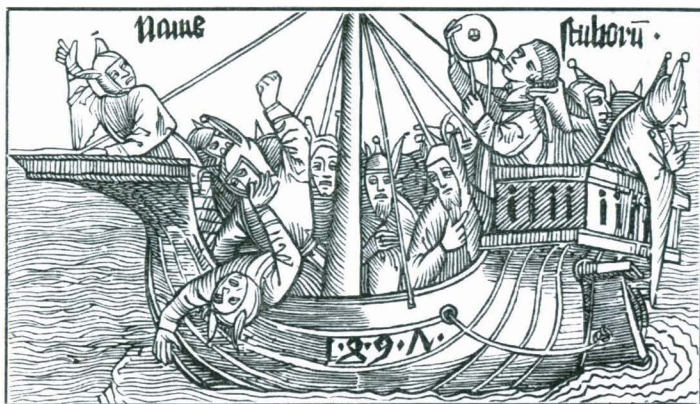


The fourth way to nowhere

the search for cosmic consciousness
and the triumph of the ordinary



a quest for the meaning of life, a
critical analysis of the
esoteric system of
Gurdjieff and
Ouspensky, and
my 27-years in
a fourth
way
cult



Martin Braybrooke

A DOORWAY TO THE FANTASTIC

A VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FOURTH WAY

The fourth way is not an invention of Robert Earl Burton, although Robert Earl Burton's version is.

The fourth way emerged from the teaching of George Gurdjieff, an Armenian Greek, brought up in the cathedral city of Kars in what is now eastern Turkey. Gurdjieff, according to his own account, gathered around him a small group of seekers of wisdom, and came back from Central Asia with the System.

Gurdjieff taught his version of the System in Russia where he was joined by Russian writer and thinker Peter Ouspensky. Whereas Ouspensky was an intellectual, Gurdjieff was rather an unashamed trickster (read for example *The Material Question* in Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men*).³⁸ Gurdjieff claimed that he had learned the System from a mysterious monastery in Central Asia, the Sarmoung Brotherhood, which has never been identified. He presented what he had learned in a bizarre nomenclature that was probably of his own devising, in which there are traces of Greek and probably other languages (for example, what Ouspensky later called the Law of Seven Gurdjieff calls *Heptaparaparshinokh*). Ouspensky unpicked the language, systematised it and re-presented the System in terms that at least appear clear.

Ouspensky eventually parted company with Gurdjieff for reasons that are differently stated in different sources, but which amount to Ouspensky feeling that the direction of Gurdjieff's work had changed, in particular that whereas Gurdjieff had initially insisted on personal verification, he later seemed to be requiring his students to take everything

³⁸ G. I. Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, Penguin Arkana 1985 pp.247ff

on trust.³⁹ The tension between personal verification and unexamined belief is a theme that I shall return to from time-to-time in this essay.

All the successors of Gurdjieff as far as I know went in search of Influence C. According to Ouspensky, *Influence C*, otherwise known as 'conscious influence,' is the direct communication of esoteric truth from someone who has previously received it.⁴⁰ Ouspensky felt that the System was incomplete (*In Search of the Miraculous* was originally entitled *Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*) and in particular that it lacked a simple method for students to become conscious. He experimented, for example, with continuous prayer.⁴¹

Student of Gurdjieff, J. G. Bennett describes part of his search for a teacher in *Journeys in Islamic Lands*, and Ouspensky's student Rodney Collin travelled to Mexico looking for inspiration among the pyramids of Oaxaca.⁴² Dr Francis Roles, the student of Ouspensky who continued the Ouspensky Work in London and founded the Study Society, and Leon MacLaren who founded the School of Economic Science (SES), eventually met the Maharishi. From the Maharishi they learned the meditation method known as Transcendental Meditation, but resisted the Maharishi's attempts to take over their organisations. Instead they went to the source, the Maharishi's teacher, the Shankaracharya. In this way the SES and the Study Society claim the continuation and development of the fourth way System through the connection with the Advaita philosophy of India.⁴³ Gerald de Symons Beckwith of the Study Society says that the knowledge of liberation manifests in different guises

³⁹ Ouspensky, *A Record of Meetings*, entry for 9 October 1935

⁴⁰ *Psychology* p.57

⁴¹ Beckwith, *Ouspensky's Fourth Way*, p.242

⁴² J.G.Bennett, *Journeys in Islamic Lands*; Joyce Collin-Smith, *Call No Man Master*

⁴³ Beckwith pp.73-80

at different times and places, and indeed the intention to adapt the System to the Western mind was explicit in Gurdjieff's activities from the beginning. The SES, of which I was a member for four years, had adopted Vedantic Sanskrit terminology by the time I was a member, and the Study Society mixes the Vedanta with Ouspensky's terminology.⁴⁴

The origin of Gurdjieff's branch of the System itself could be from the Sufis of Central Asia. J. G. Bennett in his joint work with H. L. Shushud, *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia* (based on translations of medieval texts), attributes to Gurdjieff the idea of self-remembering in a very similar phrase to that used by Gurdjieff—'Remember yourself always and in all situations.'⁴⁵ However this phrase does not appear in the version authored by Shushud alone.⁴⁶

If you look on Google Maps and drop the little yellow man onto a photograph in, say Samarkand or Khorezm, you will see dusty towns with the usual drab twentieth century commercial buildings and flats, and scattered around, extraordinary mosques the size of cathedrals or small forts, decorated in exquisite coloured tiles. These speak to the existence in the past of something remarkable, just as we stand in awe of the medieval cathedrals of Europe.

