (RH), where hallucinations originate and send to the left lobe (OoC: 100-125 & 454-

6). Jaynes made it clear that all four hypotheses could stand and fall on their own, with the hypothesis concerning periodization possibly the weakest (OoC: 456)

§2.2. Eight Aspects of J-consciousness

The list of intimately interrelated aspects of J-consciousness counted in the first edition six (OoC: 59-66). In 1990 Jaynes added two more and exchanged the term *Conciliation* with *Consilience* (OoC: 451).

1) *Spacialization*. Our sense of inner mind space is generated by the metaphor of box or room and it is located, for most people, in the head. In this space we harbor representational images of the real world. And the diachronic aspect of the world, i.e. its changes in time, is 'spatialized', usually along a line. According to Jaynes, you cannot, absolutely cannot, think of time except by spatializing it. Consciousness is always a spatialization in which the diachronic is turned into the synchronic, in which what has happened in time is excerpted and seen in side-by-sidedness (OoC: 60). We also use this spatial quality when we reason, for example, where you would *place* these ideas by Jaynes in *connection* with others.

2) *Excerption*. Things, events, persons in the world are represented in inner mind space by partial aspects, which 'stand in' for them. If you think of NEHU, you will excerpt a specific part of it, which is relevant for you and around which other memories might crystallize. When we reminisce, according to Jaynes, we experience a succession of associated excerptions. Each so-called association in consciousness is an excerption, an aspect or image, if you will, something frozen in time, excerpted from the experience on the basis of personality and changing situational factors (OoC: 62). And, of course, reminiscing is executed in inner mind space and is another accessible example of what can happen there, and how this peculiar spaciousness can be activated and be experienced.

3) *The Analog 'I'*. This is your imagined self which can go around in its imagined world, remembering, anticipating, and experimenting with scenarios of possible actions. For example, past regrettable experiences can be re-imagined as having an alternate development. It is the analog or replica of your socio-physical self in the real world, which is going through such experiences.

4) *The Metaphor 'Me'*. In such imagined exercises of the 'I' we can experience the imagined world as if seen and experienced through this analog 'I', or, when we take a step back, as if from

outside, we can imagine ourselves giving a presentation in front of an audience from the perspective of the audience. In such cases we double ourselves and Jaynes names the new entity now seen from outside the metaphoric 'Me'.

5) *Narratization*. An important manner of organizing the 'furniture' in inner mind space, including our imagined 'I' and 'Me', is through narratization, which assigns selected items as part of the story of my life. And the plot of this life-story will provide justifications for my actions, determine the roles and values of other characters and institutions, as well as prefigure possible actions in the future. And one's life-story is not necessarily veridical. On the contrary, the story entails some selectivity by which the world is made to adapt to the story instead of the story to the world.

New situations are selectively perceived as part of this ongoing story, perceptions that do not fit into it being unnoticed or at least unremembered. More important, situations are chosen which are congruent to this ongoing story, until the picture I have of myself in my life-story determines how I am to act and make choices in novel situations as they arise (OoC: 64).

Of all aspects of J-consciousness, I propose that narratization is the most important one, because the act of emplotment subordinates all other aspects to its epistemic efficacy (Schuller, 2019: 56-60).

6) *Consilience* (originally *Conciliation*). This is the process by which we, in inner mind space, make different and possibly contradictory excerpts and stories compatible with each other in order to create some semblance of consistency or probability. Like in narratization, this process is not necessarily aimed at veracity because it is selective, but it is still grounded in selectively remembered experiences.

The next two aspects were added later in the 1990 afterword and were not much elaborated.

7) *Concentration*. Within mind space we can focus on, or foreground, specific aspects while others go to the background or even drop out. This is an act analogous to paying sensory attention in the outer world.

8) *Suppression*. As the opposite of *concentration*, we can turn away from annoying thoughts and memories in the mind like we can physically turn away from less pleasant situations in the world.

McVeigh added the following traits: *Self-autonomy* as independence and self-control; *Self-authorization* as control over one's destiny; *Individuation* in the sense of one's uniqueness and

privilege; and *Self-reflection* as intentional self-introspection (McVeigh, 2018: 39-40). Because of possible confusion, J-consciousness could also be named the "present-day adult human mind (PHM)" and its sense of self, the "present-day adult human self (PHS)". And the neuro-cultural mentality before it, could simply be named the "bicameral mind/mentality (BM)" (Sharma & Narayanan, 2022: 250 & 253).

