


Gurdjieff's 'Dirty Dog'

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An exploration of 'conscious' sleep

... the best word would be awareness, that is, a consciousness which is not linked to language, to the functioning of the computer, but to presence. Certainly, one could also say that awareness is linked to the mind, but in such a case, surely, this refers to another mind. In it, there is a meeting with the heart, with the domain of the soul, of the emotions, but in this case distinct from the soup of projections, repulsions, and attachments. It is of the same domain, but much higher and, at this point, there no longer exists a perceptible difference between the higher "psyche" and this higher "mind". The two aspects are very linked and perhaps identical.

Jerzy Grotowski:  A Kind of Volcano¹

Jerzy Grotowski's radical explorations of the meaning of theatre are widely known in theatrical circles, his Stanislavski-influenced conclusions often identical to those advanced by the Armenian philosopher G.I. Gurdjieff. Before exploring some of these conclusions, Grotowski's view of what conscious awareness is in itself should be considered, for in suggesting that awareness is not linked to language, but to the body's mind (heart, soul, presence, etc) Grotowski breaks with the tradition in which language is our only means of knowing that we know something. In his interpretation of consciousness and its workings, language is identified as the mind's computer, not the unconscious mind as presumed by Poincare and many a neuroscientist. Poincare's conception of the unconscious as a "mixing machine in the basement" is replaced by language functioning like a computer in that it corsets the products of conscious awareness within

the confining rules of grammar and syntax. By such means are the logics of "coherent" thinking established, a coherence constantly in need of further *acts* of "attention" to rectify the inadequacies of linguistic construction.

Attended by awareness and attention, language can be said to manufacture conscious coherence out of itself by way of an associative juggling. *That* is its functional limit; it is not in itself the root cause of our ability to think. Reduce the influence of language in consciousness through meditative emptying or word repetition and another dimension of the self begins to form, an experience of self quite different from the one we are accustomed to. In this context to "think" is to *conceive* of something without words, then *give birth* to that something through words. Language undoubtedly assists with conception in that it is out of previous linguistic births that thinking is aroused, but thinking in itself is not conceptual, it is *perceptual*. But it's a complicated process. At the most basic level we test bits of language against other bits until some level of conscious clarity is achieved – particularly in writing, but it is a stumblingly vague process that leaves us with the impression of everything "sensible" being language driven, when in fact what is "sensible" belongs not to language but to *psyche*. Psyche is *not* the conscious mind; psyche is that within which mind as a self-orienting principle in space and time moves and has its being; it is Grotowski's *soul*, and it is a phenomenon with cosmic implications. In this sense psyche/soul is the interstice point between consciousness and the greater reality from out of which consciousness itself has emerged.

We can of course get caught up in the act of manufacturing language out of language and ignore the promptings of psyche. We can get distracted (seduced?) by the logic of language and end up with meanings estranged from their psychophysical base. This need not lead to an immediate debacle of thought, but in terms of "habit" that will almost certainly be the end result. Why so? Because endlessly permuted language-dependent concepts lead us into a linguistic desert, a dry, lifeless place of the mind where inspiration and insight give way to word gymnastics. This is the "tormenting" of language the philosopher Don Cupitt unfairly attributes to

mystical expression, and it is a constant danger for those to whom language is their only believed means of comprehension.

The conscious mind does not think *in* language, or math, it expresses its realisations *through* language or math. In this sense the unconscious mind takes on a significance not generally attributed to it, namely, that within which there is a meeting with the heart, with the domain of the soul, with the emotions. This is in contrast to the conscious mind's tendency to indulge in addition-like knowings that breed situations of conflict linked to the "soup of projections, repulsions, and attachments" belonging to the personality. The unconscious mind is our "other" mind, the one we tend to denigrate as "un" because it functions contrary to how everything known is conceived to have become known. For Cupitt, this is a non-argument; there is only one way to know anything and that is through language representations, the rest is by definition psychic mush. But that is to overlook the role of evaluative feeling in thought and ignore it as a "underground" comprehension. To understand something is to "stand under" something, and that something is psyche. It is, to borrow W.B. Yeats' lovely phrase, to *think in one's marrowbone*.

