

Consciousness¹

In defining the term consciousness for African people, the immediate task is to free our thinking from the “meanings and constraints” imposed by our training in Western thought and techniques and especially by the Western episteme and paradigms, we have inherited, for thinking itself. The African heritage of Black people is replete with elegant, elaborate and extraordinary conceptualizations of human knowing and awareness. The following explication is a brief and partial composite of African-centered understanding of consciousness.

In regards to the notion of consciousness, it is fairly well documented that Africa conceives of reality and all that is within reality as a mental expression of the Divine. In ancient Nile Valley metaphysics, for instance, Djehuti (who the Greeks call Hermes) is considered the mind and will of the creative Demiurge, and that from this “personified” Divine mind emerges the “word” that brings all things into being. Similarly, Dogon metaphysics states that the universe is the “thought” in the “mind” of Amma, the creator. In terms of consciousness, the philosophical thinking of the Akan makes a distinction between “*Adwen*” (realms of knowing), as thought, “*Nea Wonhu*” (that which can not be perceived), and “*Nea edtra Adwen*”(that which transcends thought) and “*Anidho*” (levels of awareness) as being conscious, “*Anidahoso*” (awareness of self) and “*Oben*” (perception beyond the ordinary). The Kikongo word for conscious in Lingala is *ezaleli*, which means the way you are in life, your essence. The Bantu-Congo believe that diverse forces and waves of energy that govern life surround humans. This fire-force called *Kalunga* is complete in and of itself and emerges within the emptiness or nothingness and becomes the source of life on earth. This *Kalunga* as force in motion can be considered consciousness. The Bantu-Congo believe that the heated force of *Kalunga* blew up and down as a huge storm of projectiles, *Kimbwandende*, producing a huge mass in fusion. In the process of cooling, the mass in fusion, solidification occurs giving birth to the earth. (Fu-Kiau, 1969.) In a very real way, the world as a physical reality, floating in *Kalunga*, emerges as an act of consciousness.

Consciousness relative to African people is, in effect, a construct that represents the ability of human beings to know, perceive, understand and be aware of self in relation to self and all else. All that is consciousness is, in fact, revealed in and determined by relationships (energy in motion). At the most fundamental level, consciousness is found in the “pulse” that gives us life. A heart cell, for example, is unique in that it produces a strong electromagnetic signal that “radiates” (relates to) out beyond itself. The electromagnetic (EM) field produced by the heart radiates outward some twelve to fifteen feet beyond our bodies. In effect, we are in constant contact or relationship with other human beings and energy-vibrating life forms at all times. One, in fact, can take two live heart cells, keep them apart and when they begin to die, as evidenced by fibrillation, bring them into close proximity to each other and they will resume their regular life-producing pulsation (Pearce, 2002). Not only is cellular “relationship” indicated here, but

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the awareness and understanding (consciousness) of each cell to each other cell is evidence of and critical to life. What is most important here is that what is seen as the electromagnetic (EM) energy of the cells is, in fact, the consciousness of each cell which carries information or awareness. It is the “vibration” of each cell that results in the awareness of self (one cell) and other (another cell). Consciousness is, in effect, the intelligent energy of the Divine.

What the ancient Africans of the Nile Valley (Kemites) called the “Intelligence of the Heart” was, in fact, an intricate dialog between the electromagnetic fields generated by the “knowing” cells in our hearts, minds and bodies and the electromagnetic energy fields in the world at large and selected energy fields found in our particular experience with time, place and space.

The African is distinguished by a particular consciousness that is reflected in a special capacity for having “intelligence” of the “mind and heart.” Every knowable and perceivable object in the natural universe is a hieroglyph of Divine consciousness; i.e., comprehension and imagination. In the sense of the Divine, consciousness is more than thinking, feeling and awareness. Everything vibrates in a Divinely governed Universe. It is “potentiality” contained in itself. As potentiality contained in itself, the entire universe, as a never-ending totality of possibilities, is consciousness. Consciousness is, in effect, the intelligent energy of the Divine. The spectrum of consciousness includes numerous levels, which differ in degree of frequency and density. In fact, the level of consciousness determines the configuration of matter. Level is indicated by vibration. Consciousness is inscribed in and determines the nature of every organism. Each animal, each species of plant, each mineral and each of their respective components represent conscious energy vibrating at different speeds. In terms of human beings, one vibratory level becomes “heart.” Another level of vibration becomes “liver; another will become lung, another the synergetic being known as human. The varieties of so-called races of humanity, which are biologically organized in essentially the same way, are also made distinct by the degree of differential organic vibration. Consciousness is, however, more than potentiality contained in itself. As a knowing and knowable vibration, motion or energy, consciousness is simultaneously “potentiality” and “intentionality” contained in the pulse of life.

At the human level, consciousness is always a collective experience and passes from one collective generation (being) to the next. Like the energy or vibration indicative of it, consciousness is never destroyed. In fact, it is the reincarnation of consciousness, as psyche, that constitutes the reincarnation of a person. A reincarnated person is a new person only in the carnal sense. The collective consciousness or what some call racial consciousness is constantly renewed in each succeeding generation. The reincarnated are different from the preceding generation only to the extent that the consciousness of the “next” generation vibrates at a new (different) speed. African people, as a particular vibratory phenomenon, reincarnate consciousness from one generation to the next irrespective of geographical location. Many of the great deep thinkers throughout the African world have spoken through this sense of consciousness, this force in motion, a consciousness that is in-born. *“We are Africans not because we are born in Africa, but*

because Africa is born in us.” (Higgins, 1994). The Africa born in us is that in-born sense of consciousness, that vibratory fire force in motion that is complete in and of itself yet continually emerging to become the source and the consequence of living.

