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Gurdjieff in the Light of Tradition
Part III: The Phenomenon

by

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There is an Eastern tale which speaks about a very rich magician who had a great many sheep. But at the same time this magician was very mean. He did not want to hire shepherds, nor did he want to erect a fence about the pasture where his sheep were grazing. The sheep consequently often wandered into the forest, fell into ravines, and so on, and above all they ran away, for they knew that the magician wanted their flesh and skins and this they did not like.

At last the magician found a remedy. He hypnotized his sheep and suggested to them first of all that they were immortal and that no harm was being done to them when they were skinned, that, on the contrary, it would be very good for them and even pleasant; secondly he suggested that the magician was a good master who loved his flock so much that he was ready to do anything in the world for them; and in the third place he suggested to them that if anything at all were going to happen to them it was not going to happen just then, at any rate not that day, and therefore they had no need to think about it. Further the magician suggested to his sheep that they were not sheep at all; to some of them he suggested that they were lions, to others that they were eagles, to others that they were men, and to others that they were magicians.

And after this all his cares and worries about the sheep came to an end. They never ran away again but quietly awaited the time when the magician would require their flesh and skins.

This tale is a very good illustration of man's position.

Particularly if "man" here stands for the disciples of the magician who told this tale, namely, Gurdjieff.

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IN *The Verdict of Bridlegoose,* Llewelyn Powys describes his visit to the theatre in New York in 1924 where the "dance movements" were being performed. He was able to observe Gurdjieff, who stood smoking near the entrance. The impression Powys had was of a horse jobber, with an indefinable something else which strangely affected the nerves. This feeling was heightened when the pupils came on stage like a warren of rabbits hypnotized under the gaze of a master

charlatan. Other spectators with whom Powys talked compared the dancers to frightened mice.

Another British author, Rom Landau, relates in his book *God is My Adventure,* an encounter he had with the thaumaturge in the latter's New York hotel room in the early thirties. Explaining that he himself is not at all telepathic, given to mediumship, or subject to hypnotism, Landau says that he nevertheless took the precaution to fix his attention on a young man monitoring the meeting, in order to avoid the "flame" emanating from his host's eyes. To no avail. In a few seconds he felt his body from the waist down penetrated with a growing weakness enough to render him incapable of leaving his chair had he tried. Only by mustering all his concentration in talk with the young attendant did he finally manage to extricate himself from this "magic circle". Upon departing he was presented by Gurdjieff with a copy of his *Herald of Coming Good*; it was bound in imitation suède, but of a grain so abrasive it made the teeth grind at the very touch. Landau realized that this was all part of an effect deliberately calculated by the author—whose book reads, moreover, as though conceived in clouds of Armagnac (the opening sentence alone, by Landau's count, contains not less than two hundred and eighty-four words).

In an anonymous tract, "Glimpses of Truth," which gives the earliest known report of Gurdjieff and his teachings as encountered near Moscow in 1914, the author writes: "His eyes particularly attracted my attention, not so much in themselves as by the way he looked at me when he greeted me, not as if he saw me for the first time but as though he had known me long and well".

Ouspensky describing his first meeting writes of those "piercing eyes," while de Hartmann for his part was right away struck by "the man with 'those eyes'…of unusual depth and penetration. The word 'beautiful' would hardly be appropriate, but I will say that until that moment I had never seen such eyes nor felt such a look".

Solita Solano spoke of "this 'strange' *écru* man about whom I could see nothing extraordinary except the size and power of his eyes".

Bennett called them "the strangest eyes I have ever seen. The two eyes were so different that I wondered if the light had played some trick on me. But Mrs. Beaumont afterwards made the same remark, and added that the difference was in the expression and not in any kind of cast or defect in either eye".

A random look at the photographs of the man in question does indeed show a marked dissymmetry between the eyes, that is, the upturned gaze of each follows a distinctly different axis—a trait characteristic in pathological personalities, although the inverse does not hold, as this idiosyncrasy may have purely physical causes with no ulterior connotations. It is, however, significant to hear Gurdjieff speak in his preamble to *Beelzebub of* "my peculiar psyche," and of "my brain —which is for me, constructed unsuccessfully to the point of mockery.…"

These eyes, then, betoken a magnetic personality without for that necessarily being the

direct instrument or vehicle of hypnosis, which rather was produced by a psychic power operating on the sanguinary system—if the claims of *Beelzebub's* protagonist can be considered as really referring to his author's own technique: "I then invented and very soon became expert in…a certain hindering of the movement of the blood in certain blood vessels.

"By means of this hindering I obtained the result that although the already mechanized tempo of the blood circulation of their waking state remained in beings, yet at the same time their real consciousness, that is, the one which they themselves call subconsciousness, began also to function".

This action on the circulatory system might explain the sensation of weakness experienced by Rom Landau.

Beelzebub with a knowing smile of endearment—horns, tail, hooves and all—lovingly goes on to tell his grandson, Hassein, how prior to his invention concerning the "difference-of-the-filling-of-the-bloodvessels," he had to hypnotize through expenditure of his *hanbledzoin* —a means proving very harmful to his "being-existence".

All evidence nonetheless indicates that this mysterious *hanbledzoin* is in fact the hypnotic agent acting on the "psychic bloodstream," or what Gurdjieff calls the *"Inkliazanikshanas"* of the *"Kesdjan body"*; therefore one can suppose that a general aura of it was a constant feature of his person, while the deployment which he experienced as harmful only came about at moments of highly concentrated expenditure of this magnetic force.

By way of example, Peters tells how he in 1945 in a state of shock and shattered nerves managed to obtain military leave at Luxembourg to go to Paris, obsessed with the idea of somehow finding Gurdjieff in the war's wake. Summoning the last ounce of energy he finally located the man's address and apartment, where he arrived ready to collapse. Gurdjieff immediately ushered him in, preparing a coffee upon observing his visitor's condition: "I remember being slumped over the table, sipping at my coffee, when I began to feel a strange uprising of energy within myself—I stared at him, automatically straightened up, and it was as if a violent, electric blue light emanated from him and entered into me. As this happened, I could feel the tiredness drain out of me, but at the same moment his body slumped and his face turned grey as if it was being drained of life".

Gurdjieff excused himself and limped out of the kitchen, only to return some fifteen minutes later "like a young man again, alert, smiling, sly and full of good spirits. He said that this was a very fortunate meeting, and that while I had forced him to make an almost impossible effort, it had been—as I had witnessed—a very good thing for both of us".

Bennett underwent a similar experience many years earlier at the Prieuré, at a time when his body was racked by chronic dysentery to the point where he could hardly quit his bed. Driven, however, "by a superior Will that was not my own," he forced himself through some torturous

dance exercises "of incredible complexity," so exhausting that one pupil after another dropped out: "Gradually, I became aware that Gurdjieff was putting all his attention on me….Suddenly, I was filled with the influx of an immense power. My body seemed to have turned into light….It was exultation in the faith that can move mountains".

Instead of joining the others for tea, Bennett went digging in the kitchen garden to test this new power. At the end of an hour's furious labour in the fierce heat of afternoon he still felt no fatigue, and the diarrhoea was gone. He later walked into the forest, where he came upon Gurdjieff and his explanation of this metamorphosis, as being the result of contact with what he calls the "Higher Emotional Energy":

> "There are some people in the world, but they are very rare, who are connected to a Great Reservoir or Accumulator of this energy. This Reservoir has no limits.[1] Those who can draw upon it can be a means of helping others. Suppose that a man needs a hundred units of this energy for his own transformation, but he only has ten units and cannot make more for himself. He is helpless. But with the help of someone who can draw upon the Great Accumulator, he can borrow ninety more. Then his work can be effective….Those who have this quality belong to a special part of the highest caste of humanity".

What is he talking about? To situate these remarks, it is necessary to cite the conclusion Guénon draws from his observations on shamanism and sorcery that were summarized in the first part of this study: Just as it is known in connection with what is termed "sacred geography" that sanctuaries, shrines, and places of pilgrimage serve as repositories of spiritual and benefit psychic influences, so inversely is it known concerning cases where the spirituality in centres formerly sacred has become extinct, "that there are in the world a certain number of 'reservoirs' of [malefic] influences [namely, residual psychic forces of an inferior order], the distribution of which is certainly no matter of chance, serving only too well the designs of the 'powers' responsible for the whole modern deviation," since they or more strictly their "emissaries" know how to conjure up and "galvanize" these residual energies through a kind of necromancy, in view of exploiting them for subversive ends.

