

# SCIENCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

## Two views of the Universe

Edited by:

**Michel Cazenave**

Translated by:

**A Hall and E Callander**

Oxford

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# *Science and Consciousness*

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*Science*  
*and*  
*Consciousness*

TWO VIEWS OF THE UNIVERSE

*Edited Proceedings of the France-Culture  
and Radio-France Colloquium, Cordoba, Spain*

*Edited by*  
MICHEL CAZENAVE

*Translated by*  
A. HALL and E. CALLANDER  
*Oxford, UK*



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Preparation was by Monsieur Michel Cazenave; the organization by Monsieur Guy Soares. Others helping were: Mlle Joelle Levrez and H el ene Morneau, Mme Colette Simon, and M. Michel Pommier of *France-Culture*, Radio France.

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## *Foreword*

SINCE the great philosophical split of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which witnessed in the West a dissociation of thought into two categories: privileged inner experience and thought of purely analytical nature, the gap between science and philosophy has widened over the centuries.

Since the beginning of this century, however, this view has been considerably modified. Following on the works of Heisenberg, Bohr and, more recently, Bell, quantum mechanics has to a large extent queried the relationships between the observer and the phenomena being observed, and without doubt even the very concept of the real that we used to have. Neuro- and psychophysiology, thanks to electro-encephalography and research into the chemistry and structure of the brain, have for their part been led to make new definitions of states of consciousness, to re-evaluate the relationships between body and "soul" and to give an ever better account of the processes which accompany states of meditation in oriental philosophies, for example, or to place them in a new perspective. Depth psychology, for its part, has, through its clinical experience, been led to put forward the notion of objective psychical reality at the same time as it was, with Pauli's help, rediscovering the phenomena of synchronicity and establishing a clear-cut distinction between hallucination and vision, restoring to the latter the status which classical psychiatry had long denied it.

Finally, prompted by Henri Corbin, a number of philosophers and specialists in the religious sciences were rediscovering the reality of an imaginal world which is defined at one and the same time as an intermediary between, and as a third world complementing, the two worlds of sense and intellect which are the traditional fields of science and conceptual philosophy.

Faced with these factors, which are of very different origins, *France-Culture*, on the initiative of its director Monsieur Yves Jaigu, deemed it necessary to gather representatives of each of these disciplines together in order to ask them to discuss their work and bring them face to face with practitioners of other fields of research: the colloquium which was thus organized was therefore as broad-based as possible, its primary object being to give a platform to those who are blazing the trail for a new epistemology.

It goes without saying, however, that the term "consciousness", as it has been used in the title of this meeting, and throughout all the papers, is taken in its widest sense. We are not dealing with consciousness as it might be defined in relation or in contrast to the unconscious, or to a consciousness reduced to its single component of reasoning faculty, nor in any other limited sense, but to the whole of what the Greeks used to call the *logos*, the *nous* and the *pneuma*: what classical philosophy called reason, mind and soul; what the English understand by the terms mind, spirit, soul, awareness and consciousness.

Can we consequently put forward the hypothesis of a potential psycho-physical unity of the whole of the universe? What the medieval philosophers called the *Unus Mundus*? Are we to advance the hypothesis of a fundamental energy-consciousness, whose physical, physiological, psychical and unconscious phenomena might be the different modes of manifestation and the imaginal its gateway? Are we to envisage the coexistence of a matter and consciousness which are ontologically different, but which are both constantly interacting?

Are we to consider the universe only from the angle of chance and necessity, or can we believe that in it there are manifestations of phenomena of direction and intelligence such as those shown by depth psychology or certain physical theories?

These are some of the questions that researchers and scholars have been tackling, and *France-Culture* wanted to give them an opportunity to meet and discuss them. Even if no answers are forthcoming, they can at least be clarified and illuminated thanks to a multidisciplinary approach, in question and answer sessions.