INFLUENCE C IN THE FELLOWSHIP

When I joined the Fellowship I never questioned its authenticity as a fourth way school. I simply accepted the rules, did the exercises and enjoyed the sense of being on a meaningful journey. I felt I was able to verify the teacher through the people around me and the teaching itself. At no point did the question of lineage arise as a problem for me.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Shushud and Bennett, *The masters of wisdom of Central Asia*, Systematics vol. 6, no. 4, March 1969, p.4

⁴⁶ "Remain attentive with every breath," in Shushud, *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia*, p.31

Once I was asked about it in a prospective student meeting and replied that the System came to our teacher through Rodney Collin and Alex Horn, Robert Burton's teacher. After the meeting another student quite rightly said to me that we shouldn't claim a connection with Rodney Collin because we don't know this for certain.

Lineage was always claimed by Robert Burton through Alex Horn, but it is not at all clear what connection Horn had with the fourth way of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. There is a suggestion that Horn visited Collin in Mexico, but there is scant evidence that he stayed for any length of time or learned anything from him. However according to Burton he, Burton, made direct contact with Influence C, understood as the disembodied spirits of previous conscious beings. He compiled a list of forty-four who are said to be guiding the school. According to Burton, Leonardo da Vinci whispers in his ear. He also claims that Influence C works directly with students.

In my early years in the Fellowship people would ask, "Have you verified Influence C?" At that time it was acceptable to admit that one hadn't. Verification consisted in co-incidences, what Jungians might call synchronicity. So one might on a poster or in a book see a quotation from one of the forty-four conscious beings identified by Robert Burton, and the quotation happened to answer a question that had been bothering one. This might occur on a few occasions and eventually one would take this as verification. In addition we were all sensitised to the number forty-four and in consequence saw the number forty-four everywhere.

Part of me was well aware of the tendency of the human mind to see patterns where there are none. But the idea of augury goes back a long way in human history. "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow," as Shakespeare put it. The idea of Influence C as promoted by Robert Burton slipped into my belief system without much of a struggle, I am embarrassed to admit.

THE FOURTH WAY TO WHAT?

If I were to formulate from today's understanding what my aim was when I first joined SES at the age of seventeen, it would be to acquire a sense of peace and that clear state of awareness that went with it, and also the delight of understanding the world from a set of ideas that made it make sense. It is hard to accept that sometimes it doesn't.

Stepping back, what is the aim of the fourth way from the point of view of its basic texts? The most fundamental texts are arguably Ouspensky's *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution* and his *In Search of the Miraculous*, also Gurdjieff's *All and Everything*.

Life is only real then, when I am starts with a summary of the intended results of Gurdjieff's *All and Everything*, of which *Life is the third series*. The summary is as follows:

FIRST SERIES: To destroy, mercilessly, without any compromises whatsoever, in the mentation and feelings of the reader, the beliefs and views, by centuries rooted in him, about everything existing in the world.

SECOND SERIES: To acquaint the reader with the material required for a new creation and to prove the soundness and good quality of it.

THIRD SERIES: To assist the arising, in the mentation and in the feelings of the reader, of a veritable, nonfantastic representation not of that illusory world which he now perceives, but of the world existing in reality.⁴⁷

Thus, Gurdjieff is not merely bringing to the West a psychological theory but a full-blown psychological and cosmological revolution. Nevertheless the prologue to *Life is only real then, when I am* begins simply with self-remembering and Gurdjieff's personal difficulty in attaining it at will, at any rate in 1927 by which time he had already been teaching the fourth way system for some time:

⁴⁷ *Life is only real then, when I am*, p.v

I am...? But what has become of that full-sensing of the whole of myself, formerly always in me in just such cases of self-questioning during the process of self-remembering... Is it possible that this inner ability was achieved by me thanks to all kinds of self-denial and frequent self-goading only in order that now, when its influence for my Being is more necessary even than air, it should vanish without trace? No! This cannot be! ... Something here is not right!⁴⁸

Interestingly that same book is much taken up with the problem that in his absence his teaching had become misapplied to the point that, "...it seemed clear to me that there stood out on the forehead of now one, now another of you, the inscription 'candidate for the madhouse.'"⁴⁹

The Psychology begins with a description of the state of human beings as we find ourselves, that is, without unity, a collection of jostling opinions and feelings each one of which feels entitled to say 'I' at the moment in which it is active. The many 'I's.⁵⁰ Most things occur in us mechanically by association, one 'I' to the next. The first lecture contrasts this with the idea of self-remembering, a state in which we can observe these goings on in the mind and also be aware of ourselves and our surroundings. Normally such states are fleeting and infrequent. Ouspensky writes: "The question arises, is it possible to acquire command over these fleeting moments of consciousness, to evoke them more often, and to keep them longer, or even make them permanent? In other words, is it possible to become conscious?"⁵¹

Curiously the rationalist and atheist modern philosopher Daniel Dennett, in his book *Consciousness Explained*, presents a theory which rejects the idea of a central unifying observer and claims that we are a pandemonium (his word) of

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.1

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.70

⁵⁰ Psychology p.15

⁵¹ Psychology pp.21-22, emphasis in the original

different thoughts and tendencies which sort themselves out by some kind of survival of the fittest.⁵² In developing this idea he cites Plato's comparison of thoughts to a collection of birds in an aviary.⁵³ The ancient Greek writer and priest Plutarch also wrote of our multiplicity.⁵⁴ So the idea of the many 'I's is not unique to Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. Ouspensky's project, then, is to create observing 'I' as a means towards the unity that both modern psychology and Gurdjieff's system say that we do not have.

While it may be possible and even desirable to achieve greater internal unity, the fourth way goes further. In answer to a question about life after death, Gurdjieff stated that only by certain efforts can a person develop an astral body and that an astral body can survive the death of the physical body, at least for a time. This is connected with the idea of crystallisation, the idea that with sufficient work over time, higher being bodies can become fused, like powder in a retort, and overcome death. In this way self-remembering becomes, not just a method of living more fully here, now, but part of an urgent project of survival. Whether this is plausible or not I shall discuss in what follows.