However one turns these words, the essential point is unmistakable: that all extra-mundane powers of whatever sort are not simply drawn out of empty air but must have one of two sources depending on their nature: either they come from the celestial world as vehicled through authentic, living traditions, or else they come from the nether world as channelled through the fissures left by ancient traditions whether deviated, disintegrating, or already extinct. A seeming ambiguity arises when there is an interpenetration from the two domains, but the determining criterion is given in the Gospel observation: "He that is not with me is against me". Guénon adds in what more particularly concerns deviated branches of shamanism, that when the apparent custodians of a tradition from which all spirituality has withdrawn still live on, this confers a far

[1] Gurdjieff is not being consistent with himself here, because as was demonstrated in the section on the teachings, he considered that *everything* is material, with limitations on the quantity available.

greater vitality to the powers than can be the case with anything emanating from purely "inanimate" objects.

Now to get back to Gurdjieff, no one can dispute that he was born with a charismatic personality; but this does not explain his powers, at the most it only helps explain why he rather than someone else had them. And he certainly did not draw them out of thin air. It would be disastrous to underestimate his character to claim that he indulged in nothing more than humbuggery, and it would be a mis-appraisement in Bennett's words, "to treat him as an isolated phenomenon, unique and self-sufficient. He himself emphatically refuted such suggestions. I have more than once heard him say: 'Every man has a teacher. Even I, Gurdjieff, have my teacher.' " It is noteworthy that he never from the time his basic teachings were first known to the end of his life in any manner altered them; and while the reader may be unable to liken the "epic" *Beelzebub*—the way some people have done—to the *Iliad,* the *Song of Roland,* the *Arabian Nights,* the *Song of Songs,* the *Gospel of Saint John,* the *Mahâbhârata,* the *Râmâyana,* and the *Tao Te Ching,* the fact remains that there is not a sentence inconsistent with the book's overall structure; a random sampling suffices to show that the vocabulary and technical terms—however outrageous—are always exact within their framework, —which is all the more striking, given the distracting conditions in which the opus was written. Gurdjieff in other words did not simply "chew-the-eraser-on-his-pencil," as his beloved Mullah Nassr Eddin might have put it; he relayed a "school"—or anyway a mode—of thought.

We have already seen in the preceding section of this paper that he owed nothing directly to the great orthodox religions of the world, his interest in them at best certainly being no more than cursory; and we have likewise noted in the first section his fascination with the ruins of Babylon and the "Sarmân Brotherhood," as also with Manichaeism, Mithraism, shamanism, and other decaying elements or extinct relics of "ancient wisdom"—including something called the "Imastun Brotherhood" supposedly flourishing seventy generations before the Flood. Beelzebub, incidentally, is depicted as being most ancient and venerable—in keeping with the image which the author strived to convey of his own person.

If, then, it can be admitted that Gurdjieff was a man endowed with a "mission," and that at the same time he was not delegated by any of the orthodox religions on earth, one is thereby obliged in good faith and logic to seek out the origins of his "investiture" elsewhere. Now, one mark characterizing the "residual" nature of his "ancient sources" is the tenebrous and contradictory quality attaching to his person and teachings, so fugitive that to seize hold is like trying to catch an eel, or grasping at sand.

"Despite our ready response little if any instruction materialized," wrote Miss Gladys Alexander, a pupil in the early Prieuré days, "though it was remarkable how the mere prospect of it revived our flagging energies. We lived on anticipation".

At times Gurdjieff seemed to Peters "a prophet of doom and disaster and hopelessness,"

since he taught that the "impossible" was the only thing worth attaining; yet "he nevertheless gave an effect of great encouragement and hope".

Ouspensky and the Moscow/St. Petersburg group were continually baffled by their Master's paradoxical way of erecting a whole cosmological system for them to ponder on, only to abandon it for another equally complicated theory at another session.

One day Gurdjieff set up an entirely new classification of "hydrogens" according to cosmic traits which was based on an altogether different ratio of octaves than the one the pupils had learned. "This diagram will not be very comprehensible to you at first," he said, "but gradually you will learn to make it out. Only for a long time you will have to take it separately from all the rest".

Adds Ouspensky: "This was in fact all I heard from G. about this strange diagram which actually appeared to upset a great deal of what had been said before".

"The growth of knowledge in one domain evokes the growth of ignorance in another," taught Gurdjieff, who espoused all dualities, barring uniquely that one basic theological distinction between Good and Evil. And yet *duplicity* was less a feature of his "being-existence" than *triplicity,* if the "three-brains" which haunted his "common presence" for life can be taken as the type of his own brain, "which is for me," as he said, "constructed unsuccessfully to the point of mockery".

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With a perfect disregard for consistency, then, Gurdjieff utilized and vindicated hypnosis as a means of achieving what he called "Objective Conscience," when he knew full well with one at least of his brains that hypnosis is really a door to narcosis and dreams, as demonstrated in his fable of the magician and the sheep, and in his aspersions on the "Kundalini". The way of spiritual realization is anything but passive, and yet Gurdjieff promoted hypnotism as the means of liberating the *subconsciousness,* which he mistakes for the "real consciousness" whereas in fact it is just the inverse, being the subliminal area of consciousness or the soul's nether part which harbours the murky, mindless, and passive alluvium of the psyche, and which has to be totally dominated if there is to be any spiritual progress at all. Hypnotism does indeed function in just this area, which is a good reason why spiritual masters eschew it, the other obvious reason being that it leads to nowhere.

Not that the Seigneur of the Prieuré failed to stress the necessity for an active attitude accompanied with intensive effort and self-inflicted suffering: the cult of the disagreeable had the status of a dogma; flux and ceaseless change were in the permanent scheme of things, *serenity* being a word not found in his vocabulary. "The greater the efforts that are made," he said, "the greater the new demands".

Again: "Ordinary efforts do not count. *Only super-efforts count".* And since he taught that "there is only 'self-initiation,' "no one will dispute that a Draconian effort must be required on the part of a volitionless "machine" to accomplish this incredible feat, which is—as his inimitable Mullah Nassr Eddin would say— "to hoist oneself over the moon by one's bootstraps".

What actually took place is demonstrated in the cases of Peters and Bennett above: when a man through toil, suffering, or sickness had reached the limit of his endurance, and his habitual vital resistance—i.e. the legacy of his "Kundabuffer"—was low, the moment was propitious for the transmission of *hanbledzoin* into the "psychic bloodstream"—which is an inversion of the spiritual way, where the disciple who has faithfully and integrally followed his master's teachings to the limit of his capacities is reduced to a state of worldly impoverishment favouring an influx of Divine Grace.

De Hartmann notwithstanding insisted that the operative power was "magnetic" rather than "hypnotic," "because all Mr. Gurdjieff's Teaching leads men toward being free of suggestion". This point merits examination. Gurdjieff considered himself the possessor of what he called *Zvarnoharno,* something Bennett translates as "aura of kingship," going on to say that it was this quality which among other things obliged the man to feign "outrageous behaviour" as a means of thwarting incipient idol-worship.

"There is no question," says Peters, "that Gurdjieff had an unbelievable (unless you've seen it) *awareness* of other people. It was nothing so limited as mind-reading or thought-transference. He seemed to know so much about the human processes…that he was conscious of everything that took place within any human being he happened to observe…. I have never known him to be wrong…. It was difficult to resist such obvious learning or 'power' and, in fact, there was no reason to resist it. Contrary to the reports about him, there was no evidence that he did anything to anyone that could be considered 'evil' ".[2]

Leaving this last remark for the moment in parentheses, we can now let Gurdjieff tell it his own way, with the aviso that "any human being he happened to observe" covers only those whom destiny brought under his scrutiny and cannot *de facto* be expanded to encompass the overwhelming majority of his contemporaries, of whom most—including many foremost—have never even heard his name, not to mention all those with spiritual and intellectual dimensions inaccessible to his observational techniques:

> "I know what is state of each man around me because I am educated man, I have knowledge. You must always try have considerateness for state of surrounding if you wish be objective *bon-ton.*...

[2] He loved little children, after all, teaching them always to honour and obey their parents; and he made a *Pere Noel formidable* at his rollicking Christmas parties.

You notice never anyone take offence anything I say?—never man angry with me when *I* tell? You know why? Because I tell *exact* how is, objective truth".