In its primary, undifferentiated state, thoughts haunt and tantalize us with the weight of their presence, a psychic weightiness that drives us to express in language what we sense and feel forming in psyche. When speaking, we blurt our thoughts out into the world *through* grammar and syntax without being aware of how they arose, and when writing spend much of our time struggling to express what we sense ourselves to *already* know. If we get stuck and attempt to wrestle meanings out of psyche by force of will, then we invariably end up with a big fat nothing for our efforts. Forced by the nature of psyche to wait on the good auspices of psyche, we have little option but to submit to the sheer magic of interior processes.

I will be accused of subjectivism for daring to say what I've just said about language and meaning, never mind many of the other things said about

psyche and body throughout this group of essays. So be it. The barriers put up to such thinking are beginning to come down, philosophers such as Jacob Needleman, R.K. Forman, Bruce Mangan, Jordan Zlatev and the psychologist's Benny Shanon and James Hillman (to name but a few) leading the charge towards a more experientially based appreciation of who and what we are.

End-product Thinking

Thought as an "experience" is quite different from thought as an "end product"; they are not the same thing. End-product thinking is also an experience, but it is an experience of "meaning" tamed and brought under control through the strictures of language. Language is a straitjacket allied to propositional coherence that we have to escape from each time we wish to creatively extend a piece of thinking. If all we could know was only knowable in language, then we would be governed by the limitations of language and incapable of venturing beyond linguistic constructions.² , That, thankfully, is not the case. Language itself gives way to intimations that stretch beyond the horizon of language; we are forever straining at the linguistic leash, and do often break free. Great poetry breaks free. Great literature carries us into the depths of ourselves. Great mathematics opens up vertiginous vistas of space and time. In sleep we cast aside the restraints of logic and experience psyche in the raw, and in meditation or contemplation we probe to the very heart of what it means to be human and emerge transformed in attitude if nothing else. But it is in our relationships that the most insightful moments occur, for it is there in the daily tussle between minds that we see ourselves reflected in our entirety. Mystical experience may afford us glimpses of another dimension, but it is our experience of each other that affords us, moment by moment, the chance to see ourselves as others see us. The question is, what do we see when we look at ourselves in this way?

Sleepwalkers Awake!

If George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff gave the world anything of value, it was a system of ideas whereby human beings could intentionally witness their own state of mind in the behavior of others, and in how they themselves behave in relation to others. Throughout these essays I have explored the tendency we have to disappear into consciously engaged thought, and through the writings of Jacob Needleman, Father Sylvan and others have suggested that this disappearing act has serious implications. So serious, in fact, that to not be aware of it is to be deprived of vital information. Moving impulsively from one thought to another, from one deed to another, we in fact resemble sleepwalkers in our actions and reactions. We are awake and aware to the extent that we are not asleep and in bed, but we are not actually *there* in the way we imagine ourselves to be.

G. I. Gurdjieff played an important role in Jerzy Grotowski's scheme of things because this man of the theatre discovered for himself important aspects of Gurdjieff's thinking through theatre and what it takes to be an actor of substance. This is not surprising, for Gurdjieff, too, was a man of the theatre; he saw all human beings as involved in role-playing, and used actual stage performances (sacred dances and movement configurations) to get his ideas across *as* experiences. He was also recognised as an actor in his own right because of behavior designed to impart aspects of his system beyond the confines of language. Aware of how predictable human beings are in their reactions, he set out to destroy the automatic thinking responses of those around him through situations that embarrassed and sometimes alarmed those attempting to work with him. This earned for Gurdjieff the reputation of being a bit of a madman, and caused not a few to regard him as mentally unstable. As it is the chief concern of most of us to appear sane and sensible, Gurdjieff's willingness to suffer the bad opinion of others for a greater purpose speaks for itself. Advocating an "intermediate state of awareness" in relation to *conscience* he created, by his actions, a subtle form of suffering in the minds of those around him. So powerful was this that even those who knew what he was up to could not escape the pain of such situations. In relation to this, Grotowski's own words are revealing:

There, all at once, appeared a person who brought a rigorous practice and a rigorous research. I mean it when I say research. For me, there is a very strong element of research. It is not like implanting a branch of the ancient tradition; it is also, on the same level, contemporary. After all, the traditions are only founded in this way.³

What Gurdjieff was up to went far beyond the instilling of some ancient system into those who worked with him; it was also an attempt to extend and refine what was already known about that system through ongoing experience and an examination of first principles. The temptation to engineer that knowledge into a system that could be learned, like a foreign language, was anathema to Gurdjieff; for him it had to be conveyed through a confronting of what we were at the deepest levels of being. In *The Heart of Buddhism*, Guy Claxton sums up this situation rather well:

The function of much teaching and instruction is to try to speed things up by giving you hints and clues as to where to look and what it is you are looking for. But the danger with this, of course, is that, if you are prompted too much, you may get too fixed an idea of what it is you are supposed to be seeing, and see your idea, rather than what is really there.⁴

For this reason Grotowski says that P.D. Ouspensky's great work on the Gurdjieff system, *In Search of the Miraculous*, is both useful and potentially destructive because it is too clear by half. Too much clarity leads to a false security, the security of thinking that believing something is the same as experiencing something. Caught up in the dream of believing that we are awake because involved with ideas about being awake, we may fail to notice the difference between belief and experience and die, to put it in Gurdjieff's confronting language, *like a dirty dog*. Or, in Meister Eckhart's equally brutal evaluation, *rot with the body* because we do not have *the power to do*. There has to be an accumulation of the energy (*tonos*) of attention for real change to be possible, but because of our natures and

the mechanics of perception we are deficient in our ability to sufficiently accrue this energy. Without an accruing of the energies that accompany *sustained* acts of awareness no new entity can form within us. To believe, as some do, that this "new entity" continues after death is neither here nor there; what matters is the huge difference sustained acts of attention make to the quality of our responses. Gurdjieff avoided questions at the theoretical level; he asked them at the practical level of everyday experience and interaction, for it is in the rough and tumble of everyday life that work on oneself begins.

Gifted in that we can know what the animal kingdom seems not to know, we are at the same time blind to the fact that our engagement with knowing robs us of the next level of knowing: how mind can free itself from constant mental engagement. There is nothing wrong with mental engagement, or with the form of knowing that such engagement affords: we have to know *what* we know so as to know *that* we know. But there is something wrong with mental engagement when it usurps our whole psychic landscape and become our only recognised means of comprehension. When that happens something of our humanity leaks away and we feel forsaken: existential angst is our reward. We do awaken every so often, but it is the equivalent of someone awakening from a sedative-induced trance – no sooner are we awake than we are entranced again. We may do the right thing, say the right thing, even think the right thing, but it is all hit and miss and done inside a dream-like state of consciousness that only a shock can awaken us from. As we all share the same mental condition there is little chance of anything other than grief, pain, psychological suffering or the threat of death to act as the shock we require. Anything less leaves us blissfully unaware of our predicament.

Morality versus *Thereness*

Hence the power of Christianity's crucified Christ; he is a rude, crude awakener for many within whom the question of their existence has not properly arisen. Such individuals sense that Christ was, in some difficult to

define sense, properly awake and aware, but their question generally ends up in the basket marked *morality*. Morality dominates the Christian landscape, the whole purpose of Christ's sufferings having been to save us from our *sins*. Being good or bad is however not what the puzzle of being alive is about; it is about our "being" *not* being alive. Christ dying to shield us from an angry God over moral issues is the result of language having displaced sensibility and generated its own language-bound reality around a distorted historical premise: the resurrection of "being" (*thereness*) as an experience available to *all* human beings turned into the fallacy of Jesus' resurrection as a singular act.