The development of conscience is also important. Ouspensky wrote, "The aim of this system is to bring man to conscience." He goes on to say, "...what should be understood from the beginning is that a man must have a sense of good and bad. If he has not, nothing can be done for him."

⁵² Dennett p.222. The word 'pandemonium' combines the Greek words 'pan,' meaning 'all' and 'daimon'—demons or demiurges.

⁵³ Plato, *Theaetetus* 197-198a

⁵⁴ "In fact the Deity is not Many, like each of us who is compounded of hundreds of different factors which arise in the course of our experience, a heterogenous collection combined in a haphazard way. But Being must have Unity, even as Unity must have Being." Plutarch, *The E at Delphi*, in *Plutarch Moralia* 393, Loeb Classical Library volume V, Harvard 1936

Conscience, according to Ouspensky, starts with "ordinary morality" and progresses to realising "the necessity of objective right and wrong"⁵⁵ This is achieved through the removal of 'buffers,' that is, what stops us from fully feeling our internal contradictions. In the French language, the word *conscience* refers both to conscience and consciousness.

Perhaps this connects with Socrates's claim that no-one does evil knowingly, that is, if they could see clearly the consequences of what they do, they would do nothing unjust. I emphasise this point, because it means that if your teacher shows evidence of a lack of conscience, then this is an indication that you should look elsewhere.

FOURTH STATE

Fourth state we described in introductory meetings as that state that normally only occurs at times of extreme danger, when time seems to run unusually slowly and there is a calmness and clear-headedness (probably because there is no time to worry or even think). However Ouspensky gives that description for third state.⁵⁶

Whereas third state is sometimes described as the state of being able to be objective about yourself, fourth state is supposedly being objective about the universe.

Ouspensky writes, "In the fourth state of consciousness, that is, in the state of *objective consciousness*, we are supposed to be able to know the full truth about everything: we can study 'things in themselves,' 'the world as it is.'"⁵⁷

We used to claim, according to the material in the introductory meetings, that one can, by practicing, be in the third state more and more often, and eventually at will. A person who, by repeated efforts had achieved more-or-less

⁵⁵ Conscience p.53

⁵⁶ Psychology p.21

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p.31, emphasis in the original.

permanent third state might have occasional fourth state experiences.

For me, fourth state is a theory. After twenty-seven years of diligently following the fourth way system I do not know what the fourth state is. If it exists, then I believe it is a defect in the school of which I was a member rather than any lack of effort on my part that I did not experience it. Put it this way: in all that time no-one came up to me and vouchsafed that they could be in fourth state at will or had been in the fourth state, or that the only reason I had not experienced it was that I was doing it all wrong. I only heard of one person, by hearsay, claim to have been in the fourth state. I never heard our teacher refer to it. It may or may not exist.

It is not impossible that you could meet someone from another branch of the fourth way who will claim that they are in and out of fourth state all the time, and will explain to you how to do it. You should at least ask for a time frame on that (see later under 'Time').

Any explorer of higher states of consciousness should bear in mind that all kinds of aberrations and alterations of normal consciousness are possible (like getting drunk) and they are not necessarily 'higher.' My suggestion is that if there exist higher states of consciousness, then one should expect the state to be one of clarity rather than weirdness. Weirdness or anything psychedelic is likely to be an hallucination.

I refer you back to the quotation from Ouspensky: "...in the state of objective consciousness, we are supposed to be able to know..." (emphasis mine). He also writes, "As we are not in these [objective] states of consciousness we cannot study these functions or experiment with them, and we learn about them only indirectly from those who have attained or experienced them."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Psychology p.31

One thing that is clear from this is that Ouspensky was avoiding pretending to knowledge he did not have, at least at the time he produced that material (1937).

It is tempting, when doubting everything, to settle for some certainty in disbelief, to settle for the conclusion that there is no such thing as fourth state or objective consciousness. Ouspensky points out, however, that: "In the religious and philosophical literature of different nations there are many allusions to the higher states of consciousness...."⁵⁹ William Blake wrote, "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite."⁶⁰ Maybe so. At present I have no evidence that the fourth way gets us there, but I like to leave a doubt about doubt. I have not proven that there is no such thing.

It is possible that various states that are sometimes called 'cosmic consciousness' correspond to fourth state. I shall discuss 'cosmic consciousness' and what it might mean later.

MAN NO.S 1, 2, 3

In the fourth way system men and women 1, 2 and 3 are all on the same level. The numbers simply refer to a tendency to operate from one or other of the three 'centres,' moving-instinctive, emotional and intellectual respectively.

It is said to be useful to understand one's 'mechanics,' as these tendencies are referred to, not to judge oneself but quite the reverse, to accept and understand oneself. Do you like parties, prefer to be with friends rather than read a book and you don't enjoy abstract discussions? Fine, you're probably emotionally-centred. You see the world primarily through your emotions. Do you prefer to read a book and you stand awkwardly in the background at dances? You're probably intellectually-centred. And so on. Each of us has situations in which we don't fit in, and feel as though we

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p.23

⁶⁰ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

should be different from what we are. One of the pieces of advice that was given in the school was not to judge. *Things as they are, myself as I am.* This seems to me to be sound.

Ouspensky advised his students to start with simple self-observation. This is not the same as self-remembering, but is simply observing what one does (what the 'machine' does) without making judgements.

MAN NO.S 4 AND 5

Men and women no. 5 are said to be able to self-remember, that is, to enter into the third state of consciousness at will. It is also said that at any one moment one is either a man or woman 1, 2 or 3 or else a no. 5. One is either 'conscious' (in the sense of third state) or not.