This incontestable magnetism, which Gurdjieff bequeathed to posterity, was even presumed by him to reverberate backwards in time. Thus, when in preparing a pit in a cellar at the Prieuré for the winter storage of carrots he dug through some lime, sand, and straw and came upon a "super-most-super-heavenly-nectar," namely, twenty-seven bottles of old Calvados, it was immediately clear to him that this "divine liquid" had been left there as a libation by the monks of yore, whose "intuitive perspicacity…thanks to their pious lives" allowed them to precognize the advent of an Eminence able to appreciate and propagate their "ideals" "to the next generation"; which said libation the predestined beneficiary forthright consumed—along with some two hundred bottles of "no less sublime" old Armagnac to top off "this totality of cosmic substances".

So much for magnetism. Back now to de Hartmann's idea that the Gurdjieffian way leads towards freedom from suggestion: John Middleton Murry did not believe this, and he had been forced to investigate the Fontainebleau Institute closely, given his wife's involvement. An editorial note at the conclusion of *Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry 1913-1922*, which he published, manifests enough neutrality and magnanimity in its assessment of the circumstances culminating in her death to permit serious reflection on some remarks of his written to the *London Daily News* several months after she died. He observed in effect that the Institute did not resolve the problem that it claimed to resolve. Instead, it simply plunged its members for the time being into a sort of unconsciousness. It was as though they had been given some kind of drug, a very efficacious and very penetrating drug, but who could say if in the end any benefit was produced, any really positive result?

However unbiased this opinion may be, it is admittedly still from the outside; but there are other witnesses from the inside: Pierre Minet, for example, co-founder along with René Daumal and other French literati of the somewhat surrealistic poetry movement, *Le Grand Jeu,* and who was briefly brought into Gurdjieffianism by Daumal, himself known for the allegorical account of his experiences therein, entitled *Le Mont Analogue.* Here are some extracts from Minet's autobiographical work, *La Défaite:*

'Begin by letting this idea sink in that you are nothing, no, not even a grain of sand in the desert, absolutely nothing, the naught.' This beat all philosophies, this affirmation. It transported me with rapture. It opened up infinite horizons. At first, how much more agreeable it was to be nothing instead of this mass of pitiful, sad, and boring corpuscles that had to be called something. Absolute negation, how restful! Not a thought, not a feeling could resist it….

This did not last for long. 'You are nothing. You can be everything. You can be. Only watch out, to right, to left, attention, more attention, always attention, don't identify yourself with your sensations, you are like a baby learning to walk! Not so fast! Follow your governess!' The

governess, that was me: me also. Both the brat and the nanny. How could one avoid being mistaken? Nevertheless I did my utmost to play these roles correctly".[3]

Minet says his whole life revolved around the three hours weekly of lectures:

> We sat down, no cigarettes please, one more little victory over yourselves**,** small streams make big rivers! A dozen persons, then, sagely seated, to hear excellent metaphysical recipes. Very sensible, all this; undeniable the consciousness that is unaware of itself, the mechanical man, and even man number 1, man number 2, man number 3, man number 4, whom you will be, the day when hens get teeth. But the more one advanced, the more this became theoretical, to believe that we were not made of flesh and bones and that we could depend entirely on these graphs, these figures, these circles which claimed to explain everything, to resolve everything, and which led straight to immortality. Cosmic laws, the influence of planets on my behaviour, the moon as chaperon, no, I didn't recognize myself any more. This no longer interested me. I groused. I now had the impression of participating in a juggling act. Thus, one and all we only began to exist after having thrown overboard what best characterized us. Our tastes, our most tenacious sufferings, our fondest attachments, into the sea! Really, it was asking a lot. Too much. And all this in order to gain peace, the virgin awe of the catechumen.… Finally, I broke off. I refused to let myself be robbed any longer. And I gained back my muck. To be sure, it did not smell good. But stench for stench, I still preferred mine to that of the newborn babe!

Reflections along a similar vein determined another French writer, the journalist and editor Paul Sérant, to quit the movement:

> I was no doubt less affected by the outward world; conversely, the exclusive attention on myself ended by creating in me an unbearable sensation of disgust. I had aspired to be liberated from the world; I now aspired to be liberated from myself. Instead of feeling released from my 'mechanical' chains, I had the impression of forging new ones, infinitely heavier in that they abolished the spontaneity of the instincts and feelings, a spontaneity which could render so light at times the constraint of being nothing but a machine! Maybe I was no longer a machine, but not to be one any more, what a dreadful nostalgia! This consciousness which I had supposed would shatter my limitations had instead only procured for me the most terrible of tyrannies.…[4] The more

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[3] Minet gives an eloquent testimony here to the trials of "self-initiation".

[4] These words recall a cry of distress coming from another place and time, but decidedly analogous in content: "Somehow they (the 'Berlin Brotherhood') all seemed to me to be men without souls. They were desperate, determined seekers into realms of being with which earth had no sympathy, and which in consequence abstracted them from all human feelings or human emotions….

"In their companionship I felt abandoned of my kind…. If the knowledge I had purchased was indeed a reality, there were times when I deemed it was neither good nor lawful for man to possess it. I often envied the peaceful unconsciousness of the outer world, and would gladly have gone back to the simple faith of my childhood, and then have closed my eyes in eternal sleep sooner than awaken to the terrible unrest which had possessed me since I had crossed the safe boundaries of the visible, and entered upon the illimitable wastes of the invisible" (*Ghost Land; or Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism*, anonymous, tr. and ed. by Emma Hardinge Britten, Boston, 1876, pp. 47-48).

I plunged into myself, the less did I discover this 'greater than I'! The 'I' which I encompassed only infected me more and more with a frightful nausea".

For Sérant "there is no true spirituality without worship. Ascesis, renouncement, detachment, and the void only have a meaning when ordained by Love. That this Love is not to be confused with the more immediate aspects of the sentiments is perfectly clear to me, and such moreover is the attitude of the great mystics. But it is essential not to destroy in the soul the very possibility for worship".

Sérant observed that his erstwhile companions trampled blithely on morality, culture, civilization, religion, sneering when one spoke about scruples of conscience: "The really extraordinary feature," says Bennett, "is that the way to liberation is not by virtuous living, but by fulfilling the obligation to transform energies needed for the Cosmic Purpose".

"I noticed," writes Sérant, "that the effort of consciousness had created among these people a rather suspicious mixture of pretension, selfishness, and pride (or more exactly, self-satisfaction.[5] These faults are naturally the lot of all mortals, but what seemed to me grave here is that they were methodically cultivated in the name of non-identification, lucidity, and self-awareness. Obviously when it is taken for granted that all men are machines while one is oneself emerging from this category, the risk of a dangerous temptation arises: if other people are machines, why not use them as such? Duplicity then becomes a very legitimate form of training in sharper self-awareness".

This idea is echoed in a remark Madame de Salzmann made to René Guénon, whom she sought out in Cairo shortly after her master's death with hope of getting counsel ("*Vous voilà dans de beaux draps*"). "Gurdjieff," she told the French metaphysician, "rarely spoke the truth"—an admission which goes at any rate to show that Gurdjieff practiced what he preached, one of his dicta being, "Truth can only come to people *in the form of a lie*".

But when this attitude is adopted, one may insensibly—thanks to the soporific effects of hypnosis—transgress the fragile demarcation line separating the practice of contradiction from the spirit of perversity: "This is where a sort of spiritual inversion occurs," continues Sérant, "infinitely more perilous than *immoralism accepted as such*.... The real spiritual danger begins the moment when Good is called Evil, and Evil Good. The perversion thus created is well-nigh irremediable."

This point is brought home by Charles Duits, cited in Michel Waldberg's recent French book, *Gurdjieff*. "Beelzebub, an old man filled with goodness," assures us, "whose action has clearly been nothing short of 'angelic', is taken by human beings for the devil in person. Thus, right from the start we have a key at our disposal: men see the world upside down, such is their

[5] In a lecture at Fontainbleau recorded by Bennett, Gurdjieff taught: "Pride of Self is the sign of being in possession of oneself ….Pride of Self is 'I'. 'I' is God. Consequently it is needful to have pride".

affliction; they take Angels for Devils, and *vice versa"*.

While Bennett does not quite have that to say about Beelzebub, he argues lamely that this personage "was a minor member of the Chaldaean Pantheon…rather than…a synonym for Satan"—a particularly weak argument when Gurdjieff himself has given the secret away with his explanation in *The Herald of Coming Good* that he chose for "principal hero" someone "as a likely witness" to the appearance "of the first human beings on earth". Now apart from God, who else was "witness" to the proceedings in the Garden except the serpent?