The philosopher Jacob Needleman cuts to the heart of this matter when he asked if we can hear the voice of conscience speaking within us. This was Gurdjieff's question, and it had nothing to do with morality. Neither had it anything to do with the voice of our social conditioning. Conscience, for Gurdjieff, was not the voice of parent, teacher, clergyman or policeman whispering in our ear, or the voice of Christianity's tripartite God instructing us from heaven. It was "the feeling of the whole truth in any situation" surfacing within us as a friction between our deep-seated sense of truth and our submerged, automated natures. Conscience was waking up in the midst of conscious engagement and *knowing* that we were awake. Not as a proposition recognised, but as an experience actualised.

As with conscience, so also with "love", "hope" and "faith", a set of demands we consciously battle with because they are dependent on the *force of conscience* as it arises in our momentarily awake minds.⁵ To awaken, in this sense, is to undergo intrinsic change at the center of being; it is to wake up into a "new mind" and *see* things in an entirely new way. And what do we see? We see that Christ has been turned into a monster of our minds and has to be chased out of our minds.⁶ Only with the arising of real conscience can he be allowed re-entry, real conscience being the friction that allows mind to glimpse itself slipping constantly into unaware responses. Archbishop Rowan Williams picks up on this theme when he says, "Authentic religious ... practice begins in the attempt to attend to the

moment of self-questioning – to refuse to cover over, evade or explain the pain and shock of whatever brings the self into question, to hold on to the difficulty before the almost inevitable descent into pathos and the personal drama begins.”⁷

Three Centers of Perception

To help us with the problem of conscience, Gurdjieff postulated three centers of perception: (1) the thinking center; (2) the emotional center; and (3) the moving-instinctive center. It is through these centers that we are said to perceive, think or move in any given moment of time. In our consciously engaged state of mind we are unaware of the functioning of these centers, and equally unaware of our perceptions being organized and filtered through what Gurdjieff called the “formatory apparatus”, the mechanical functioning of the mind that organizes all physical and mental experiences as they occur. Place this alongside Grotowski’s idea of language functioning as a computer, and “formatory apparatus” begins to make sense – it aptly describes our perceptions of self, other and world as under the control of automatic processes difficult to detect, and equally difficult to bring under conscious control. As each center is said to perceive only one aspect of reality, and we perceive reality through only one center at a time (thinking, feeling or organic sensation), we end up with a truncated comprehension of reality that can be righted only through an *intentional spreading of attention into those other centers*. Needleman puts it like this:

the body needs to be penetrated by a quality of attention that is quite distinct from the mainly intellectual function which we usually designate by "mind".⁸

If this penetration of the body by attention does not take place, then we are at the mercy of the center that happens to be in control. We are, therefore, not just half the person we ought to be, we are only one-third the person we ought to be in terms of the center we happen to be

functioning through. We are either *all* mind ("intellect") or all feeling ("emotion") or all sensation ("body"), but hardly ever a healthy mixture of all three. That is perhaps the deadly fascination drug addiction has for us; it allows us a glimpse of reality not generally experienced, and it is such a revelation some of us are willing to slowly die to repeat it. At the most basic of levels a single cigarette can change the consciousness of an addict, alcohol and sex become addictive for the same reason. Even intellectual matters can become addictive in the sense of an over-dependence on verbal schemes.

So what to do? How can we escape the dictates of our own natures? And what does this say about Christianity's spiritual premise? If the penetration of attention into the body can bring about a radical transformation of what we are and what we perceive, and this was understood and practiced by Christians in the early days of the faith, then how are we to evaluate that faith's evolution when dependence on vicarious sacrifice has turned its original contemplative genius into a theological excuse for us to stay exactly as we are? For that, in essence, is what Christianity offers the world: the ability to legitimately ignore the deep-seated knowing that moments of real awareness afford. Don't dare question the Christian plan of salvation, or cast doubt on whether Jesus walked on water or fed five thousand with the contents of someone's lunch box. Salvation comes to those who believe, then believe some more. It is the experience of *believing without question in what you've been taught to believe* that saves you from the wrath of God, not some philosophically obscure notion about truth being allied to the experience of being. But hang on a minute. The wrath of what? God? Does this mean that God too is emotionally unstable, that he is liable to react in unpredictable ways? Is that why we need Jesus? Would God destroy us all if left to his own devices?