Men and women no. 4 are neither one thing nor the other. They stand at the threshold, or as it were in the doorway, neither in the hallway nor the living room. They are ordinary people who are trying to awaken.

Men and women no. 5 are said to have higher emotional centre working within them. This is said to be a part of us that is dormant unless we awaken. Gurdjieff said that we do not possess a soul, but have to acquire one.

In the Fellowship only two students were alleged to have become men no. 5. One was before my time, and according to reports of others subsequently left the school, and the other was told he was man no. 5 by the teacher during the time when I was a member. When asked about this by another student he simply remarked: 'I record it,' that is, he was trying to make honest observations about what it might mean. Robert Burton asked him, 'Do you feel Influence C pinching you?' to which he replied that he did not. By the Teacher's own account he, the Teacher, was intending to retire at that point and pass on the mantle, however things worked out otherwise and this possible man no. 5 was sidelined in the further history of the school.

Two 'conscious beings' is not a great track record for a school that at its zenith had over two thousand members worldwide, a few of whom have by now been in the school upwards of forty years.

CENTRES OF GRAVITY AND BODY TYPES

You're nothing but a pack of cards!

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

I do not recall reading anywhere in Gurdjieff's or Ouspensky's works the idea of body types or centres of gravity. The idea of body types appears to derive from Rodney Collin's *Theory of Celestial Influence* and that of centres of gravity is, as far as I can tell, an innovation by Robert Burton, although I do not know for certain.

In essence both sets of ideas are peripheral to the aim of the fourth way, but they have their uses. Both sets of ideas provide a framework in which one can identify the mechanics of one's 'machine.' This enables one better to understand one's mechanical or automatic reactions to people and situations and thus become more forgiving and accepting of oneself and others.

The idea of centres of gravity appears to be an embellishment on the division of the body into head, heart and guts, or intellectual centre, emotional centre and instinctive-moving centre, which is discussed in *In Search of the Miraculous*. Whereas Ouspensky only talks about these centres in each of us in relation to their basic functions and various speeds, the Fellowship system additionally proposes that each of us operates preferentially from one or more of these centres. In the Fellowship system each of these centres is associated with one of the suits in an ordinary deck of playing cards: clubs for instinctive centre, spades for the moving centre, hearts for the emotional centre and diamonds for the intellectual centre, with each centre further divided into head, heart and guts, or in the Fellowship nomenclature, king, queen and jack.

Thus the moving part of the intellectual centre is the part that free-associates mechanically and stores facts, the emotional part of the intellectual centre is the part that gets excited about new knowledge, and the intellectual part of the intellectual centre can weigh up things intentionally, and can hold an idea without necessarily believing it. The intellectual part of the intellectual centre is called the king of diamonds, the emotional part is the queen and the instinctive-moving part is the jack. Similarly with the other centres, the kings of centres are the parts that can act intentionally, and while these parts do not act consciously as such, they are considered to be the gateway to consciousness and 'higher centres,' symbolised by the jokers.

Each part of each centre is further subdivided into king, queen and jack. Given that each centre is subdivided in this way, each of the four lower centres is divided into a total of nine subdivisions which are designated two to ten.

Specifically the gateway to higher centres is the queen of the king of hearts, that is, the nine of hearts, that is, the emotional part of the intellectual part of the emotional centre. Such is the baroque complexity of Ouspensky's system as embellished through the Fellowship. There is at any rate room for a St Mary figure, if she be the nine of hearts within who gives birth to the conscious being.

So, in terms of the system I am supposed to be intellectually-centred (diamonds), but not the king of diamonds (those rare people who think deeply for what seems ages before answering a question), rather the jack, a collector of random information, a magpie (or perhaps the jack of the queen). You might already have deduced that.

The body type theory derives from Rodney Collin's speculations about the endocrine glands, at least what was known about them in the early 1950s. In *The Theory of Celestial Influence* he lists the endocrine glands that were known at the time (many more hormones have been discovered since) and associates them with the planets. He then places them on

Gurdjieff's enneagram, a nine-pointed diagram arranged around a circle (see next section).

There are of course historical precedents for associating certain character types with the Roman gods and by association with the heavenly bodies, and it is perhaps not an unnatural stretch also to associate character types with endocrine glands. Taking the next step and associating character types with planetary influences is of course highly speculative.

Thus we know what someone means when they talk about a jovial type, someone jocular, good-humoured and tending to the rotund. Jove is another name for Jupiter, father of the Roman gods, and Jupiter is the largest of the planets, with many moons circling it. Thus jovial types attract admirers and hangers-on (although until Galileo no-one knew about Jupiter's moons, and even then Galileo only identified four of them). Examples might include Samuel Johnson who was at the centre of coffee-house intellectual debate in the eighteenth century, or Shakespeare's fictitious character Falstaff. Rodney Collin then associates Jupiter with the anterior pituitary gland, a gland that modulates the activity of a number of other glands, including the thyroid, adrenals, and ovaries.

Similarly we can talk about martial types after Mars, god of war: people of a certain directness and impulsiveness of action. We think of Alexander the Great cutting the Gordian knot with his sword instead of untying it. Collin associates the martial type with the adrenal glands, source of the 'fight or flight' hormone adrenaline. Similarly Rodney Collin manages to associate other types, lunar, mercurial, venusian and so on with various of the endocrine glands, some more plausibly than others.

Advisers in psychology and business sometimes use other classifications of type, such as other variations on Gurdjieff's enneagram, or the entirely different Myers-Briggs classification. However such classifications are based on

observation of manifestations only and so are bound to be somewhat arbitrary and circular. Lunar types tend to be solitary and introverted. Because I tend to be solitary and introverted I am a lunar type. There is nothing underpinning this, unless the link with the endocrine glands is correct, for which I know of no evidence whatever (the lunar type is supposed to be associated with the pancreas—I'm not sure why—insulin puts sugar back in the cells as lunars go back in their shells?). There is even less reason to suppose that the endocrine glands are under the influence of the planets. But as a way of helping us accept ourselves and others as we are, it has its uses.