All this, of course, is so much poppycock to Gurdjieff, who announces, "I have set myself under essence-oath…to prove, without fail…to all my contemporaries, the absurdity of all their inherent ideas concerning the suppositious existences [*sic*] of a certain 'other world' with its famous and so beautiful 'paradise' and its so repugnant a 'hell' ". Theological "wiseacring" about Good and Evil, future reward and future punishment, has no place in his world view. But the denial of immediate and by consequence ultimate Good and Evil does not of itself suffice to banish these concepts, nor does it guarantee immunity from mistaking the one for the other—assuming these concepts exist, as his exposition in the following paragraph allows us to believe they do.

Not forgetting Peters' remark on "evil" that was left in parentheses, we can let Gurdjieff answer this himself with a saying from "very ancient times" to the effect that "every stick always has two ends," "one of which," he goes on to observe, "is considered good and the other bad…. Briefly, if I exercise my privilege and take the good end of the stick, then the bad end must inevitably fall 'on the reader's head' ". Or, as he has his Mullah Nassr Eddin say: "For our sins, God has sent us two kinds of physicians, one kind to help us die, and the other to prevent us living".

Call it then magnetism, hypnotism, or what you like, and accept Gurdjieff's beguiling (because no commitment is asked) disclaimer of initiation ("There is not, nor can there be, any outward initiation"), the fact remains that he transmitted very real powers, as the instrument of "agencies" to which Bennett gives the name "Demiurgic Intelligences". During all his years of teaching, Ouspensky remained convinced that the Gurdjieffian "System" emanated from a "Great Source". "But there is no chance for us to find it by looking…. It is much better hidden than people suppose. Therefore, our only hope is that the Source will seek us out. That is why I am giving these lectures in London. If those who have the real knowledge see that we can be useful to them, they may send someone". What he did not know was that he was already being very useful to "them," but that they could not co-operate any more than they were already doing, being in Bennett's words, "agencies that we cannot perceive with our senses or even know with our minds".

This "something" moreover that was transmitted does not—to repeat—easily wash off, even with those who have attempted purgation. "You poisoned for life," we have seen Gurdjieff tell

Peters, who himself confesses that "even in death, he continued to have an enormous and troubling influence over me". We likewise saw how Pauwels remained saddled with "the ambiguities of the profoundest respect," which finds a resonance in Sérant's declaration that "it is not at all my intention to condemn the Teaching outright. I remain persuaded that it conveys elements which an authentic spiritual search cannot afford to neglect;…in a word, I liked and continue to like the aristocratic, even Nietzchean, aspect of the Teaching".[6]

This last remark is frankly misplaced. Certainly the spiritual elect constitutes a great aristocracy, even including its more "outlandish" manifestations—the "Fools in Christ" of Hesychasm, for example, or the *Malâmatîyah* ("People of Blame") in Islam, the "Immortals" in Taoism, or the *Heyokas* of the Sioux Indians—which always derive from suprahuman and not subhuman factors; certainly moreover the Gurdjieffian movement has always attracted aristocrats aplenty.[7] But if one has to search for a word to describe it, then snobbism—and not aristocracy—best catches the prevailing tone—this "attitude of almost beatific secrecy" already mentioned by Peters, who observed that Gurdjieff's "students, with contented, superior smiles on their faces would declare publicly that they had at last found the 'real thing', or a 'great teaching', etc., etc., and then, upon being challenged, seemed unable to explain what it was, or how it worked". The grossness of approach (starting with "men are machines"), the studied insolence (as in the "idiots' toast"), and Gurdjieff's predilection "to wiseacre full blast" ill accord with what most people understand by aristocracy—a rank furthermore which he hated, calling aristocrats "jokes of nature" and "misconceptions" whose ability to exist on our planet puzzled "even the great cunning Lucifer" to the point where "he grew so intensely thoughtful that all the hairs of the tip of his tail turned quite gray". Gurdjieff by the way would roar with laughter when such passages from *Beelzebub* were read aloud to him.

But aristocratic elements aside, Sérant's message is clear. Pauwels attempts to explain the grip of Gurdjieffianism—this "subterranean and darkly fascinating world"—with a description from the African jungle of how hunters trap monkeys. They attach a hollow gourd to a coconut palm, toss in some peanuts, and disappear. The monkey soon swings down from the tree and

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[6] Pauwels cites from an article in the September 1927 issue of the review *New Adelphi* by a Dr. Young, for twenty years an English surgeon and later psychiatrist and disciple of Jung, spent a year at the Prieuré. With a cold medical eye he reached the studied conviction that whatever the appearances, Gurdjieff's real motivation was the obscure and Luciferian quest for powers (*siddhis*) as taught through brutal methods in certain Mongolian monasteries where he probably received initiation—powers acquired with a view to ruling our planet. "However," concludes Dr. Young, "I would not want it thought that this experience for me resulted in the loss pure and simple of a year of my time. Far from that, I am convinced that I greatly profited from what is of value in this teaching".

[7] The collaboration of aristocrats in a movement is not *ipso facto* a guarantee of canonicity. The Freemasonic conflagration sweeping through eighteenth-century Europe was fuelled by aristocracy. Rasputin played to the Russian Court, and certainly aristocrats participated in Hitler's rise to power.

reaches his hand through the narrow neck to seize a fistful of nuts. But now he is unable to extricate the swollen hand, and the frightened beast clenching his booty ever more tightly falls prey to his captors.

"I have often thought of this fruit when trying to disengage myself from the teaching of Gurdjieff…. But it was very difficult and I was like most members of these groups: prisoner of my own ambition, henceforth doomed to desiccation, and, like the monkey, fated for the cage or death".

Peters and other writers repeatedly comment on Gurdjieff's lusty humour, so conspicuously lacking in his disciples, and it is true that photographs of them typically betray a certain torpor, a sadness or melancholy and vacancy of expression. Yet it seems obvious enough that if Gurdjieff had reason for indulging in laughter, by the same token his disciples had reason to refrain.

* * *

Gurdjieff made some telling observations on another subject "Black magic does not in any way mean magic of evil…. No one ever does anything for the sake of evil, in the interests of evil. Everyone always does everything in the interests of good *as he understands it*…. Black magic may be quite altruistic, may strive after the good of humanity…. But what can be called black magic has always one definite characteristic. This characteristic is the tendency to use people for some, even the best of aims, *without their knowledge and understanding,* either by producing in them faith and infatuation or by acting upon them through fear.

"But it must be remembered in this connection that a 'black magician', whether good or evil [*sic*], has at all events been at a school. He has learned something, has heard something, knows something. He is simply a 'half-educated man' who has either been turned out of a school or who has himself left a school having decided that he already knows enough, that he does not want to be in subordination any longer, and that he can work independently and even direct the work of others. All 'work' of this kind can produce only subjective results, that is to say, it can only increase deception and increase sleep instead of decreasing them. Nevertheless something can be learned from a 'black magician' although in the wrong way. He can sometimes by accident even tell the truth".

To whom was the speaker of these lines holding up a mirror?

Aleister Crowley, the notorious English magician, once paid Gurdjieff an apparently unsolicited visit at Fontainebleau. The "Forest Philosophers" gathered round in anticipation of what would eventuate, the visiting mage having challenged the resident one to a display in magic, but it came to a disappointing draw, Gurdjieff declining to expose certain powers which he nonetheless claimed to possess. Crowley for his part refused to stage a solo performance, and he left convinced, according to Peters, that his rival was either "a fake," or else "an inferior black magician".

This episode can be interpreted in several ways. First, it is common knowledge that magicians do not lose any love on one another, each being jealous of his demesne. Secondly, Crowley was ostentatiously a "bounder" and master showman, whereas Gurdjieff passed for a "serious" man with a concern for society, being a "scientific philosopher," *maestro* of "sacred dance," and herald of a new path for humanity based on the hoariest of forgotten wisdoms. It must also be remembered that the resolve he formulated never to exploit his *hanbledzoin* for self-seeking ends left him literally "indifferent" to the effect he created on people—thoroughly confident that his resolve would make the necessary effect felt without the need to implicate himself "egotistically" in any contrived "theatrics". Transposed into spiritual terms, this would be the equivalent of sacrificing one's personal gifts for the glory of God. Gurdjieff, in other words, was a "dedicated" man, working for a cause larger than himself. Thirdly, Crowley was the High Initiate of Freemasonry and so many of the occultisms and secret societies which Gurdjieff openly professed to scorn, saying that "their work simply consists in aping"—which whatever the case certainly enhanced the credibility of his own method by opposing it to the pseudo initiations and pseudo-esoteric systems that are conventionally considered to be false. Crowley by contrast from his view-point might well regard the other thaumaturge as a kind of "freak intruder" from Turkestan, answering to none of the more "orthodox" cabalisms. Fourthly, there is just the possibility that the two men had some business in common that escaped the notice of the others present—a "mandate" from the Order of Thule, for example, since Gurdjieff despite his barbs at occultism always claimed to be in contact with a "Hidden Centre"; but this is to speculate in the dark.