In terms of conscience, what we're talking about here is not some kind of mental struggle in the sense of trying to be good. That is bootstrap conscience, and it belongs to anyone within whom attention has not, to some degree, been developed. There *is* a struggle involved, but it has

nothing to do with sin, guilt or fear; it has to do with *impulses recognized for what they are as they arise*. It is a state of "attention" within which we *sense* an impulse toward behavior that could be problematical and deal with it *before* it takes hold. If we fail in this, then like everyone else we have to ride the impulse through until its energy dissipates. Such impulses can, on occasions, be conquered through mental stubbornness reinforced by prayer or New Age affirmations, but few individuals are capable of sustaining that kind of control, and when their steely resolve fails the result is generally catastrophic. Father Sylvan puts it like this:

The most dangerous people ... are those who have achieved inner being without the corresponding development of soul.⁹

And again:

Man must reverse the ... dispersal of the soul by drawing unto himself the attention which he unnecessarily gives to his thoughts, emotional reactions and sensations, and which results in the deformation and distortion of the entire human organism, to the extent that he has fallen to the level of a sick animal. This work is the basis of religious asceticism and is the authentic meaning of religious morality.¹⁰

The "dispersal of the soul" refers to the losing of soul (the new entity) through an inability to accumulate the energy of attention. For those who achieve a sense of inner being through moral uprightness alone, their morality is by definition bigger than their soul in the sense that they have invested all their energies in the idea of moral uprightness at the expense of the energies required to build a new entity. They will achieve much in pursuing this path (moral uprightness seems to confirm the claims of faith), but as these powerful energies are still attached to submerged and engaged conscious minds, and to emotionally governed natures, the result is religious leaders or charismatic personalities who at the flick of a finger can exhibit unexpected tendencies. Hence Father Sylvan's observation that

these “men of salvation walk the earth like explosive devices ready to be set off at random.” This is “mysticism without a soul,” he tells us,¹¹ and according to Needleman it can lead to religious fervor (the “caricature of love”) and to fear, hatred and violence. Orthodoxy has a role to play in society, but on its own it offers a system of moral idealism and belief that in itself is not enough in terms of personal transformation. Christ may be held up as the example we ought to follow, but the meaning of Christ’s life and death have been trumped by a theology of dependence that leaves the individual existentially bankrupt.

For Jerzy Grotowski, P.D. Ouspensky suffered from the problem of being too clear in his breakdown of Gurdjieff’s ideas, but a certain degree of clarity is necessary when dealing with the challenges that system of thought represents. Misunderstand attention and everything falls in a heap. Whatever one thinks of our having three centers of perception, it is the idea of attention being ultra important that makes Gurdjieff’s ideas unique – unique to the extent that Father Sylvan relies on them to explain the relevance of contemplative practice for the modern world. So also the philosopher Jacob Needleman who, as co-editor of *Gurdjieff, Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings*, tells us in the introduction that Gurdjieff’s diagnosis of the human condition “integrates psychological, social, cultural, and ontological approaches to life.”¹²