Consciousness is, therefore, the essence, energy, expression and experience of Black spirit (being) in the form of awareness, knowing, comprehension and existing (being). It is that which allows African people to reflect, respond, project and create from, before, and beyond the time of one’s experience. Consciousness is intricately merged with spirit (see discussion of Spirit, pg __). It is the “knowing” of what a knowing and knowable spirit knows. The hermeneutics of consciousness, in a sense, determines or allows African people to conceive of and understand themselves as fundamentally spirit. Having an awareness of oneself as spirit, in turn, allows one to access realms of knowing that are not limited to just cognition or perception. It also allows one to be accessible to those spirits in the realm of the spirit. It connects knowing and awareness to both the perceivable (visible) and the unperceivable (invisible). Hence, consciousness as (or driven by) an eternal living spirit is not bound by time, space or place. It connects knowing, awareness and comprehension to the universal and the Divine. Consciousness is, therefore, that which gives congruity between the supra, inter and inner realms of being. It allows for the retention of ancestral sensibilities that interpret and give meaning to contemporary experience. It is consciousness, as awareness, knowing and comprehension, and its subsequent meaning that gives particular content, context and contour to Black character and style. The desire to always function at a higher level (the sense of excellence) is characteristic of the consciousness of African people from time immemorial.

Consciousness functions as both retentive and residual knowing and awareness. As retentive energy, consciousness allows for the “remembering” or retention of all previous information, experience and ideas. As residual energy, consciousness provides a conduit or circuit for tapping into the residue of human knowing and awareness and thereby creates or inspires new knowing and awareness.

The vibratory spiraling of African people towards higher level functioning; i.e., ascension, is best understood as self-generating consciousness (energy). In the ancient Nile Valley, it is this sense of consciousness that is reflected in the Book of Knowing the Evolutions of Ra where the God Neb-er-tcher records the creation and birth of the Gods in noting that, “*I am he who evolved himself under the form of the God Khepera. I, the evolver of the evolutions and developments which came forth from my mouth... I laid the foundations of all things by my will and all things evolved themselves there from.*” The same consciousness, the sense of essence, energy and experience is further symbolized in the ancient Nile valley text which states, “*Kheper-i, Kheper Kheperu, Kheper-kuy, M Keperu, (When I Became, The Becoming Became, I have Become in Becoming)*”. This consciousness of evolving the evolutions, of vibrating knowable and knowing energy, of the “pulse” that gives us life is continually reincarnated in Black awareness; i.e., consciousness. It is found in the logos of “advancement” in the framing and motivation for establishing the “National Association for the ADVANCEMENT of Colored People” or in the “improvement” of the “Universal Negro IMPROVEMENT Association” or in

the “Lift Every Voice and Sing” of the Negro National Anthem. Finally, the consciousness of W.E.B. DuBois speaks directly to the complexity of the vibratory radiance (energy) he immortalized as the double consciousness, the “*two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.*” Consciousness, as defined, allowed and still allows Black people to draw upon a meaning of being that is antithetical to the socially constructed objectifications of negation, nullification and dehumanization. It serves as the source of both the “potential” for liberation and the “intention” to be free. It is the inner thought (mental vibration) that guides the awareness that one’s actions are (or should be) in deliberate accord with one’s destiny. Consciousness also allows one to be aware of the possibility of its (destiny’s) fulfillment. Accordingly, without understanding the vibratory energy that configured itself into being, becoming and belonging to African people, one is incapable, for instance, of fully comprehending why Tubman, Turner, Truth, DuBois, Garvey, and other Black leaders and lay people alike react to and determine reality in a unique and special way.

An African-centered understanding of “consciousness” requires one to meet the challenge of awareness, knowing, comprehension, and existing through the realms of knowing and levels of awareness that are the very same aspect of being that one is attempting to define. Consciousness is the knowing and knowable vibratory fire-force that is the never-ending totality of possibilities emerging from itself and shaping and being shaped in relation to both perceivable and unperceivable reality.

Post note: Unfortunately, it was this African sense of consciousness that was derailed or deformed as the direct and indirect intent and consequence of Arab conquest, American led international enslavement and European colonization. The de-Africanization (dehumanization) of the African, which all three foreign powers hold in common, requires the distortion of African consciousness. The contemporary disconnection from African sense of consciousness remains the intent and consequence of Euro-centric intellectual (conceptual) hegemony and worldwide white (political and philosophical) supremacy. It is clear that the “re-remembering” or “re-experiencing” of an African meaning of consciousness is essential to the liberation of the African mind and the development, empowerment and revitalization of African people worldwide.

Further Readings:

Higgins, Chester, Jr., *Feeling the Spirit: Searching the World for the people of Africa*. Bantam Books, N.Y. 1994.

Pearce, J.C., *The Biology of Transcendence: A Blueprint of the Human Spirit*. Park Street Press, Rochester, Vermont, 2002

Fu-Kiau, Kimbwandende Kia Bunseki, *Tying the Spiritual Knot: African Cosmology of the Bantu-Konko*. (2nd Ed) Athelia Henrietta Press. Canada, 2001

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Entry for the Encyclopedia of Black Studies

By Dr. Wade W. Nobles, (aka Nana Kwaku Berko I, Ifagbemi Sangodare).