* * *

Another teaching Gurdjieff honoured with all the *noblesse oblige* its conviction entailed went to the effect—on Denis Saurat's testimony —that women could scarcely hope to come by souls except through sexual contact and union with a man. Thus—to hear Bennett tell it—he recompensed brief spells of austerity with "unbridled periods" of venery: "At times, he had sexual relationships not only with almost any woman who happened to come within the sphere of his influence, but also with his own pupils. Quite a number of his women pupils bore him children". The idea was bruited about that "only those women who had slept with him were really initiated into his Work". And yet in fact there were some women disciples who had no relationship of this kind with him at all; and it would sometimes even happen that a young lady upon receiving a hint to knock at his door and going in the expectation of a remarkable spiritual adventure would discover him apparently astonished to find her there and would be rebuffed with a bag of sweets as a solace, whereas those who went with no illusions got their relationship and perchance some instruction too.

For "he was very insistent that sex should be separated from the intellectual and emotional life of man. Sex was sex and, if treated as such, was not only a legitimate but even a necessary part of the process of our development".

With most people, however, he said "it is the principal motive force of all mechanicalness," and to the average man, woman is no more than a "handkerchief". "Do you think people go to the theatre or to church to pray or to see some new play?" he asked Ouspensky. "That is only for the sake of appearances. The principle thing, in the theatre as well as in church, is that there will be a lot of women or a lot of men. This is the centre of gravity of all gatherings".

Gurdjieff once—in 1933— treated Peters to a demonstration of this at the former's New York apartment in the Henry Hudson Hotel, where Peters was convoked. When he arrived he was asked to wash dishes and prepare vegetables for "some very important people" who were coming to dinner. Gurdjieff said he needed Peters to give him an "English lesson" consisting of words for all those parts and functions of the body "that were not in the dictionary". By the time Gurdjieff had mastered the four-letter words and obscene phrases the guests starting arriving, who turned out to be some fifteen "well-dressed, well-mannered New Yorkers," of which a number were reporters or journalists.

After staging a late and obsequious entry, the host humbly began responding at table to the guests' *blasé* questions on his work and reasons for visiting America, when with a wink to his "English teacher" he suddenly changed tone and explained that the sad degeneration of humankind and its transformation into a substance only describable by a four-letter expletive was particularly striking in their country, whence his coming to observe this phenomenon in the raw. The cause behind this distressing state of affairs, he continued, lay in the fact that people—especially Americans—never followed the dictates of intelligence or propriety, but only that of their genital organs. Then, signalling out one particularly handsome woman, he complimented her on her attire and make-up, after which he confided that in all honesty between them the real explanation behind her adornment was an irresistible sexual urge she felt for some particular person—graphically spelled out by Gurdjieff with his newly-acquired vocabulary. Before the guests could react he launched into a discourse on his own sexual prowess, followed by intimate and detailed descriptions of the sexual mores of various races and nations.

By the time the dinner was over and the guests well plied with "good old Armagnac as always," they lost their inhibitions and joined in an exchange of obscenities which soon became more than verbal. Gurdjieff retired with the lady whom he had insulted, and the others, by now conditioned to believe that an orgy or something was in the tenor of the evening, began entangling physically in different rooms of the apartment in various stages of undress.

Just when the carousel was at a climax Gurdjieff briskly disengaged himself and thundered forth orders for the revels to cease, proclaiming that the lesson had been accomplished, that the guests had already amply verified through their comportment the soundness of his observations made earlier in the evening—that thanks to him they were now partly conscious of their true condition, and that he would gladly accept from them cheques and cash in payment for this "important lesson". Peters noted—without surprise, knowing Gurdjieff—that the take came to *"several thousand dollars"*.

When everyone had left, Gurdjieff went into the kitchen to help Peters with the dishes, asking at the same time how he had enjoyed the evening.

"I was disgusted," came the reply. Gurdjieff laughed and scrutinized his companion with a "piercing look". "Is fine feeling you have —this disgust. But now is necessary ask yourself one question. With who you disgusted?"

* * *

One thing that "appalled" Peters among both the admirers and detractors[8] of Gurdjieff was the emotional, personal, or vindictive—as the case might be—reactions to his person and method. Rarely did anyone evaluate him with objective detachment. Even his proponents would sometimes manifest disgust at what they considered to be his "dirty" or "insanitary" habits. Peters was the first to know about this, having cleaned the maestro's room for two years at the Prieuré. But he argues rather weakly against the repeated contention "that a great teacher is, of necessity, clean," reasoning: "This seems to me to be the equivalent of accepting Christianity after an investigation of the bathing habits of Jesus Christ. Or is 'cleanliness next to Godliness' after all? And does that old saw actually refer to physical cleanliness?"

Well, it certainly in no way excludes it, and the best response here is from the *Discourses* of Epictetus, the chapter "On Cleanliness" (IV. xi):

> Since the gods are by nature pure and unalloyed, just in so far as men have approached them by virtue of reason, they have a tendency to purity and cleanliness. But since it is impossible for their nature to be entirely pure, being composed of such stuff as it is, the reason which they have received endeavours, so far as in it lies, to make this stuff clean.
>
> The primary and fundamental purity is that of the soul, and so with impurity…. The soul's impurity consists in bad judgements, and purification consists in producing in it right judgements….
>
> And one ought to endeavour, as far as may be, to achieve a similar cleanliness in one's body too…. It was impossible for men's feet not to be made muddy and dirty when they pass through mud and dirt; for this reason nature provided water and hands to wash with….
>
> But who does not turn from a man who is dirty, odorous, foul-complexioned, more than from one who is bespattered with muck? The smell of the latter is external and accidental, that of the former comes from want of tendance; it is from within, and shows a sort of inward rottenness.
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> 'But Socrates rarely washed.'

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[8] For Peters these detractors were of two kinds: vituperative ex-students, and scholars who considered themselves critics "of any teaching that touched on the occult" and who "seem to me to pounce on [Gurdjieff] because he did not live up to their conception of orthodoxy". But this last remark is tantamount to saying that orthodoxy is by definition subjective and by nature purely psychological; with a facile phrase objective criteria are thus condemned to the dustheap.

> Why, his body was clean and bright, nay, it was so gracious and agreeable … he might have never washed or bathed, if he had liked: I tell you his ablutions, if rare, were powerful….
>
> By the gods, when the young man feels the first stirrings of philosophy I would rather he came to me with his hair sleek than dishevelled and dirty: for that shows a sort of reflection of the beautiful, and a longing for the comely, and where he imagines these to be, there he spends his effort….
>
> Here is a young man worthy to be loved, here is an old man worthy to love and to be loved, one to whom a man is to hand over his son to be instructed: daughters and young men will come to him, if it so chance, and for what? That he may discourse to them on a dunghill? God forbid. All eccentricity springs from some human source, but this comes near to being inhuman altogether.

Frithjof Schuon has shown[9] how certain voluntaristic and sentimental excesses in the Christian sphere since the time of the Renaissance have made it possible to equate intelligence with pride, which in itself is comprehensible, but which leads to other equations, like beauty with sin—hence ugliness with virtue, or again, cleanliness with sin—hence dirtiness with virtue. This does not mean that Gurdjieff's disciples—all presumably of Christian origin—adhered to any particular pietistic persuasions, although some belonged to the Orthodox Church; but it does mean that the prevalence of such currents in Christianity has left its tendencies and traces—albeit unconsciously—even on those who have abandoned their faith.

It is not known that Gurdjieff, despite his years in Islamic countries, had any Muslims for disciples; and other considerations apart, the stress in Islam on intelligence, beauty, and purity would make it unthinkable for a Muslim still conscious of his heritage to be drawn into Gurdjieff's world.