The surgeon Kenneth Walker was no less certain as to Gurdjieff’s importance, for on meeting with P.D. Ouspensky in 1923 he spoke of stumbling into Gurdjieff’s ideas and described them as capable of “taking possession of us and of propelling us in a direction in which, at the beginning, we had no desire to go.”¹³ Likewise Jerzy Grotowski whose radical explorations of the meaning of theatre splice almost seamlessly into the Gurdjieffian perspective of what makes a human being human. And as I discovered when reading the book of essays on Gurdjieff edited by Needleman and George Baker, many others were of the same opinion. Peter Brook, director of the International Centre of Theatre Research in Paris, had, like Grotowski, come under the sway of Gurdjieffian thought, as

had Henry Leroy Finch, philosopher and Wittgenstein authority. Also Roger Lipsey, historian of art and classical literature; Basarab Nicolescu, theoretical physicist and specialist in the theory of elementary particles; Ravi Ravindra, professor of physics and comparative religion; Robin Skynner, psychiatrist and pioneer in the development of family and group therapy in England; and last but not least Charles Tart, professor of transpersonal psychology. This varied collection of individuals had given the Gurdjieffian scheme a firm nod of approval, and their reason for doing so rested mainly on one thing: the discipline of *self-remembering* as taught by Gurdjieff to Ouspensky, and through Ouspensky's seminal book *In Search of the Miraculous* to a host of others across the planet since 1949. So maybe the Catholic mystic Bernadette Roberts is not far off the mark when she suggests there are millions of people out there who have, like herself, experienced the depths of being, and that eventually all human beings will experience what she has experienced.¹⁴ In an evolutionary sense we are perhaps on the cusp of another huge change in perception of self, other and world, a change already well established, although not yet fully visible.

The Skill of Self-Remembering

Those familiar with Gurdjieff's ideas may think the word "skill" in this context inappropriate, but I think it has its place, particularly as Ouspensky himself refers to self-remembering as a "deliberate"

act.¹⁵ If something is deliberate, it is intentional, and if it is intentional it is brought about by an act of will. We may not have a developed will, but we are not exactly will-less. As self-remembering is, in its early stages, an extremely difficult thing for many people to grasp, it takes an active will to set it in motion *as an experience*, that is, it takes conscious effort to start the wheel of awareness turning. Once that wheel is set in motion, however, everything changes, for self-awareness then becomes part of a loop in the

conscious mind that can spring into action when least expected. But there's a problem here, and it has to do with how we interpret "self-awareness", for becoming self-aware is something we all experience from time to time, and that, strictly speaking, is not self-remembering in the sense that Gurdjieff taught. Self-awareness and self-remembering are different experiences; there is without doubt self-awareness *in* self-remembering, but there need not be, and seldom is, any level of self-remembering in a moment of self-awareness. Why so? Because self-awareness as an experience is by definition mono-directional, that is, it is reflective of the self alone, whereas self-remembering incorporates the context within which self-awareness takes place *alongside the experience of self-awareness*. In this sense self-remembering is duo-directional, not mono-directional, and it is this fundamental factor that makes it into the problem many people experience when experimenting with it. Self-remembering requires *a division of attention between self and object*; it is not just you becoming aware of yourself, it is you becoming aware of yourself *and* what you are looking at or interacting with in the same moment of time. It is a form of double-attention in which two objects of attention, or what appear to be two objects of attention, are paradoxically attended to simultaneously. Ouspensky's own words confirm this point:

Having defined this I saw that the problem consisted in directing attention on oneself without weakening or obliterating the attention directed on something else. Moreover, this "something" could as well be within me as outside me.

Hence my interest when I came across the psychologist Robert Forman's definition of a "pure consciousness event" as a "dualistic mystical state" (DMS) that gives way to a "unitive mystical state" (UMS). And then more directly still as *an awareness of one's own awareness while simultaneously remaining conscious of thoughts, sensations and actions*.¹⁶ I did a double-take when I read those words, for Forman was articulating something not generally understood in meditational circles. I was also intrigued by his two-tier approach: that a dualistic mystical experience subsequently *gives*