§2.3. The Bicameral Civilization Inventory (BCI) and Vestigial Bicamerality (VB)

McVeigh (2018: 31-36) identified seventeen traits by which bicameral civilizations could be identified. He named this the Bicameral Civilization Inventory (BCI). The inventory is based on inductive work on ancient civilizations like Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Japan and China. These traits were fully operational and culturally integrated in bicameral societies. And many of them survived in modern times in unexpected and skewed manners. Jaynes considered such remnants or vestiges of great importance as he dedicated the whole of Book III of OoC, titled "Vestiges of the Bicameral Mind in the Modern World" (OoC: 317-446) to phenomena like mediumship, possession, poetry, music, hypnosis and schizophrenia, all obtaining a whole new significance within the Jaynesian paradigm. Of McVeigh's seventeen traits I will present seven, which will be applicable to K's experiences as they are arguably "vestiges of a previous mentality" (OoC: 317), in the context of the Theosophical worldview, which can be categorized as Vestigial Bicameralism (VB; McVeigh, 2018: 35) based on a wide variety of what could be named neo-bicameral experiences (OoC: 336 & McVeigh, 2018: 43), and allegedly more mundane phenomena like invented traditions and personae, stage magic and coordinated deceptions (Meade, 1980; Paul Johnson, 1994; App, 2025). The seven traits are more or less in order of importance and intensity:

- 1) *Right-Hemisphere Dominance (RHD)*. Hallucinated messages coming from the right hemisphere and received in the left hemisphere, but experienced as coming from outside.
- 2) *Induction Methods for Right- Hemisphere Activation (IMRHA)*. Practices like chanting, meditation, and rituals, which will trigger the activation of right hemisphere domination.
- 3) *Authority-Radiating Ceremonial Complex (ARCC)*. Architectural structures with "focal points of deity-mortal communication", like temples, pyramids, tombs, etc., to activate RHD.
- 4) *Volitional Voice-Visions (VVV)*. Hallucinated voices and appearances of ancestors and absent leaders giving guidance to the process of socio-political decision-making.

5) *Visitation Dreams (VD)*. Vividly remembered dreams of encounters and communications with meta-empirical beings like ancestors, angels, masters, etc.

6) *Indirect Divine Communications (IDC)*. Divinatory practices like omens, casting of lots, augury, and visitation dreams to receive indirect communications from meta-empirical beings.

7) *Supernatural Visitation (SV)*. Hallucinated visitations by lower-rung meta-empirical beings like ghosts and demons after direct deity-mortal communications faded.

§3. Krishnamurti's spiritual development from a Jaynesian Perspective

The following is a list of K's major spiritual, mystical and occult experiences in roughly chronological order. It is based on a list developed for a previous presentation in which I interpreted K's experiences within a Theosophical-developmental framework using Sanskrit and Buddhist terms appropriated by Theosophists, describing K's step-wise, initiatic course towards allegedly enlightenment and beyond (Schuller, 2023b). Below I will execute something similar but now will interpret them from a Jaynesian perspective. First, as far as possible, a conventional and neutral description is given of the event under scrutiny, then in the indented paragraph, I will try to elucidate the events within either i) the Jaynesian paradigm, ii) a conventional psychological framework, or iii) a speculative-metaphysical construct.

a) K, in his youth, develops an ordinary consciousness, though has occasional visions of his departed mother.

K displays a conventional, religious consciousness with sporadic visual hallucinations, which are acceptable experiences in the cultural milieu of Hindus and Theosophists.

b) K is discovered by Charles W. Leadbeater (CWL) and inducted into Theosophical doctrines. CWL brings K along for initiatic experiences during nightly 'astral' travels, meeting 'masters', getting instructions, and writing its summaries down next morning in waking consciousness, from which notes K's first book *At the Feet of the Masters* was composed (for a discussion of its origin see Williams, 2010).

Suggestible K gets primed for Right-Hemisphere Dominance (RHD) with CWL in charge of Induction Methods for Right- Hemisphere Activation (IMRHA) leading to Visitation Dreams (VD).

c) On December 28, 1911, during the blessing of membership certificates of the *Order of the Rising Star in the East*, a first manifestation of something transcendental is experienced by

almost all present. The ceremony was conducted at the ornate headquarters of the Indian Section of the Theosophical Society in Varanasi and this day becomes the organization's 'Star Day' (Lutyens, 1976: 44-45).

A mass hypnosis is induced through Induction Methods for Right-Hemisphere Activation (IMRHA) conducted in an Authority-Radiating Ceremonial Complex (ARCC) resulting in a great sense of energy and holiness with some members spontaneously prostrating themselves in front of K.

d) In the years leading up to 1922, K was often critical and doubtful of his expected role.