* * *

Certain facets of the personality sponsoring Harmonious Development are revealed in his travelling manners. He was perfectly capable, for example, of detaining the midnight sleeper from New York to Chicago ten minutes' overtime by somehow convincing an official on the platform at Grand Central Station that he was an eminent personage having urgent business to conclude with the delegation of votaries thronging about; when finally shoved on board an already moving train followed by a travelling companion—in this case Peters—and some seven pieces of luggage loaded with books, medicine, clothing, food, and liquor—of noisily complaining about the interruption, and ordering a bed prepared immediately. Appalled at learning that his berth was thirteen cars ahead—of sitting on a suitcase to light a cigarette and groaning loudly when told that smoking was prohibited except in the men's room (berths on American sleeping cars at that period were partitioned from the corridor solely by curtains); of

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[9] See for example "Paradoxes de l'expression spirituelle en Islam et ailleurs," *Revue Philosophique*, janvier-mars, 1974.

awakening every last passenger (most having boarded early) during the forty-five-minute trek through the train with complaints about the rude handling he was undergoing, and when finally reaching his berth, of unpacking his bags in search of food and liquor until forced by Peters into the men's quarters, there to start a loud discourse on the terrible service and the shoddy way in which he—a very important man—was being treated, yet when warned by the conductor and the porter that he courted the risk of expulsion at the next station, of staring around in wide-eyed innocence; of at last going to bed all the while lamenting loudly about his thirst and need for cigarettes and so forth until more menaces from the porter finally decided him to sleep; of raising a rumpus in the dining car the next morning—which he finally reached after an hour's dressing with repeated walks down the aisle in his underwear—on finding no yoghurts or other (then) exotic foods so necessary for his highly specialized digestive proccesses, vividly detailed to the waiter and head steward, whereupon he consumed amidst grumbles a hearty American breakfast; of passing the remainder of the journey in his Pullman car, smoking incessantly despite passengers' complaints and threats from the porter, drinking heavily, and intermittently producing foods—mainly evil-smelling cheeses—all the time apologizing profusely to the irate passengers even while inventing new ways to annoy and offend. And when at last reaching the group awaiting him on the platform at Chicago, of telling them all about what a ghastly trip he had had, and laying the entire responsibility for it on the already mortified Peters.

Are we to suppose, by the way, that all this was a comedy staged by the possessor of *Zvarnoharno* in view of protecting the passengers, conductor, and porter from incipient idol worship, or to test their mettle as potential disciples? A devotee would no doubt reply that a King can do as he pleases—such runs the reasoning of the world.

Bennett went through a similar ordeal in putting Gurdjieff on board the boat at Le Havre in 1948. When his charge, who had insisted on a single cabin, found there were none on the outside, he announced that he would leave the ship at Southampton, ordering Bennett to arrange to meet him there the next morning. Then he stormed off to the deserted grill-room, telling his companion to fetch the basket from Paris that had "bottles of Armagnac, jars of caviare and zakuskas of various kinds". This of course infuriated the stewards, "but he mollified them with a generous tip". Bennett himself was only able to mollify Gurdjieff by proposing toast after toast as "Director of toasts," drinking with him until the ship left at midnight.

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Some readers who have held on thus far may by now be wondering just what Gurdjieff had for all his magnetism that could induce discerning men and women to submit their spiritual development into his safekeeping.

It has been seen how people could scarcely maintain a neutral attitude when confronted with this person: one either reacted with a strong aversion, or else one was irresistibly drawn into his orbit with something approaching total commitment—not to mention those cases where an initial

repulsion turned later into utter rapture. The fact that it is likewise a peculiarity of evil either to fascinate or repel, while it cannot necessarily be adduced as an *ad rem* proof of anything, must at least be weighed into consideration by the serious reader along with everything else.

Gurdjieff came to a West of scattered values with a cynical eye that saw clearly—almost—the trash that is modern civilisation, the mess that is modern man. This in itself is a positive "contribution". But his vision was negative and destructive—hence the ambiguity recognized by Pauwels. For if he was keenly aware of man's foibles, he suffered a corresponding blindness to man's virtues. *Beelzebub* on the surface thus appears as a heavy-handed sneer at the human race, while on a deeper level it really reveals Gurdjieff's own obsession with modalities of consciousness depassing his competence. He identified himself unequivocally with the "Devil," only, having this identification, he naturally did not envisage the "Devil" as "evil," but simply as "realistic". And yet if something of this became ontologically too transparent in his writings, he would recast the passage in order to "bury the dog deeper," as he put it.[10] He even repudiated *The Herald of Coming Good* and had it withdrawn from circulation.

The point here is that the advent of Gurdjieff coincided with the moment when reflective Western intellectuals were having their first second-thoughts about Progress, and he brought, to begin with, an explanation for the existent state of affairs, and secondly, an "ancient" remedy pried out of the East purporting to get man back once again onto the right track.

Was he then, or not, an evolutionist? True to his contradictory character, the answer is: both yes and no. The World-process, he taught, is concurrently evolutionary and involutionary, being based on "the great fundamental cosmic law Trogoautoegocrat," namely, the "reciprocal-maintenance-of-every-thing-that-exists," which without elaborating the scheme comes down to a sort of "galactic ecology" where man, assisted by various Demiurges and Higher Intelligences patterned somewhat along Gnostic and Manichaean lines, shares with God—"our COMMON FATHER OMNI-BEING ENDLESSNESS," or whatever—responsibility for running the cosmic show. *Reciprocal,* because it suffices an error in judgment on the part of either God (who it will be remembered is not Omnipotent) or man to put the Universe out of true. God set to rights an earlier miscalculation of his by removing from man the pernicious organ Kundabuffer, and it is now for man to cease basking in the dreams which are this organ's after-effects, and, combining the "wisdom" of the East with the "energy" of the West, to breach his subconsciousness and thus break loose from the tyranny of modern technology and all the cosmically disruptive idiocies invented by three-brained scientists bent—as the esteemed Mullah Nassr Eddin sagely said—on "making a gnat swallow an elephant"—before they smash the world to smithereens with a blast,

[10] Bennett attempts to side-step this expression with the argument that "the dog is Sirius the dog star, which stands for the spirit of wisdom in the Zoroastrian tradition". But he comes much nearer the heart of the matter when he adds that Gurdjieff did not wish "to be analysed and criticized by philosophers and theologians, so he wrote in language that learned beings would not trouble to read".

once more in the sage's words—"like a Jericho-trumpet-in-crescendo".[11] Gurdjieff chided Peters at their last meeting: "Americans drop bomb on Japan, yes? What you think of your America now?"

By the Law of Reciprocal Maintenance, all energy, matter, and life patterns or "essence classes" to be found in the Universe maintain and sustain one another through a delicately equilibrated evoluting/involuting cosmic cannibalism (it will be remembered that the moon fattens on the earth, and *vice versa*).

One might nevertheless wonder how this galactic ecological system can be reconciled with *"a way against nature, against God*"; but the incompatibility between the two conceptions does not seem to ruffle some people, who apparently find it flattering to enter upon a partnership with the "Higher Hosts" in a work of Reciprocal Maintenance aimed at keeping the World on an even keel, that would free our planet of "hate, madness and war," in Margaret Anderson's words.

Yet if these Western intellectuals looked to the core of the matter, they would see that the rituals in all religions are for maintaining an equilibrium between Heaven and Earth—by symbolism, analogy, and sympathetic correspondence. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" is the basis for it in Christianity. Islam (submission to the Divine Will) proclaims that man is Viceregent on Earth (*khalîfah fi 'l-ard*), and responsible to God for the right ordering of everything. *Dharmaśâstra* enjoins on Hindus what is necessary here. The Far East has the doctrine that man is Mediator between Heaven and Earth. As for the American Indians, they possessed one of the most perfectly functioning "ecological systems" the world has ever known, until destroyed by "three-brained" Europeans gone astray from their own heritage.

Moreover, since every religion in its mode teaches that man is in a state of disequilibrium, illusion, ignorance, fall, or rebellion, why do some people only prick up their ears when Gurdjieff says it?

"The origin and cause of thoughts lies in the splitting up, by man's transgression, of his single and simple memory, which has thus lost the memory of God and, becoming multiple instead of simple, and varied instead of single, has fallen a prey to its own forces," writes St. Gregory of Sinai.

Or as Plato puts it: "The soul…by reason of lust had become the principal accomplice in her

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[11] It is curious that Beelzebub's own solution for mankind's woes is to have planted into men a new organ in place of the former Kundabuffer, that would render every "three-brained being" perpetually "cognizant of the inevitability of his own death as well as of the death of everyone upon whom his eyes or attention rests". While traditionally the remembrance of death is also enjoined on us, it is for a reason that is well expressed, for example, in The Imitation of Christ: "Learn now to die to the world, that thou mayest then begin to live with Christ".

own captivity".