From childhood I was shy and under-confident and even as a much more confident adult I do not mix easily with others. I find small-talk difficult and it is a skill I have had to acquire through effort and practice. Thus to understand that this is simply my 'type' was something of a relief. My type is neither good nor bad, just one of many. As the song says, 'I am who I'm meant to be, this is me.'

As with the 'centres of gravity,' such classifications can be helpful but in my view not essential, curiosities perhaps useful at times. No type is said to be superior to any other in terms of spiritual understanding, but it may determine what we love and what we seem naturally good at.

Up to a point there is some truth in the idea of centres of gravity and perhaps body types, but I do not think that should pre-determine one's fate. That I am not instinctively centred may account for why I am not a chef, but that does not stop me from learning to cook meals that are accounted tasty by my family. I have seen a class of children learning to dance and it is obvious by the age of four or five which ones already seem to have dancing in them and which are a little awkward. Even so I saw one who at age ten seemed lacking in grace, two years on perform a solo with considerable beauty. Sufficient love of something and sufficient effort can produce surprising results.

THE ENNEAGRAM

The enneagram, Gurdjieff's diagram of nine points, has been subsequently adopted by all kinds of people to classify supposed relationships between things, not always with any obvious connection with the diagram as originally set out.

I am principally familiar with it as a diagram of the relationships between the various body types, and as a way of understanding our different essences it is as good as any. Classifying ourselves and each other in this way can help in understanding our 'mechanics,' why we do things in particular characteristic ways, that we are not unique, and that our differences from other types need not result in self-deprecation or negative judgements of others. We are what we are.

Rodney Collin claimed that there is a circulation within the enneagram, such that each body type tends towards the next one in the flow of the diagram. Thus a lunar type, during the course of spiritual evolution, will tend to become more venusian, venusians will become more mercurial, and so on. This is another of those ideas that seem to lack evidence.

A curiosity is that the flow inside the enneagram is the same as the decimal expansion of one seventh, that is, 0.142857 recurring: all the digits except 3, 6 and 9.

THE FOOD DIAGRAM

To awaken, the fourth way system of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky says we need to accumulate higher hydrogens.

Here in a few words is the scheme:

By repeated efforts over a long period of time it is possible to wake up fully, to become conscious in the terms of the System;

Through self-remembering one accumulates higher hydrogens—finer substances which crystallise in one—in this process consciousness can be made permanent;

Beyond a certain level of attainment, what has been gained cannot be lost, and that person becomes effectively immortal.

To accumulate higher hydrogens the various foods are transformed by the mechanism of the body, seen as a factory. There are three food types: ordinary food, air and impressions. Ordinary food is transformed into finer substances by air (corresponding to the various chemical processes of digestion and assimilation), and finer substances still are formed from the two conscious shocks, self-remembering and voluntary suffering. Every day the organism is given or generates enough energy to accumulate finer substances, eventually to build a soul, but ordinarily this energy is wasted in unnecessary talk and the expression of negative emotions.

All this relates to the food diagram, which is explained in detail in *In Search of the Miraculous*. Further elaboration is to be found in Beckwith's Ouspensky's *Fourth Way*.⁶¹

What can we make of these finer substances? And what are we to make of the claim that acquiring a soul will make us immortal?

HIGHER HYDROGENS

In *In Search of the Miraculous* Ouspensky discusses Gurdjieff's concept of 'hydrogens,' the idea that the universe is composed of different orders of substance, the finer interpenetrating the coarser. According to Gurdjieff, everything, even the Absolute is material, but a very fine type of material. These finer types of substance, or higher hydrogens, are unknown to modern science.⁶²

A friend once light-heartedly asked whether in California it was possible to buy higher hydrogens in a jar. I suppose if there were anywhere on the planet where you could buy

⁶¹ *In Search of the Miraculous* pp.182-192; Beckwith pp. 222-232

⁶² *In Search of the Miraculous* pp.86-90

higher hydrogens in a jar it would be California. Of course if we adopt a materialist world view then we feel as though higher hydrogens ought to be something we could somehow see or feel or otherwise demonstrate the existence of in some physical way.⁶³

However I have another take on this.

We experience many real things that do not have a recognised chemical structure, like the emotions of aesthetic experience or sexual attraction, for example. We can be in low moods or light states, and sometimes our states of mind can be changed by places, like a fine garden or the sea. Sometimes, when in the kind of love that invades us, usually but not always in youth, the whole world is transformed into a place infused with painful wonder.⁶⁴ We might I suppose try, as some have, to link various emotional states with various brain neurotransmitters. But it is more natural to think of the whole experience of the garden and our state of mind as one thing, as though somehow the feeling of the garden and the feeling evoked by it shared the same substance. We even say, metaphorically, 'there must be something in the air.' Somehow the explanation that it is just an increase of serotonin, endorphins or whatever in the brain doesn't really feel as though it explains anything. (In any event, I don't think neuroscientists would seriously claim that it's that simple.)

Considering that Gurdjieff's system supposedly came from Central Asia in the 19th century, and may possibly derive from a Sufi tradition a few hundred years old, that is, long before the chemists of the eighteenth century, then it would

⁶³ Most of the matter in the universe is so-called 'dark matter' which we also cannot buy in a jar in California or anywhere else, but there is no reason to think either that it is a higher hydrogen or that it doesn't exist, although we don't know what it is.