MICHEL CAZENAVE

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# *The Place of Freedom*

## *Opening Speech of the Convention*

YVES JAIGU

Director of *France-Culture*

BEFORE opening our convention on “Science and Consciousness” by briefly indicating why I, responsible for a radio channel, that is to say for “mass media”, in company with my colleagues, wanted the participants to be of such a high level of scholarship and reputation, and why I chose Cordoba in particular as the venue, I should like to offer my thanks to our Spanish hosts both in Andalusia and Cordoba.

Without the welcome so unhesitatingly accorded to us by the Presidency of the Council of Spain and the Ministers of Education, Culture and Tourism, as well as by the Governor of the Province, Francisco Javier Ansuategui, and without the open-mindedness and generosity of the Diputacion of Andalusia, of its president, Diego Romero Marin, its vice-president, the president of the Cultural Commission, Jose Luis Fernandez Castillejo y Algaba, as well as the local administration of Cordoba and its Mayor, Julio Enguita, we should certainly not have been able to meet together under such suitable conditions.

My thanks extend through them to the people of their town, their province, their country, and are expressed all the more warmly because when thinking of them and of the peoples of France and those of all the lands which are represented here at their highest level of knowledge, science, and respect for truth, *France-Culture* and Radio-France, by organizing this convention, are also addressing them as citizens who are keen observers of their world.

Like them, I am grateful to all those taking part in this convention who have come from the four corners of the world, for having so generously and so swiftly accepted our invitation to exchange their experiences and views on the most fundamental fields of human thought, and at the same time to allow us to learn about them and to share them.

The field we are entering today is one which a shifting of our cognitive consciousness allows us to glimpse little by little, in which everything is different from what we usually perceive in the familiar territory of our traditional way of looking at things, from which we still regard the new world with circumspection.

The conceptual orderings of the world operated by classical “objective” reason suddenly become different in reality. From the depths of Nature, on the fringes of the Invisible, yet still within Matter, an unexpected glimpse draws the observer, hitherto separate from it, into a complicity which transforms solitary observation into a kind of intimate conversation.

Similarly, the frontiers of the individual, spreading beyond the traditional self, are extended within a psychosomatic organization (ever more complex and ambiguous) in its links with one subject or another, first towards the psychosocial unconscious which each of us carries within himself, then towards the archetypal unconscious common to all mankind, the sphere of the great myths – and deeper still towards that unknown source which is entered only in the silence of vision by those who have experienced the presence of an objective psychic reality transcending the five senses.

Then we can glimpse other physical descriptions of our universe, indeed even multiple universes, to which, to employ language common to some visionaries and certain physicists, ours is supposed to belong.

These descriptions show us worlds in perpetual movement, where the distinction between dead and living matter becomes more and more blurred.

We can perceive that our place in this universe is different from what we usually believe, that we are involved in a general movement where we should be tempted to dream of discovering that what will be united on earth will be united in heaven, and what will be disunited on earth will also be so in heaven.

For what has been happening whilst we were going about our daily tasks? What has been happening in the places where present-day knowledge is developed, and who has suggested that we should wish to hold this meeting?

If we are to go back to the theory of the “big bang”, which places the origin of our universe some fifteen thousand million years ago, at the moment of the primordial explosion of “something”, the possibility mooted by physics and modern astrophysics of approaching the moment  $0 + x$  hundredths of a second after this explosion and describing its consequences up to our time has brought together at the same time, as if in a formidable “zoom”, the observers of the immediately-afterwards – the physicists and astrophysicists – and the seers of the immediately-before – the philosophers, poets and visionary prophets of a tradition in the history of Mankind, which is constant, but which is for the most part to be rediscovered today.

This bringing together, which is actually geographical, placing the two groups on either side of a thin wall of a few hundredths of a second, is also an image of this moment when we are gathered together in Cordoba, and of the two courses of research which have so long been blind to each other.

Indeed, everything is happening as though the two approaches, which have until now run parallel, were drawing closer together without touching or merging into a single line, making a region, in the literal meaning of the word, in which views can be exchanged.

On one side we find scientists coming on nature from the outside meeting a place which determines its centre of comprehension, just as the point of intersection of a radius with a circumference makes an opening on the latter which looks on to its centre; on the other hand, philosophers, poets and prophets coming from the interior of the dark sphere which concept cannot reach, towards the inner place of the reason of things – and somewhere between them, the point of their meeting but not of their identity, which might constitute a possible explosion point of the unknown in knowledge.