Emergence of critical thinking and doubts in K's private 'inner mind space'.

e) This attitude was radically altered by his re-dedication to his mission inspired by a message received in Sydney in June 1922 *via* Leadbeater from one of the *Mahatmas* in the Theosophical pantheon named Kuthumi.

Leadbeater claiming to have experienced a Supernatural Visitation (SV) by meta-empirical *Mahatma* Kuthumi, re-authorizing K to pursue his destiny (Lutyens, 1976: 109).

f) From then on K is engaged in a regular regime of meditation.

K is mentally focused in his introcosmos on excerpts (images) of the *Mahatmas*; possibly already aiming at emptying inner mind space, making initial steps towards a post-egoic, Buddhist state of mind, which can be coined as B-consciousness.

g) Residing in August 1922 in Ojai, California, K experienced the start of the painful *Process*, which accompanied by the emergence of the 'body elemental' communicating with K's guardians while K's self has an out-of-body experience (Lutyens, 1976: 112-135).

Psychosomatic effects of meditation and self-split with left hemisphere (LH) regressing to early childhood and right hemisphere (RH) absorbed in Visionary Dreams (VD).

h) After a year and a half, and back in Ojai again, the *Process* culminates in conscious, clairvoyant communion with the *Mahatmas* and K attains certainty about his mission within the context of the World Teacher Project. After the vent, a long letter from Maitrya came through *via* K (Lutyens, 1976: 134-135).

K is subject to intense, fully developed Volitional Voice-Visions (VVV) and Supernatural Visitation (SV) by meta-empirical *Mahatmas*, including the Maitreya and the Buddha.

i) On his way from California to India in late 1925, K experienced the initially very traumatic,

but subsequently very transformative experience, of the passing of his beloved brother Nityananda after an extended battle with tuberculosis. Nitya had stayed in the US to be cared for and K was on his way to Adyar for the fifty-year jubilee of the TS. K reported that "there is also in me the body, the Being, of Nityananda" (Lutyens, 1976: 158). The trauma enabled K to let go of some of his last deep attachments, i.e. the vision and expectation that he would fulfill his destiny with his brother on his side. He might also have lost, as argued by some, his trust in the *Mahatmas* and maybe also CWL as they had allegedly confirmed that Nitya was crucial to the 'coming' and guaranteed that he would survive his ailment. The result was that K became an empty "crystal vase", as he later expressed it (Lutyens, 1976: 158-9).

K was traumatized by the death of his brother and the broken *Mahatmic* promises that he would survive. After the deep grief, K imagines he absorbed the spirit of his brother and with help of acquired meditative skills, he comes out 'empty' and ready for more and deeper Supernatural Visitations (SV).

j) On December 28, 1925 occurred the first manifestation of *Maitreya* speaking through K. The dramatic event happened when K switched from third person to first person during his address to OSE members at the international headquarters of the TS in Adyar. As Mary Lutyens reported: "It came at the end of his talk. He had been speaking about the World Teacher: 'He comes only to those who want, who desire, who long...' and then his voice changed completely and rang out, 'and I come for those who want sympathy, who want happiness, who are longing to be released, who are longing to find happiness in all things. I come to reform and not to tear down, I come not to destroy but to build' " (Lutyens, 1976: 160-2).

Given the Jaynesian understanding of the relative specializations of the two cerebral hemispheres, it might not be too speculative to state that within K, while speaking from the LH and opening himself to be 'overshadowed', there occurred a switch from his LH to the RH, i.e. going from the individual K in an inspired state to 'channel' a relative other, the Lord Maitreya, talking from his right cerebral hemisphere (RHD). As in the days of the bicameral mind (BM), both K and some of his audience would experience this communication as coming from a different realm and delivered by a real, meta-empirical being. Nobody would have suspected that it was an induced, hallucinated event, both self-induced by K (IMRHA), but also collectively induced by a group of expectant believers and maybe the setting under the Banyan tree (ARCC).

k) Around 1927 K starts to re-frame his mystical-developmental arc with the intentionally vague term "*my Beloved*". For K, his *Beloved* was the ultimate goal to be united with, like attaining a mountain top or entering a flame (Lutyens, 1976: 176-8). Actually, K reported he had occasionally become the *Beloved* in moments of intense mysticism. He sees the *Beloved* as everywhere and within everything, including his guru and other masters. K stated that "I have been united with my Beloved, and my Beloved and I will wander together the face of the earth" (Lutyens, 1976: 179). In a Theosophical interpretation this could be seen as if K was getting united with his higher self. In his speeches he develops a subtle distance between his own mystical development and the role of meta-empirical teachers, including Maitreya. Some Theosophists became alarmed and skeptical about K, leading to some behind the scenes confrontations (Lutyens, 1976: 168, 179 & 198-199).