⁶⁴ 'Pains of love be sweeter far than all other pleasures are.' Dryden (1631-1700), Ah, how sweet it is to love!

not be unnatural for the thinkers of those earlier times to attribute the states evoked by people and places to finer or coarser substances.

We have already considered that the kinds of concept that we use to describe biological phenomena are quite different from the concepts that physicists use in describing the atomic and subatomic worlds. We are usually content to use yet other types of language to discuss painting or music. So there is no reason in principle why quite other concepts than those of ordinary chemistry should not be useful in describing (for example) states of being evoked by landscapes, people, food, works of art, buildings or books.

It seems to me that there is some sense in classifying things according to their 'hydrogen' or the 'world' they belong to (see next section), although Gurdjieff never explained to Ouspensky why he used the term *hydrogen*. Nevertheless Ouspensky is clear that Gurdjieff's view is that the whole universe is material, and that there are different degrees of matter, some finer than others, which are not recognised by modern science. While we may recognise the states, it is difficult to know how one would verify that these states are related to actual substances, as opposed to the more conventional view that these states represent different relationships between things and our perceptions of them.

One implication of the theory that these states are underpinned by actual subtle substances is that it opens up the possibility of life after the death of the physical body. That is, when the body composed of *hydrogen 48* drops away, a body within it composed of *hydrogen 24* might somehow persist. However for this we are offered no evidence.

HIGHER WORLDS

The idea of *hydrogens* is related to the idea of *worlds*. The *worlds* are designated by numbers, which relate to the idea that each *world* or level of existence is under a certain number of laws. The finer worlds are said to be under fewer laws.

Nowhere in the literature have I come across any explanation of what these laws are, and the questions of new students about that were usually brushed off with some vague waffle which I don't remember. Even so there is some intuitive sense to the idea. When we are awake we are able to accomplish a lot more than when dreaming, and when cured of some neurotic compulsion or fear we are freer than before. We are under fewer laws, so to speak (for example, the law that you must cower behind the furniture until a spider is removed from the room).

World 48 is characterised as a normal, ordinary state, neither high nor low, like a blank piece of paper. World 96 is the world of coarse impressions. World 24 is the state of essence, the child-like, guileless state of simplicity and wonder. World 12 is essence together with awakened consciousness. World 12 impressions are said to be rare. One student had the opinion that Andrei Rublev's ikon of the three angels who visited Abraham is a World 12 impression.

FOOD FOR THE MOON

Everything eats and is eaten, Gurdjieff tells us. After death our energy goes to the Moon, which belongs to world 96.

According to Gurdjieff there are two streams: a descending stream in which energy flows from the Absolute outwards into creation, and a much smaller ascending stream which flows upwards, back towards the origin. The stream is called the *ray of creation*. It is the job of those who choose to be in the Work to join the smaller, upward-flowing stream.

The moon is supposedly at the end of the ray of creation. It will gradually evolve to become more like the earth, and the earth in turn will gradually evolve towards becoming a sun. The moon is supposedly fed by the souls of those who swim in the downward, outward stream.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ In *Search of the Miraculous* pp.83,85

There is nothing in modern physics to suggest that a body like the earth could ever be massive enough to become a star. The sun has about a million times more mass than the earth and its heat and light are powered by fusion reactions involving hydrogen (the kind of hydrogen that conventional physics knows about). The earth has relatively little hydrogen in elemental form and is too small ever to be a sun. The moon is too small to retain much of an atmosphere and there is no known mechanism by which it could somehow grow, short of accumulating an enormous number of impacts with asteroids. In defence of Ouspensky, the idea that the sun might be powered by nuclear fusion was first suggested in 1920 by Sir Arthur Eddington, and that the most abundant element in the sun was hydrogen was not discovered until 1925 by Cecilia Payne and was ignored, partly, one suspects, because Payne was a woman.⁶⁶ Gurdjieff's cosmology fitted, almost, if you didn't think about it too hard, into a gap in contemporary understanding, although it should still have strained the credulity of an educated person at the time.

How did I come to believe it? I didn't. I accepted without challenge that descending souls would end up in the moon and thought no more about it. It was never central to why I was there and I gave it very little thought. I never thought seriously about the idea that the earth might become a sun, and I never for a moment accepted Ouspensky's belief that humans are not descended from apes.⁶⁷ My focus was very much on awakening.

If the cosmology of the fourth way is to make any sense at all, it has to be taken as some kind of allegory, because taken at face value it is fantastical.

⁶⁶ Lucie Green, *15 Million Degrees*, Viking Penguin 2016 p.47

⁶⁷ *Psychology* p.10

FEMININE DOMINANCE

This is not a name I have found in the fourth way literature, and I think it is an innovation by Robert Burton. *Feminine dominance* is the force that keeps us doing what we are doing, in other words, that keeps us mechanical. I think somewhere Gurdjieff refers to a similar idea as the *general law*. I don't know why Robert Burton called it *feminine dominance*.

On a cosmic level it is 'what keeps the planets in their orbits' (what ordinary folk call the laws of physics). On a personal level it is doing what is expected of us, whether or not such behaviour is in our interest or in the interest of others.

Once I was on holiday with my family in Cornwall and we met a couple who had recently moved there (not, as far as I was aware, belonging to any kind of esoteric school). The husband explained that he had once been on a course and part of the learning experience was to increase personal freedom by acting against what people expect and trying not to be affected by it. The exercise involved pulling a banana on a string through the street. Apparently he had accomplished this. Anyway, our two families decided to attend a meeting in the town which was advertised as a brief presentation by the bank followed by cheese and wine. Free cheese and wine, we thought, so we went. The presentation was so unutterably boring and so protracted that after a while I realised that we were all sitting there because of this 'general law,' since frankly the cheese and wine would not compensate for it. I reminded our new friend about the banana and finally we all left.