The town of Cordoba was the scene of a notable event which perhaps, for

Europe, dates the origin of this double advance, this diaspora of intelligence outside one of its fields of activity. It appeared to Henry Corbin, to whom so many of us are and will always be indebted, to be invested with an invaluable symbolic function. And it was after reading of this event, as Henry Corbin relates in his book *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*, quoting the direct account given by one of the characters, that I decided together with Michel Cazenave to choose Cordoba as the physical and imaginal seat of this convention.

This event involves the most famous philosopher of Aristotelian rationality of his times, Averroës, and a young man who eventually became one of the greatest masters of mystic thought and experience in the East of Islam, Ibn Arabi.

“To tell of the relationship between the integrist Aristotelian master and the young man who ought to be called ‘the son of Plato’, we must let the latter speak”, proposes Henry Corbin. “Therefore, one fine day I betook myself to Cordoba, to the house of Averroës”, Ibn Arabi tells us.

“He had expressed the desire to meet me personally, because he had heard of the revelations that God had granted me during my spiritual retreat, and he had not concealed his astonishment at what he had been told. At that time I was still a beardless youth. When I entered, the philosopher rose from his seat, came to meet me, showering me with demonstrative signs of friendship and esteem, and finally embraced me. Then he said to me, ‘Yes’. And in my turn, I said to him, ‘Yes’. Then his joy increased on seeing that I had understood him. But then, myself comprehending what had caused his joy, I added: ‘No’. At once Averroës seemed to shrink, his colour changed, he seemed to doubt what he was thinking. He asked this question: ‘What kind of solution have you found through enlightenment and divine inspiration? Is it identical to that which speculative thought grants to us?’ I replied to him: ‘Yes and no. Between the yes and the no, minds take flight outside their matter, and necks are detached from their bodies.’ Averroës turned pale; I saw him tremble, he murmured the ritual words: ‘There is strength only in God’ – for he had understood to what I was alluding [ . . . ].

“Later I wished to have another interview with Averroës. The Divine Mercy caused him to appear to me in ecstasy (*Wâqi’a*) in such a form that there was a fine veil between our two presences. I could see him through this veil, without his seeing or knowing that I was there. Indeed, he was too deep in his thoughts to notice me. Then I said to myself: ‘His purpose does not lead him to where I myself am [ . . . ].’

“I had no chance to see him again before his death which took place in the year of 595 of the Hegira (1198) in Marrakesh. His remains were taken to Cordoba, where his tomb is. When the casket containing his ashes had been loaded on to a beast of burden, his works were placed as a counterweight on the other side. I stood there, watching: with me were the jurist and scholar Abü-l-Hosayn Mohammed Ibn Jabayr, as well as my companion Abü-l-Hakam Amru Ibn al Sarraj, the copyist. Then Abü-l-Hakam

turned towards us and said: 'Do you not see what is serving as a counterweight to the Master Averroës on his steed? On one side the Master, on the other, his works, the books he wrote.' Then Ibn Jobayr replied: 'Thou sayest that I see not, my child? Of a certainty, I do. May thy tongue be blessed.' Then I took unto myself (these words of Abū-l-Hakam) as a theme of meditation and remembrance for myself. I am now the only survivor of that little group of friends – may God have mercy on them – and I say to myself on this subject: On one side the Master, on the other, his works. Ah! How I long to know whether his hopes have been fulfilled!"

However, Corbin tells us a little further on that Ibn Arabi knows that he can attain this desire neither through the effort of purely rational philosophy nor by going over to what his lexicon will designate as a "God created in dogma".

What, precisely, is the significance of this account? Some time after the death of Averroës, Ibn Arabi was led to leave Andalusia, and therefore Europe, where the great development based on strict rationality began. In the Islamic Middle East he joined the students of vision who remained the faithful practitioners and theoreticians of a space-time other than that of our tangible perception which the Western world, for the most part, tends to call "objective" in the sense of "the only reality".

