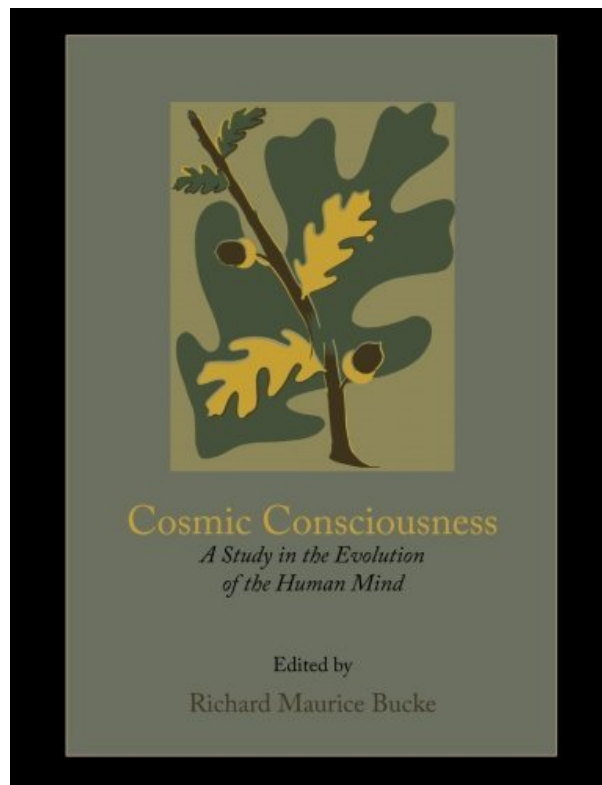
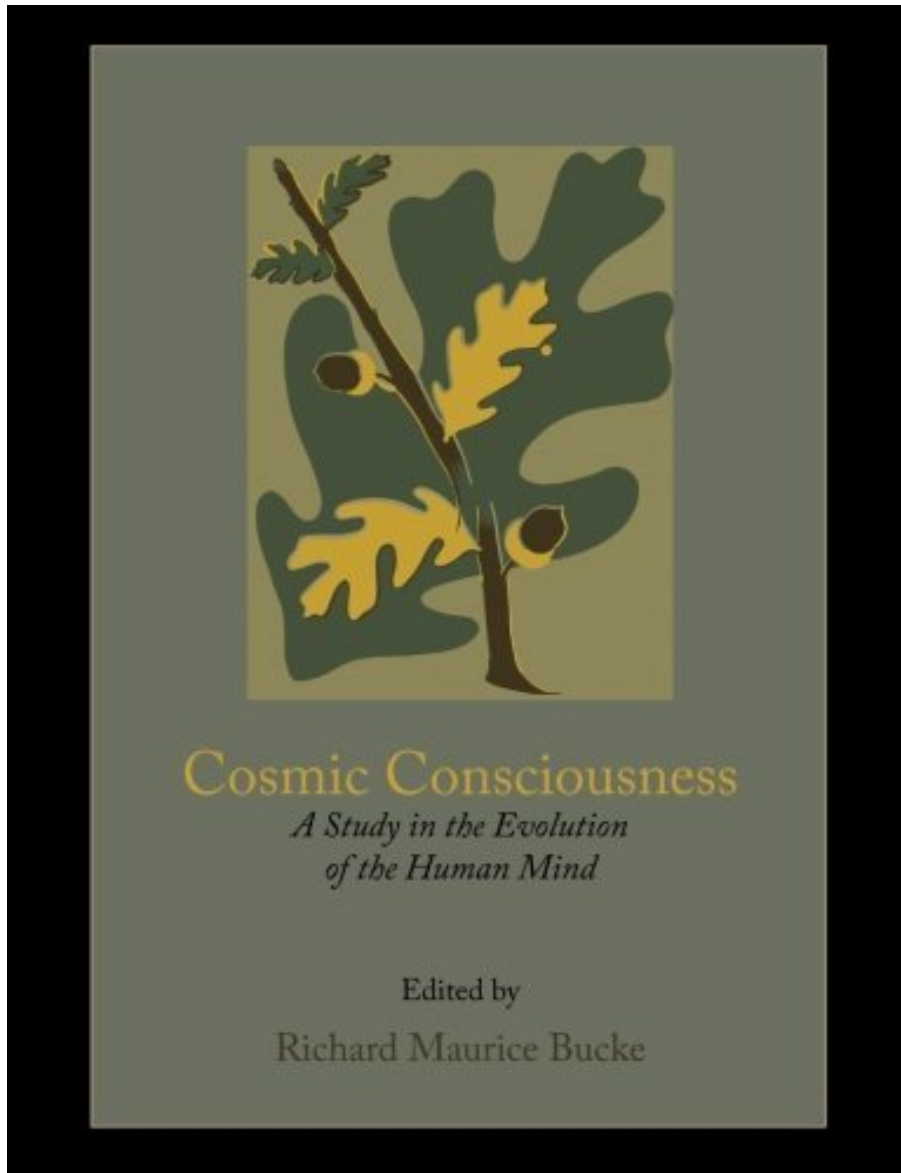