way to a unitive mystical experience. The reason for my interest was that a form of awareness capable of going in two directions simultaneously defied Kant's assertion that two objects of attention could exist in the same conscious space in any given moment of time. That seemed to put the mockers on the whole business, except that Forman had come to the same realisation I had come to: it was a two-tier process that *resulted* in an experience of mystical unity. First came the intentionally aroused state of two-way attention (the attempt to scan self and object simultaneously), followed by the unity experience in which self and object *appeared* to fuse into one experience. But how did one explain what had happened given that the first tier of this experience had been declared philosophically impossible to attain? Why does this fusion result from a mind that loops presence of the physical self into its internal or external perceptions? Could it be that the experience of unity had to do with the *tension* set up in psyche? The experience would then be the result of a mind that had blown a psychic fuse, not a mind in contact with some transcendental source. Such an explanation takes the gloss off such experiences, but it need not be the case, for we have no way of telling how or when the phenomenon of self-consciousness arose, and how those who first experienced consciousness of self reacted to that development. The self-conscious loop would have given a huge advantage to those within whom it first developed.

Robert Forman's description of a "dualistic mystical experience" suggests a moment in the meditative process when self and object of attention come together as a result of successfully holding in place awareness of one's own awareness alongside whatever one happens to be dealing with. But that should be understood as a moment prefaced by *many* such moments – this is not something that happens once and that's it; it is an ongoing series of experiences that progressively strengthen. This is altogether different from identification with internal events leading to ecstatic experiences aligned with religious beliefs; it is a quite different experience in that it has no doctrinal hook. The meditator/contemplator is not at the mercy of religious bias or imagination; they are instead open to the mythic

level of being where symbols dominate. Having said that, it is possible for someone of a particular religious persuasion to find themselves experiencing something that carries them beyond their religious orientation – in fact if they persist that is almost inevitable. There are, in other words, numerous levels of fusion, the final levels being described by people like Meister Eckhart and Bernadette Roberts as unitive on two levels.

At the more mundane levels fusion experiences can be described as instances where the mind manages to cast off its constant busyness, and through the attempt to hold self and other in the same perceptual frame of reference experience the tiny jolt of becoming momentarily real. This "realness" is however not the result of self and object fusing together; it is the result of the self as an "idea", as an object in one's mind being replaced by the self as an "experience", an act of cognitive-mentation that momentarily integrates us with *psyche*. Cognitive-mentation requires us to relate to our own cognitive activities; it not an *objectifying* process. In this sense we are free of the philosophical objection cited earlier. In relation to thinking and language, J.L. Mehta puts it best in *Heidegger and Vedanta*:

Being and thinking belong together in a deeper unity (inaccessible to any form of dialectic), from which they both derive their nature and which exhibits itself, while yet concealing itself, as the proper manner of thinking that is no more a grasping, no longer a striving to form a system of concepts for what is beyond conceptualizing."¹⁷

The discipline of being aware of being aware in conjunction with either internal or external reality is the key to a wholly *other* kind of mental life, and it can be enticed to appear with practice. But it is the sustaining of this practice that is important. Without effort nothing is reciprocated. I use this loaded term in the sense of a higher system of awareness being switched on. No, not "switched on", that is a mechanistic way of talking and it has no place here. This is not a switch being thrown; it is the experience of self

experientially *presenced* to itself *beyond* mental construct.

There is little reason to call this experience "mystical"; it is, in the first instance, little more than a subtle mental game, albeit a game with serious consequences. Ouspensky uses the term "novelty" to describe such moments,¹⁸ and that just about sums them up. But not quite. For to scan self and other simultaneously is to scan what mystics term the *still point* of being, and when that is accomplished there is always the chance of threading the ontological needle. When that happens the fusion experience, tiny and inconsequential as it may appear, gives way to something beyond all expectation.