On the one hand it is good to be able to do what is right irrespective of what other people think. On the other hand some seem to interpret it as giving *carte blanche* to all kinds of barely legal behaviour. 'Going against feminine dominance' can lead to a feeling that illegal activity is acceptable. Once a student was in danger of losing his driver's licence because of a repeat speeding offence. He asked students in the 'good

householder' part of a meeting whether anyone would say that they had been driving his car on the day in question, thus acquiring the extra points but not being banned. I had to point out to him that this was fraud and not something that anyone with any sense would indulge in. I also came across a number of marriages which looked as though they might have to do with immigration to the United States. Also, many of the developments at the headquarters of the Fellowship were allegedly done without proper planning permission, and covered up from aerial view by the positioning of prodigious numbers of palm trees.

It can be ethically correct to break the law for the sake of a compelling moral imperative, usually only in extreme circumstances. If breaking the law results in one's own advantage one should question one's motivation.

THE LAW OF SEVEN

The law of seven tells us that all events proceed in steps corresponding to the notes in the musical octave. Ouspensky explains that each octave has two intervals, corresponding to the semitones between *mi* and *fa* and between *si* and *do*. At the intervals extra energy is required to bridge the interval, otherwise the octave takes a new direction. Ouspensky says that unless this intentional energy is put in at the intervals, an octave is likely to deviate, and if this pattern is repeated one can end up doing almost the opposite of what one first intended. "This law shows why straight lines never occur in our activities, why, having begun to do one thing, we in fact constantly do something entirely different, often the opposite of the first, although we do not notice this and continue to think that we are doing the same thing that we began to do."⁶⁸

We can all think of activities that begin with enthusiasm, like starting to learn a new language, and then hit an

⁶⁸ In *Search of the Miraculous* pp.128-9

inevitable interval where difficulty dominates and progress seems almost to stop. We despair of ever achieving anything close to fluency. Only dogged determination, or the encouragement of a friend or a good teacher can take us beyond the interval into further progress. That is, there needs to be what Ouspensky called a 'parallel octave' or an external shock to help the first octave bridge its interval.

On a political level there have been events like the Russian revolution, the effects of which Ouspensky was all too familiar with, taking its justification from relieving the oppression of the proletariat and resulting in one of the most murderous oppressions in history. This is an example of setting out to do one thing and ending up doing the opposite. An example of a parallel octave might be a country with an independent judiciary. The existence of an independent judiciary can, with good will and vigilance, keep a government on the straight and narrow path when it might otherwise degenerate into a tyranny. The one octave proceeding normally can sustain the other past the interval.

Critics of the Fellowship might see the same law at work, with the interval not being bridged. I would go further and say that from my perspective it felt like a *descending octave*.

Although the idea of intervals fits everyday events very well, I have not met anyone who could explain the significance of the other notes in the octave, what it might mean to be at *sol* or *la* in an activity.

THE LAW OF THREE

According to the law of three, nothing can take place without a third force. For every event there is first force which initiates the activity, second or denying force which opposes it, and third force which allows it to happen.

In the morning when the alarm radio comes on, I remember I must get up for work. I still feel tired because I am not a morning person, so I stay in bed a few more minutes. Finally something changes and I find my body

moving out of bed almost without my willing it. Is it that the first thing I am going to do is make coffee, and the coffee happens to be very good? I'm not actually sure what the third force is, but something has broken the impasse.

Rodney Collin and Francis Roles developed the idea of three forces into the six processes, in which the three forces interact in different ways.⁶⁹

I cannot in honesty say that this idea has been particularly practical in my life. I suppose, though, if something isn't working it is reasonable to ask what third force could be brought to bear on it to allow things to progress in the desired direction. It might be something as simple as a phone call or a smile.

INTENTIONAL INSINCERITY

Intentional insincerity is a term used in the Fellowship meaning 'the practice, in order to further one's aim, of saying something which is not strictly true in circumstances where it will not cause real harm to anyone.'⁷⁰

It is an idea I have never had any time for, even in the depths of belief. I have known students to use it for some lower aim as though to deceive 'life' people is perfectly legitimate. It isn't. It is a tool used to further the aims of what the School calls 'the lower self.'

At most, I would avoid mentioning the School and my involvement in it, but this was not difficult because almost nobody was interested in any case.

I have always seen dishonesty as a way unnecessarily to complicate life and to put one's relation to reality at one remove. It is to be avoided by anyone who does not wish to have to waste energy on fabrications. A direct and open relation to the truth is necessary for inner tranquility.

⁶⁹ *The Theory of Celestial Influence*, pp.172-203

⁷⁰ Girard Haven, *Creating a soul*, p. 596

THE ARK

Here as always I must, for the sake of avoiding self-deception, record my own gullibility. In my early days in the School it was suggested that one could regard oneself as if one were an interesting stranger. With a little effort I can perhaps succeed in this, recording my weaknesses without either indulging in guilt or making myself look better than I am.

Early on in the School I was aware of Robert's prediction that sooner or later nuclear armageddon would occur. This came as no surprise to me, since before meeting the School (or even realising that I wanted to find one) I had been active in the peace movement. The Cuban missile crisis (1962) was in the news when I was a child old enough to understand. In the eighties and nineties an escalating arms race made nuclear war frighteningly likely, with the already dangerous doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD—as satirised in Kubrik's film *Dr Strangelove*) being made obsolete by more accurate weapons and by President Ronald Reagan's Star Wars programme, which could potentially make a first strike look like a viable option for a paranoid government.