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RICHARD MAURICE BUCKE**



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2010 Reprint of 1905 edition. This work is the magnum opus of Bucke's career, a project that he researched and wrote over many years. In it, Bucke described his own experience, that of contemporaries (most notably Whitman, but also unknown figures like "C.P."), and the experiences and outlook of historical figures including Buddha, Jesus, Paul, Plotinus, Muhammad, Dante, Francis Bacon, and William Blake. Bucke developed a theory involving three stages in the development of consciousness: the simple consciousness of animals; the self-consciousness of the mass of humanity (encompassing reason, imagination, etc.); and cosmic consciousness - an emerging faculty and the next stage of human development. Among the effects of this progression, he believed he detected a lengthy historical trend in which religious conceptions and theologies had become less and less fearful. A classic work.

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The pioneering book on enlightenment episodes

By OAKSHAMAN

This study is from the early days of the psychiatric profession when its practitioners could still write seriously of spiritual and mystical matters without being ostracised or ridiculed as "unscientific." Briefly, the author personally experienced a sudden episode of enlightenment and rapture that, while it was only of brief duration, changed his outlook on life forever. He spent the rest of his life, he was in his mid-thirties at the time, trying to figure out what had happened to him, and if there were any others.

What he found was that such sudden occurrences of enlightenment, these epiphanies, had been occurring to mystics, philosophers, writers, and artists all through recorded history. Not only that, but they were occurring with increased frequency as time went on. Bucke concluded that this marked an evolutionary trend. Carried out to its logical conclusion, he postulated that one day "cosmic consciousness" as he termed it, would be as common in the human race as self consciousness currently is. He based this on the manner in which the ancestors of man slowly climbed from the simple consciousness of animals to an almost universal state of self consciousness.

Having experienced a similar event in my mid-thirties (remember, it happens to varying degrees), I found this book to be immensely personally relevant- as it has proven to be to many of us for over one hundred years now.

65 of 66 people found the following review helpful.

Timeless Spirituality with the Authority of Experience

By richardpinneau.com

Although now a century old, Dr. Bucke's volume is timeless because its topic is: the human quest for the experience of The Divine.

Written, not by a theologian but by an experienter of the Ultimate Mystical Experience, this book describes Bucke's own few seconds of illumination, then goes on to show commonalities among the experiences of the ancient (Lao Tse, Buddha, Christ, Paul, Muhammad, etc.), medieval-renaissance (Dante, Shakespeare, etc.), and modern (Ramakrishna, Whitman, etc). The intellectual credentials of this neurologist cause Bucke's work to stand head-and-shoulders above popular "New Age" mystic reports.

Be sure not to miss Bucke's description of his own experience (humbly buried in introductory notes), and don't get bored by reading his analytical sections on the nature of consciousness. Dive into the excerpts of how writers have struggled through the ages to express their inexpressible experiences of Divine Love, Brahmic Ecstasy, Rapture... variously named in different times and cultures.

Although women are under-represented (naturally, since for millenia they've largely been barred from authorship), some of the most movingly personal experiences are those near the end of the volume by three

19th Century women.

The power of this gem stems from its first-hand reports of enlightenment - with its unpredictable, highly personal expressions. You'll find God experienced here not as an anthropomorphic Jehovah, but as a living Presence; not sterilized by intellectual analysis, but revered in Its humanity-divinity. Most helpfully, Bucke shows the parallels between different saints/illuminati/authors in their experiences and in their ways of describing it.

I tell my students that if they were to be sentenced to live out the rest of their lives on a desert island with only five books: Make this one of the five!

78 of 81 people found the following review helpful.