And it is not the least of paradoxes to see today one of the most advanced of the natural sciences freeing "objects" from their realistic immutability by asking itself whether they are not the appearances of events, object-events.

It is there, between a world studded with fixed objects, regulated, as if by legislation, by the shackles of the logic of observers, and a world of spiritual events, both produced and encountered at the same time, bearing witness to the origin of nature and the finality of worlds, that the question raised in 1200 by the parting of the ways of Cordoba is to be placed.

Just where is Ibn Arabi taking us, a place different from Averroës', who, because of his very method, cannot reach the place where the former is?

First, towards the use of an organ of knowledge, creative imagination, as legitimate as the reason or the will which it completes and which, because it continues the creation and expansion of the world, both produces and at the same time, moreover, receives what it sees, as if it were achieving a kind of living synthesis between "realism" and "intuitionism".

Next, and through it, towards that imaginal world which Henry Corbin comments on all through his writings which I am referring to here.

For Arabi leads us into the world of real and subsisting images, brought into being by the effect of the creative energy of the psyche which evokes them: it is, for Man, the place of experimentation for all direct knowledge, in a phenomenon of vision which now at last, whilst integrating belief and knowledge, takes them over.

Now, this objective psychic world of real images is for the philosopher what Nature is for the physicist.

A theory based on the natural sciences is experimentally verifiable at some time or other since Nature, and the materials being studied, are always present within our sensory field. A conceptual theory of metaphysical philo-

sophy, outside a pure and aleatory internal coherence, is, on the contrary, by definition, impossible to verify by experiment. It would only be verifiable if there existed a place where one would find that thoughts could be realized. The fact that such a situation does not exist, if we exclude the infallible thoughts of logic, takes away all means of verifying by experiencing: *on one side the Master, on the other, his works*; on one side the work, on the other the experience of life.

And so some set off down the path of deductive perfection, which, in the field of the natural sciences, has its correspondence in the field of our system of experience and perception – whilst, down this same path, in the field of rational arguments, a correspondence of the same type cannot be found. Others, on the other hand, try in philosophy to develop their faculty of calling up such a correspondence. Within themselves, they rouse that point where reality is led to reveal itself “concretely”, within the limits, it is true, imposed on it by its relationship with the person who is meditating on it, but with sufficient presence to make itself seen, in intimate experience and beyond the concept, whose existence rational philosophy can induce up to a point, without ever managing to experience it.

This legendary place in the whole of Humanity, including, in Europe, numerous accounts which are symbolical and at the same time from experience, but gradually lost sight of since the spiritual catastrophe at the end of the twelfth century, is the one whose memory the great Don Quixote saw with desperate longing like a primordial gleam of light which was extinguished on the outbreak of the vast mutations of the “century of learning”; his own people took that for madness.

This suffering which condemnation to the abstract brings to us is almost entirely in the tragic feeling of life so strongly expressed by Miguel de Unamuno, which every person feels in what today is called the crisis of our civilization.

When the source of a river dries up, what remains of the water continues to flow to the sea, and those who live on the banks of its estuary, hundreds of kilometres farther down, cannot perceive anything – until one day dry land emerges because of the sudden absence of water.

Perhaps it is for us the same thing with respect to thought? It has been running down its slope for hundreds of years, and the concepts of ancient visions which at the beginning were still powerful, as the stream was, have gradually as we forget them become postulates of reason. Is not thought from then on deprived of the transparency of its sources, wherein the reasons of existence appear alive? Today, the reserves are becoming exhausted, impassés arise, and with them comes crisis. In a concerted movement I believe, however, that today we are witnessing a thaw in this direction. We see scientists seeming to touch the body of the Universe with their hands and to reach it, so to speak, physically, in those paradoxical spaces where forms appear and disappear, rolled along in the billows of real-insubstantial waves.

We can also see, appearing as if by a band of synchronicity as explicit in itself as an effective cause would be, the indication of a certain materiality in the highest states of consciousness, at the same time that the natural sciences are opening out on to the problems of the relationship between consciousness and