References and Notes:

- 1) Grotowski, Jerzy, "A Kind of Volcano", an essay in *Gurdjieff*, edited by Jacob Needleman and George Baker, Continuum, New York, 1996, p 90.
- 2) Cupitt, Don, *Mysticism after Modernity*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1998. pp 35, 61. Cupitt rejects the idea of subjective self-reflectivity as being in any way valuable in terms of meaning; that was a hope sandwiched between the early seventeenth and the early twentieth centuries that bore no useful fruit. Arguments from religious experience were of no consequences then, and equally of no consequence now. True as this observation is on many levels (trying to prove the existence of God or some implicit moral order cannot be done by way of subjective experience), Cupitt's argument weakens when he equates mystical experience with religious beliefs and pronounces mystical experience subjectively invalid because of that supposed relationship. At the *via positiva* level of mystical experience, emotional intoxication can seem to verify religious beliefs for the experiencer, but at the *via negativa* levels the very opposite is true. When *via negativa* mysticism begins to gain ground it unravels rather than confirms religious beliefs. This is perhaps why Cupitt is later forced to interpret the tendency of experienced mystics to question belief forms as a species of political subversion.
- 3) Ibid, p 93.^[1]
- 4) Claxton, Guy, *The Heart of Buddhism*, Aquarian/Thorsons, London, 1990, p 127.^[1]
- 5) Needleman, Jacob, "Gurdjieff, or the Metaphysics of Energy", an essay in *Gurdjieff*, edited by Jacob Needleman and George Baker, Continuum, New York, 1996., pp 83-84. The question of conscience is a difficult one for Christians, indeed for anyone. The modern, democratic idea of

conscience is that we each, ultimately, have the right to decide what is right and what is wrong for ourselves. This is a “rights of the individual” argument that has taken hold in our time, but it may be mistaken in its basic premise. Not in the Catholic sense of a willful ignoring of established doctrine for selfish purposes (the use of contraceptive devices is, for the Catholic hierarchy, a major sin), but in the sense of our becoming aware of how we overlook our own habituated foibles. We are adept at side-stepping our own weaknesses, yet do manage to glimpse them from time to time. It is a matter of awareness levels. Caught mostly in submerged and engaged thought as we are, our capacity for self-reflection is impaired. In this sense, and in this sense only, is our ability to view and correct our own behavior through conscience not as robust as we might think.

6) Needleman, Jacob, *Lost Christianity*, (as above), p 212.

7) Williams, Archbishop Rowan, *Lost Icons*, T & T Clark. A Continuum Imprint, London 2003, pp 183-4. ^[1]_[SEP]364 ^[1]_[SEP]

8) Needleman, Jacob, Gurdjieff, or the Metaphysics of Energy, an essay in *Gurdjieff*, edited by Jacob Needleman and George Baker, (as above) p 80. ^[1]_[SEP]

9) Sylvan, Father, as cited in *Lost Christianity* by Jacob Needleman, p 194.

10) Ibid. ^[1]_[SEP]

11) Ibid, p 193.

^[1]_[SEP]12) Needleman, Jacob, Gurdjieff, or the Metaphysics of Energy, an essay in *Gurdjieff*, edited by Jacob Needleman and George Baker, Intro, p ix. (as above)

13) Walker, Kenneth, *Venture with Ideas*, Intro, Luzac Oriental, London, 1995, p 10.

^[1]_[SEP]14) Roberts, Bernadette, *What is Self? A Study of the Spiritual Journey in Terms of Consciousness*, Sentient Publications, LLC edition, 2005, pp 165-6. Roberts makes an extraordinary statement in this section of her book. She accuses God of overstepping himself and pushing her human limits at age nine too far. She then caps this statement with the following observation: The result ... left me with the decided intuition that God’s work in this human form [herself] was actually a piece of research, or that God was testing to see just how far he could stretch the human limits – possibly with the idea of refashioning them.” One makes of this what one will.

15) Ouspensky, P.D., *In Search of the Miraculous*, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1949, p 119. ^[1]_[SEP]

16) Forman, Robert K., “What Does Mysticism Have to Teach us?”, *Journal of Consciousness*

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Studies, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1998, p 186.

17) Mehta, J.L., "Heidegger and Vedanta", p 32. As found in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1990.

18) Ouspensky, P.D., *In Search of the Miraculous*, (as above) p 119.