MUCH FOOD FOR THOUGHT

By Peter Uys

This book was one of the first to consider religious illumination from a psychological perspective. It differs from William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in that many of Bucke's opinions (e.g. his views on socialism) have been refuted by history. In order to judge it objectively, one ought thus to always keep in mind the era in which it was written. The basic point is that the human race is slowly and sporadically - albeit with increasing speed - advancing in consciousness to a higher state that will eventually lift the species above the fear, ignorance and brutality that have plagued mankind throughout history. Bucke's argument - which may be strongly disputed today - is based on analogy. He points out the three phases of consciousness found among living creatures: perception amongst lower animals, receptual consciousness amongst higher animals and the conceptual thinking of human beings which is accompanied by a strong sense of self.

In a very interesting chapter he demonstrates the development of consciousness over the last couple of millennia with reference to mankind's improving ability to distinguish colors. Initially only black and red were differentiated, but what was perceived as "red" has been refined into red, orange, yellow and white and even further. Likewise with "black" which split up into black and blue-green, from which the separate colors blue and green were again discerned:

"The blazing blue of the oriental sky is not mentioned in Homer or the Bible, nor the Rig Veda or Zend Avesta. But in this present century we know not only the seven primitive colors, but literally thousands of different shades and gradations of them."

Bucke argues that new or enhanced senses originate with sporadic manifestations among a minority of human beings and that a new consciousness eventually spreads through the whole population. The new or fourth level of consciousness will enable mankind to perceive the unity of the cosmos and the divine presence inherent in it, liberate humanity from fear and enable the race to perceive that love is the rule and the basis of the universe: this is cosmic consciousness. Bucke predicts that it will ultimately be the norm.

No reader will agree with all the author's points, but some of his great contemporaries like the scientist and philosopher Ouspensky agreed to such an extent that he devoted an entire chapter in his work *Tertium Organum* to this book. The response of psychologist William James in a letter to Bucke was: "My total reaction on your book, my dear Sir, is that it is an addition to psychology of first rate importance, and that you are a benefactor to us all."

Bucke considers the greatest teachers, artists and religious thinkers by looking at their teaching and what is known about their lives, pointing out the remarkable correspondences. Some of those discussed in detail include Gautama, Jesus, Paul, Plotinus, Mohammed, Dante, St. John of the Cross, Francis Bacon, Jacob Behmen, William Blake, Walt Whitman, Lao Tse, Socrates, Benedict Spinoza, Swedenborg, Emerson, Thoreau and Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

His arguments are persuasive as regards both the comparison of texts and the similarities in the numinous experiences of the individuals. As such, the book also serves as an illuminating study of the nature of the mystical experience that is exactly the same in all the religious traditions.

Bucke concludes that these individuals were the pioneers who had already entered cosmic consciousness and wished to convey its essence to the rest of humanity. They were, however, restricted to use the language of normal consciousness and that is why their revelations appear to be incomplete and even deceptive:

"It would be beyond the power of the self conscious mind to conceive the cosmic conscious world. This being so, the reports made by these spiritual travelers have been not only not understood but misunderstood in an infinite variety of senses, and the essentially similar account given by for example, Paul, Mohammed, Dante, Jesus, Gautama and others, has been looked upon as a variety of accounts, not of the same, but of diverse things. A critical study of all these (seeming) diverse accounts will show that they are more or less unsuccessful attempts to describe the same thing. But because it was out of the power of the original reporter, the seer, to give anything like a full and clear account of what he saw, largely because of the inadequacy of the language belonging to the self conscious mind; because his reporters again (as in the cases of Jesus and Gautama, who did not write), possessing only self consciousness, blurred still further the picture; because translators, possessing only self consciousness and understanding only imperfectly what the teacher wished to convey, still further distorted the record. For all these reasons the important fact of the unity of the teachings of these men has been very generally overlooked; hence the confusion and the so-called mystery; a misunderstanding unavoidable, no doubt, under the circumstances, but which will one day, assuredly, be cleared up."

Cosmic Consciousness deserves its "classic" status and may be appreciated even more when read together with William James' aforementioned work. Other works on religion & spirituality that I have found inspiring or thought-provoking include Bible Mystery and Bible Meaning & The Creative Process in the Individual by Thomas Troward, Religion in the Making by Alfred North Whitehead, Alter Your Life by Emmet Fox, Cracking the Bible Code by Jeffrey Satinover, The Thirteen Petalled Rose by Adin Steinsaltz and One Cosmos Under God by Robert Godwin.

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