From a Jaynesian perspective it could be argued that K's reflections and meditations not only did quiet his LH (and thereby becoming receptive to the RH), but he arguably also quiets his right hemisphere with all its meta-empirical beings, messages, visions and other spiritual experiences, thereby making him intensely, non-dualistically present to his *Hic et Nunc* life-world. In short, *he had both overcome language-based, egoic, J-consciousness in the cerebral left (LH) as well as the vestigial bicameral mind in the cerebral right (RH)*. This development was not expected by the Theosophists, nor by K himself and logically led to the dissolution of the Order of the Star in 1929 and K's break with the Theosophical worldview and the Theosophical society itself. From here on K is on a non-egoic, non-religious adventure into the unknown.

l) By 1961, and maybe even earlier, K has deep experiences of 'benediction,' 'otherness,' 'vastness' and 'immensity.' (Krishnamurti, 1976; Lutyens, 1983: 81-2). This experience seems to have been unexpectedly coming and going, and in differing intensities.

The Jaynesian paradigm does not necessarily cover the deep, mystical experiences mentioned in m) and n), but a more physicalist interpretation is possible within the framework of thermodynamics. This might sound far-fetched, but I gave it a try (Schuller, 2023a). The basic proposal is that a very sensitive and silent mind, as K had attained, can become intensely aware of the vastness of the universe as a vibrant and expansive entity, throbbing with ecstatic, swirling, limitless energy.

m) K's state of high intensity meditation culminates one night in the middle of November 1979

in reaching "the source of all energy". For two and a half months, till the end of January of 1980, he would often wake up with "this sense of the absolute" (Lutyens, 1983: 170-1).

Can this movement of non-egoic, non-imagined meditative exploration of the energy of the cosmos attain its source? As scientists deduced from background radiation the origin of the universe in the Big Bang, did K feelingly meditate his way back to this event? It might sound preposterous as an act of metaphysical-speculative overreach, but it has a nice ring to it. With this ultimate experience of a sense of the absolute the sequence of K's occult and spiritual experiences comes almost to a fitting close.

n) What is left over are some of the mysterious, more occult-like experiences of, or esoteric-tinged claims by, K after his break with Theosophy. For example, a) "It's there, as if it were behind a curtain, I *could* lift it but I don't feel it is my business to" (Lutyens, 1983: 135), "if you talk about the masters, they're there" (Chandmal, 1985), 'the face' (Zimbalist, 2016), and "Mrs Besant intended the land at Adyar to be meant for the teaching. The Theosophical Society has failed, the original purpose is destroyed" (Jayakar, 1986: 379; Schuller, 1997: 4). Many more of such experiences have come to light from the many biographies written by those who were close to K. At this moment it will not be a surprise that most of these experiences can be analyzed under the category of *Vestigial Bicameralism* (VB).

§4. Conclusion

The most important take-away from the above exercise in Jaynesian hermeneutics, is the proposal that *K went through a double liberation, which in Jaynesian terms could be construed as the radical silencing of both cerebral hemispheres, i.e. the silencing of the left hemisphere with its thought-constructed sense of self, and the silencing of the right hemisphere with its fertile, religious imagination in the form of voices, visions, visitations and other occult experiences.*

Though this exercise in--let's call it--Jaynesian reductionism might sound disenchanting and maybe even materialistically cold and cruel, it is not intended to diminish or explain away the possibly deep impact K's charismatic person and transformational teachings can, and will, have on any of us open to his message. This is just what science and philosophy do. They look under the hood, find enabling mechanisms, dispel fancy notions and satisfy our curiosity to find out. And understood rightly, they only provide the most plausible, inter-subjectively testable,

hypotheses, models and explanations of reality, but such constructs are no substitute for the messy, exciting experience of reality itself. Like in the case of a great dish, knowing its ingredients--even to the level of its chemical composition and knowing its culinary procedures to the micro-gram and micro-second--should not interfere with its enjoyment and actually might help improve the experience. In that spirit I would submit the idea that, if the above Jaynesian interpretation is true, this might provide insights into our psyche and its active elements, bringing us possibly closer to a post-egoic way of being at an individual and collective level.

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