In 1990 I had travelled with IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War) and a small delegation from the Western Shoshone Nation to Moscow and Kazakhstan, in order to protest at nuclear weapons testing and to push for a global nuclear test ban treaty. I suspect that we were being played, both by Eduard Shevardnadze (then Soviet Foreign Minister) and by local Kazakh politicians, while at the same time we were ignored in the West (apart from a letter I wrote which was published in the *European*). I came away disillusioned with the peace movement: not that it was not well-intentioned, but that it was ineffective. I felt that real change had to begin at the human rather than the political level. I had heard the six-handshakes theory, which holds that every human being is no more than six handshakes from any other. Real change

must start with work on oneself. It was in the following year that I joined the School.

Early on a student told me in hushed tones Robert's prediction about nuclear war. The idea was that in exchange for esoteric knowledge, Influence C requires a payment, and that payment is the creation of an Ark so that civilisation can survive a nuclear war. While the idea of an Ark in relation to a global catastrophe was not something I had known about before, it did not surprise me. If anything I was more surprised by the way other students 'buffered' the topic—people do not like to think about what the real consequences of nuclear war would be—a topic I had read about in some detail. The student, a kindly elderly lady, added that the birthmark on Gorbachev's forehead indicated, according to Robert, that Russia would suffer 'a direct hit.'

When I later visited Apollo (then Renaissance) it did occur to me that it was totally unprepared. The School did not measure up as a survivalist organisation at all, and my rationalisation for this was that, after all, the main purpose of a school of awakening is awakening, not the strengthening of the instinctive part. It seemed to me that Robert's various predictions were aimed at reminding us of our mortality and of the impermanence of the things we become attached to, the better to bring us to appreciation of the present moment, the only thing we have for certain.

I think it was probably in 2006 that I was in Apollo (then named Isis for the Egyptian goddess and before the terrorist organisation of that name was heard of). This was the year that Robert first predicted the fall of California (he did again later). I was sitting next but one to him at one of the dinners held in the formal garden at the back of the Galleria (now the Academy). I remember Robert saying, 'I am so excited!' He was actually looking forward to the event, when he assumed that Apollo would be spared and would become a coastal city. It did cross my mind at the time that such a catastrophe would involve millions of drowned and that to

be looking forward to it was an inappropriate emotion. But I did not question Robert as a teacher. At a similar dinner not long afterwards, when California had failed to fall into the sea, Robert referred to an item of news that there had been a large earthquake in Iran. He said that Iran was on the opposite side of the world to California and took this as a sign from Influence C that the prediction was partly right. Both California and Iran are north of the equator, San Francisco at 37.8N and Iran (Luristan) at 33.4N. For there to be any correspondence the longitudes would have to be separated by 180 degrees. California (San Francisco) is 122.4W and Iran (Luristan) is 48.4E, making a separation of 170.8 degrees. I did look at a map but I didn't do the sums, and I accepted it, wide-eyed, in the way Robert intended.

It is hard to believe any more in the idea of Apollo or the School being an Ark given that the School population is ageing and the world-wide membership is diminishing.

The preparedness of Apollo for nuclear war was always close to non-existent. Beale Air Force Base is a United States Air Force base located approximately 12 miles south of Apollo, and would be an obvious target for incoming nuclear missiles in the event of an all-out nuclear conflict. An airburst would probably be sufficient to ground any planes that are dependent on modern electronic equipment (presumably all of them) because of EMP (electromagnetic pulse) effects alone, and this would not cause radiation fallout. However a ground-burst could not be ruled out. Either way, electricity would be knocked out in Apollo and it is likely that motor vehicles would also be affected as well as any other equipment dependent on microchips. A car with an old-fashioned carburettor and choke might still work as long as there was petrol, however the delivery of petrol would no doubt cease and the pumps would not work if the electricity was cut off.

Most water at Apollo is pumped up from wells tens of feet underground. In the event that the electricity grid went

down, getting water would become an immediate problem. Pumps would have to run on fuels other than electricity unless the electricity were generated locally. There are a number of small lakes on the property at Apollo, but no natural irrigation.

Wildfires would be likely, depending on the time of year. Even without a war, wildfires have been devastating. The town of Paradise some 56km (35 miles) north-west of Apollo was completely destroyed by such a fire in November 2018.

In the event of a ground-burst there would be considerable radiation and the level at Apollo would depend on the wind direction. I heard that there was the thought of using the winery as a fallout shelter. There is some plausibility to that, given that it is a large concrete structure, but survivors would have to remain indoors for at least two weeks to avoid significant radiation exposure. There would have been plenty of wine in 2006, although now the wine is being sold off. There are now a number of animals including turkeys and camels, so there might be sufficient meat for a while.

In an all-out nuclear war, a nuclear winter would probably follow, similar to or worse than the volcanic winter following the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815, which was followed by 'the year without a summer' and global food shortages. Obtaining food would become a problem, and all food would have to be sourced locally.

All of this was apparent to me even during the time of my committed membership, however I rationalised it. First, it was explicit that the Fellowship was not a survivalist organisation, and that its prime purpose was the awakening of its students. Too much attention to the details of physical survival too soon would encourage identification with the instinctive centre. There was no stockpiling of food and there were no caches of armaments or any reference to training in firearms (the owning of firearms was banned in the Fellowship in 1980). Second, I assumed that should there be a disaster (and I made no efforts to move to Apollo in

anticipation of it) that Influence C would somehow take care of it. Third, I assumed that Robert made these predictions in order to remind students not to identify too much with present material gains, since in the end all is wiped away. In sum, for my own part I did not analyse too closely the contradictions implicit in the predictions. Robert has said that Schools do not make sense, a point underlined by the later arrival of the camels to Apollo. The predictions certainly did not make sense.

As regards the anticipated fall of California in 2018, one student posted a warning notice in the post office nearest the Fellowship's headquarters in California, but Robert Burton was reportedly not happy about it. There is a kind of callous madness that results from the System, at least as it was understood in the Fellowship.