This finds its echo in John Smith the Platonist: "Those turbulent and unruly, uncertain and unconstant motions of passion and self-will that dwell in degenerate minds, divide them perpetually from themselves, and are always moulding several factions and tumultuous combinations within them against the dominion of reason".

But now comes Gurdjieff with a startling new formula. MAN IS A MACHINE: Here is the stuff that strikes a chord in modern minds, proclaimed to boot by a "scientific philosopher" who is a forthright materialist and sceptic—hence a "realist". And a way based on "sciences" of the highest antiquity lost to everybody but himself is proposed for resolving the dilemma straight at the core without having to have recourse to all the clutter of a religion. What if for the unremitting pains one takes, Harmonious Development proves in practice to be but the metamorphosis into a high-precision robot? Well, "the game is worth the candle," and this is presumably better at least than remaining—say—just a broken-down gramophone. Anyhow, the Institute with its ramifications has always been particularly attractive to artists, writers, musicians, and professional people in general, namely, those of a high sensitivity with an equally high ego-content—people worldly and complicated yet idealistic, strong yet vulnerable, with the innate human desire to dominate and transcend the tragedies of the undisciplined ego.

Still, how can human beings of such sensitivity stomach the grossness prevalent throughout? For one thing, the dances and the music and the complicated doctrines lend an aura of "dignity" to the movement; for another, the thaumaturge's proneness to shock with outrageous behaviour is often compared to the techniques employed by Zen *roshis* to precipitate *Satori.* Only, here the analogy does not hold, since Zen—where vulgarity to begin with is totally absent—functions within the framework and protection of Buddhism, of which it is a particular extension. The *roshi,* acting under inspiration in a revealed and living tradition, is applying procedures of proven efficacy to qualified disciples finely attuned by strict monastic disciplines to receive them.

It must be recognized, however, that Gurdjieff offered in a "complete" way a very beguiling show of cold unsentimental inquiry regarding his investigations into "the miraculous," combined with great practicality and earthy commonsense—with a shrewdness at times almost passing for wisdom.

Take for example what he says on Eastern music after having explained about quarter tones, and even "a seventh of a tone": "To foreigners, Eastern music seems monotonous, they only wonder at its crudity and musical poverty. But what sounds like one note to them is a whole melody for the local inhabitants—a melody contained in one note. This kind of melody is much more difficult than ours. If an Eastern musician makes a mistake in his melody the result is cacophony for them, but for a European the whole thing is a rhythmic monotone".

And on Eastern art: "I found nothing in the West to compare with Eastern art. Western art

has much that is external, sometimes a great deal of philosophy but Eastern art is precise, mathematical, without manipulations. It is a form of script".

And on art in general: "Either the shoemaker's craft must be called art, or all contemporary art must be called craft. In what way is a shoemaker sewing fashionable custom shoes of beautiful design inferior to an artist who pursues the aim of imitation or originality? *With knowledge, the sewing of shoes may be sacred art too, but without it a priest of contemporary art is worse than a cobbler*".[12]

Any reader who finds the above statements out of character with the over-all portrait thus far depicted might ponder that remark cited earlier about the man who "can sometimes by accident even tell the truth".

Gurdjieff, to sum up, made in his way a terrific impresario—only, on closer examination a superb tinkerer comes nearer the reality, since the preponderance of his projects and constructions in the long run seemed ready to—and mostly did—fall apart, on those rare occasions when he did not willfully tear them down himself, in keeping with what could be called his Law of the Necessity for Incessant Change.

An article appeared in a New York review, *The Century,* a month after the Gurdjieff troupe had made its American tour, by a writer and traveller named G. E. Bechhofer, who first met the thaumaturge at Tiflis and among other things has this to report about a sojourn at Fontainebleau:[13]

> I often heard it said that Gurdjieff was a marvellous worker. The disciples, breathless with rapture, told me of the unusual speed and ease with which he laid out roads, for example, or sawed wood, laid bricks, designed ovens for drying herrings. But recently I have noticed a dubious element in these accounts. The roads did not hold up with wear, the walls cracked, the ovens did not work and dry the herrings. It is possible that Gurdjieff is not the super-artisan he was claimed to be.

But what matter if like his material constructions, his elaborate etherial systems, when impartially scrutinized, fall to pieces like a house of cards? The danger only begins when a tinkerer starts tinkering with human souls.

* * *

The time has now come to ask what Gurdjieff, or the "Power," "Great Source," "Sarmân Brotherhood," or what not from whom he received his investiture, was really up to. The answer is as simple as it is devastating: *the total upheaval of the world order.* This is not to say that he

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[12] This in its manner recalls Ananda Coomaraswamy's "The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man a special kind of artist".

[13] This extract was found in Pauwels and has thus had to be re-translated back into English.

was up to it, but that he intended it. Total: the combined series of his writings is entitled *All and Everything,* and not just "this thing and that thing". The reversal was envisaged, moreover, as coming about in three stages, denoted by the trilogy form which his writings take.

To help clarify the pattern, it is revealing to borrow from the language of mystical theology, where the first stage would correspond to the term Purgation. Normally, this means the process undergone by the spiritual aspirant to rid himself of the "world" with all its illusions and seductions. With Gurdjieff (*first series*), it means "to destroy, mercilessly, without any compromise whatsoever, in the mentation and feelings of the reader, the beliefs and views, by centuries rooted in him, about everything existing in the world". Aimed at here is nothing less than the established dominion of powers formerly and still presently ruling the world—everything political, institutional, social and economic, religious, philosophic, and cultural—at least "*as practised*" in their existing forms.

Illumination is the second stage in mystical theology, where the adept now emptied of the "world" is in a spiritual capacity for receiving the Divine influx of graces from the supraformal and Heavenly World. With Gurdjieff (*second series*), it means "to acquaint the reader with the material required for a new creation and to prove the soundness and good quality of it". What this comes down to in effect is the replacing of the Noumenal World from which our world emanates, in favour of Gurdjieff's phenomenalist cosmogony; the replacing of the Celestial Pantheon with its supraformal domains and deities, Divine Qualities and Attributes, Archetypes, Angelic Intelligences and hierarchy of Powers as revealed by all traditions, in favour of his "Megalocosmos" with its *Protocosmos, Ayocosmos, Macrocosmos, Deuterocosmos, Mesocosmos, Tritocosmos, Microcosmos, Defterocosmos,* plus the bewildering variety of the "Tetartocosmoses" with their "temporarily independent crystallizations" named *Protoehary, Defteroehary, Tritoehary, Tetartoehary, Piandjoehary, Exioehary,* and *Resulzarion*—cosmoses peopled and ruled by the likes of the "Archangel Sakaki," "Archangel Hariton," "Arch-cherub Peshtvogner," "Chief-Common-Universal-Arch-Chemist-Physicist Angel Looisos," "Most-Great-Arch-Seraph Sevohtartra," "His Self-Keepness the Archseraph Ksheltarna," "Very Saintly Ashiata Shiemash," and so forth. Even the sun has to go. Beelzebub is embittered by the malicious results of false education on all three-brained creatures inhabiting the planet earth (with the exception of "certain beings who existed before the second Transapalnian perturbation") which conditions them into believing down to the last person without the slightest suspicion of doubt that the source of light and heat is the sun, when in reality the "Sun" is "almost always freezing cold like the 'hairless-dog' of our highly esteemed Mullah Nassr Eddin…[and] perhaps more covered with ice than the surface of what they call their 'North Pole'". Indeed, the "Sun" has better uses for any trace of heat it may possess than to share it with the "lopsided monstrosity" (ever since the moon was apparently shorn off by a comet) which is our earth.

No, the source of the arisings of light and heat in the cosmos is from the *Iraniranumange* or

transformation of energies due to the *Trogoautoegocrat* or Law of Reciprocal Maintenance. The way it works is simplicity itself: within the "Most Holy Sun Absolute" is the "Sacred Triamazikamno" or principle of "Holy-Affirming," "Holy-Denying," and "Holy-Reconciling" which together beget the *Theomertmalogos* or "Word-God," being the "prime emanation" from which the "Omnipresent-Okidanokh obtains its prime arising"; for as Bennett explains, "It is not God that is omnipotent but the Universal Will, the *Okidanokh"*. The "Vivifyingness of Vibrations" results from the passage of this latter through "Stopinders" or "gravity-centres" within the "fundamental 'common-cosmic sacred Heptaparaparshinokh' ," which is none other than our Law of Seven-foldness. And thus is the cause why the three-brains have "those cosmic phenomena which they call 'daylight', 'darkness', 'heat', 'cold', and so on".

The final stage in mystical theology is called Realization, or Union. With Gurdjieff (*third series*), it means "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". Only this, he says elsewhere, will ease "the Sorrow of OUR COMMON ENDLESS FATHER".

And there in a nutshell is what Harmonious Development is all about.

* * *

Some people tap their heads upon hearing Gurdjieff's theories about the "moon," but this is to miss the point. The moon for him is not just the physical body in the sky, any more than it is for Dante, who follows mediaeval cosmology in equating the Lunar Sphere with the Terrestrial Paradise and gateway to the Higher Heavens; this accords with the Upanishads, where the waxing moon symbolizes access to Higher States of Being for those on the *deva-yâna* ("Path of the Gods"). But if this phase or face of the moon corresponds to *Janua Coeli,* as in the litanies of the Virgin in the Catholic liturgy, there is also *Janua Inferni* or the waning aspect symbolizing a return to individual states of manifestation for those on the *pitri-yâna* ("Path of the ancestors"). Hence the moon is both Diana and Hecate, door to Heaven and door to Hell, but in either case the Abode of the Dead and *locus* of "cosmic memory". "The Lunar Sphere," says Guénon, "determines the separation of the higher (non-individual) states from the lower (individual) states". For this reason the term *sub-lunary* is a synonym for flux, ephemerality, change, and dissolution.

With Gurdjieff, the moon is "man's enemy…at the extremity" at the end of the world; it is the 'outer darkness' of the Christian doctrine 'where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' ". While he speaks about the possibility of "liberation from the moon," this is really wishful thinking on his part, as his orientation or centre of gravity is effectively confined within the subtle domain—whose outer-most limit is precisely the Sphere of the Moon—on his own admission that "everything in the Universe is material".

"The sun, verily, is life," says the *Prasna Upanishad;* "matter, indeed, is the moon". It is in

this cosmological sense that Gurdjieff is a "materialist," and not in the ordinary usage of the word; that is, everything "below the moon" pertains to the realm of matter—whether gross or subtle, the subtle state belonging to the individual and not the Universal plane of reality and being comprised of formal manifestation—albeit in a mode "interiorized" as contrasted with corporeal; psychic or "animic" rather than physical.

These explanations have a twofold purpose: to show that Gurdjieff's "Worlds" are not simply the luminaries one sees in the skies, and to situate that sector of the cosmos to which his cosmology applies. For neologisms change nothing; his "worlds" are "real" enough at their level, even if but a shadowy semblance of the upper hierarchy—worlds merging upon the infra-formal rather than the supra-formal; and were he to give them their more "traditional" designations, it would only serve to discomfit when not alienating the reader, and thwart the ends that he—or more accurately his "Hidden Directorate" —had and has in view, The same goes for the "Higher Powers" inhabiting these worlds: nothing would be gained for him in using their common appellations. It was already a "trial balloon"—as his Mullah Nassr Eddin might call it—to put Beelzebub's name on his magnum opus; he certainly would never have entitled it "Satan's Tales to His Grandson". But Beelzebub…well, if not all readers are going to subscribe to the tune on the jacket about this "all-wise" fellow's "profound understanding" and "deep compassion," many will nevertheless find him a harmless enough—if crotchety—old fogy in the long run, who would not even hurt one of those creatures over whom his lordship is firmly established—at least etymologically. Gurdjieff also had in view the idea that familiarity begets derision, for he sought to inure his readers with the injunction to wade thrice through his writings, by which time they should be conditioned for anything—or as he words it: "Only then can my hope be actualized that according to your understanding you will obtain the specific benefit for yourself which I anticipate, and which I wish for you with all by being". In addition, he serves a Warning on the readers at the commencement of *Beelzebub* about "such mental associations as must engender in them all kinds of automatic contradictory impulses…owing to the famous what is called 'religious morality' existing and rooted in their life, and in them, consequently, there must inevitably be formed data for an inexplicable hostility towards me personally".

Thus challenged, or flattered as the case may be, certain categories of readers at any rate blithely sail into the book determined to show its author that they, at least, are not victims of "automatic contradictory impulses," but on the contrary ready, or "mature" enough, to master any message he has to offer.[14]

Yet, it might be asked, if this is how things are, why does Gurdjieff not betray hostility toward religion? The obvious answer—apart from the fact that he does, for those who can read

[14] The author must have felt his ends in mind were well accomplished, as Beelzebub at the finish of the book is awarded for his labours with a magnificent new growth of five-pronged horns, reserved solely for those who have attained "the Reason of the sacred Podkoolad, i.e., the last gradation before the Reason of the sacred Anklad".

between the lines (according to his disciples the only way to understand his writings)—is, why should he? Of what avail was it for Madame Blavatsky to proclaim: "Our aim is not to restore Hinduism, but to sweep Christianity off the surface of the earth," or Annie Besant to unmask her design to "chase God from Heaven"? Gurdjieff chose rather to manifest toward religion an attitude, in current parlance, of "benign neglect". The "well-foundedness" of this approach is vindicated in the way his followers believe that he and the saints and sages of all traditions are talking about the same thing—the difference for them being simply one of expertise on his part and a more direct access to "ancient sources". Let the Great Source by whom he was mandated once gain the ascendency, and there would then be time enough to deal in whatever style seemed fit with the likes of "Saints Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Lama [*sic*]," and the rest, who are anyway already distorted beyond recognition in the portrayals given by the thaumaturge. The preceding section offers examples of the lessons he managed to elicit from Christianity and Islam; and in *Beelzebub* "Saint Buddha" himself utters a long harangue on the organ Kundabuffer which sounds word for word like the credulous Hassein's grandfather speaking.

Still, did Gurdjieff even dream for an instant, however preposterous it seems, that he could inaugurate a movement to replace the Celestial Pantheon or Rule of Heaven with that of the nether spheres, let alone make a dent in society? The answer is, he did the only thing he knew to do, motivated throughout his life by what he calls an "itching-itch…to elucidate everything" by means of "instilling into the consciousness of my contemporaries of several such 'psychic-initiative' factors as in my opinion…ought inevitably to act as guiding principles in the consciousness of all creatures presuming to call themselves 'God-like' "—fully determined to "tread heavily on the most sensitive corn of everyone he met" rather than falter by the wayside. We have seen him say "I need soldiers who will fight for me for the new world". Bennett estimates that Gurdjieff must have marshalled some tens of thousands of such soldiers from the time he first started taking pupils around 1909, including upwards of a thousand under his personal supervision at one period or another. Undoubtedly he could even have had many more had he wished; but clearly what he sought was an "elect," and not just a passing coterie of admirers.

It has already been mentioned how his objectives were confounded by the motor accident at Fontainebleau, regarded by him "as the manifestation of a power hostile to his aim, a power with which he could not contend". Bennett speaks of "the intensity of the forces at work which destroyed, or at least deferred for many long years, the hopes that many had formed that Gurdjieff's system might change the course of human history".

But to the end he kept his sights high, and even in the last summer of his life declaimed: "I am Gurdjieff! I *not* will die…. One day *Beelzebub* will be read in Pope's Palace. Perhaps I will be there".

Dr. Christopher Evans, an experimental psychologist cited in the first part of this *expose,* writes of the thaumaturge: "The spell that this extraordinary individual seems to have held over

people is really hard to fathom…. There seems to have been an aura or presence about him which it is impossible to comprehend in the language of science and psychology". This is because Gurdjieff operated out of a domain inaccessible to analytical science, a domain moreover even unsuspected by it to exist. And yet it is this very secret which allows Gurdjieff whatever triumphs he has gained in the modern world. For the true ancients from whom he alleges the origin of his teachings were fully cognizant of this domain and would ironically—if one wishes—by that fact have made the dissemination of any such teachings fall on barren soil—these ancients not having that "child-like naïveté"—in this sphere, to say the least—which Peters claims was Gurdjieff's design to inculcate in people.

The paradox about Gurdjieff the "materialist" is the way in which he more than any other figure probably in our day has been able to effectuate a breach in the protective carapace of matter sealing off our world from its animic substratum. If one can judge by Holy Writ, his legacy will not be lost, being but a mild foretaste of what Destiny holds in store; and Gurdjieff even admitted in so many words that he was really a precursor, or "Herald of Coming Good" as he puts it.

For the reader who desires to see things in a clear light, the whole matter hinges on metaphysical discernment—even if aesthetic discernment alone should suffice.

In order to situate Gurdjieff and his movement, the one and only question the seeker has to resolve is whether or not God is Omnipotent. If the answer is in the affirmative, then Gurdjieff and his hosts are doomed.