

THE 'THIRD DIMENSION' OF THE ENNEAGRAM

There was always a practical thread in the Gurdjieff approach which was centred on what we could 'do' rather than on what we could 'think'. In the design of the brochure Gurdjieff put together for his proposed but never realised 'Institute', we find the enneagram flanked by angel and devil, impressed with the four symbolic figures of the evangelists and, beneath it, showing paraphernalia such as sewing machines, telescopes and so on.¹ The dark and the light, the balance of perspectives and technology are brought together. One of Gurdjieff's sayings was: "Trust devil, angel - he always want to become archangel". A self-avowed materialist, Gurdjieff was always one for immersion in the concrete; which goes along with his insistence on the necessity for us to bring our bodies into our understanding.

When people have looked at the numerology of the enneagram, they have been tempted - like angel - to float off into considerations of cosmic laws. Gurdjieff himself was acutely aware of the necessity for an 'objective language', a language that would enable people to exchange information about the 'inner world' in an exact way, so that they could really benefit one another and make progress in their understanding of the phenomenon of being human; but the numerical abstractions he played with during the Russian period were by way of experiment and later abandoned. He himself said that the best method in symbolism required the combination of numbers, letters, symbols and words and anyone of them in isolation would not work.² We can understand this in terms of combining abstract and concrete, the linear and the holistic.

The construction of the enneagram is ingenious. It embodies two of Gurdjieff's favourite 'laws' or forms of understanding. The first of these, the 'law of three' is the principle of all relatedness. Most traditions have their own version of this law and Gurdjieff's is one amongst many. However, in his inimitable practical style, he pinpoints the essence by saying that it is only when three independent forces come together that anything can change. This simply reflects the fairly obvious finding that action and reaction alone cancel each other out. The second law is 'the law of seven'. In Gurdjieff's explanations, this has in fact at least two forms. In one of these, we have the differentiation of a continuum such as we find in the spectrum of colour.³ In the other, we have the idea of the 'octave'. This derives not only from music but also from the 'octaves' that are found in the Periodic Table of Elements as developed by Mendeleev in Russia and Newlands in England at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴ The octave (of *eight* terms in fact) goes from *do* to *do*, through various stages or 'notes' that stand in simple numerical relations to each other.

Before we go any further into what these 'laws' might mean, we have to stop and consider the operation involved in bringing two independent forms of understanding into a single vision. This was a masterstroke. Although the two laws are encoded in the symbol, it is only when our own consciousness is activated that we see their mutual consequences 'in depth'. There is a precise analogue with stereoscopic vision, in which we have an image for each eye compounded together to give the experience of a third dimension. If the enneagram is seen as flat, it gives us nothing; but, when the three and the seven are brought together 'in our own brain', we can see a great deal. In general, this concerns *transformation*. The concept of transformation is that something of a given nature is broken down and mixed with other elements, and then reformed to realise the original at a higher level. A common example given of this is how the food we ingest is turned into 'our own substance'. Gurdjieff made much of this and said we had to take account *three* different kinds of 'food'.

The three foods were food as such, air and impressions. In our view, air relates to *energy-transformation* and impressions to *information*. The three categories of matter, energy and information are only now becoming co-equal in our understanding of the world. Distinguishing the three foods in this way anticipates what we will say later about the need for three independent 'octaves' in the workings of the enneagram.

Change and Becoming

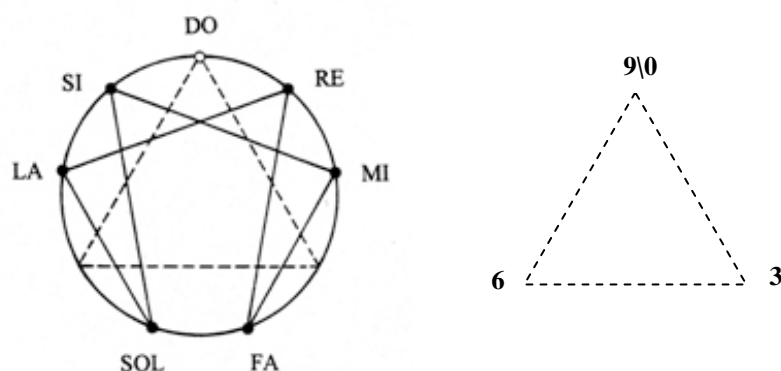
Gurdjieff's 'law of seven' gives us a language for thinking about a kind of change that 'changes being'. We can picture what is going on in terms, again, of a combination of two perspectives. In one of these, we have change in time; a series of steps one after the other. In the other, we consider what is happening in terms of *level*. In respect to level, we have a whole series of complex ideas and feelings: we see higher levels as more organised than lower ones and in some sense 'including' them; we feel there are different *qualities* of experience associated with different levels, and what change means on different levels is different, or associated with different 'energies'. The two dimensions of time and level are combined in the 'law of seven'. In Gurdjieff's explanations, he says that there are two critical transitions, at which things can go wrong, or deviate: in that a transition of level will not take place but a 'deceptive' change of direction on the same level instead. If we take the model of the musical octave (the major diatonic scale in particular) the first critical transition is between mi and fa and the second between si and do.⁵

It is matter of practical experience that things tend to go wrong. If we are involved in a project, we become subject to all sorts of influences, which introduce uncertainty. The overcoming of this uncertainty is an act of intelligence and, without uncertainty, there is no intelligence. When we become involved in complexity and uncertainty, we have to be able to pick up the right signals to keep us on track. We ourselves have 'created' the uncertainty by starting off the process of change in the first place, but we cannot know in advance what will befall us. In Gurdjieff's picture, what we have to do is to allow something to join in the process which comes from outside.

Experientially, this may feel as if it is to *increase* our difficulties. The idea is that, by taking on another challenge, we are able to control the one with which we began. Such an idea is quite contrary to many traditional views, which regard our immersion in complexity and uncertainty as simply a mistake. Gurdjieff's position was based on a profound feeling for the nature of *life* and we must add that he was, amongst many things, a pioneer of ecological thinking.⁶ No living being can exist in isolation. Every living entity feeds on and is food for other living entities. So, the new input that can come at the first critical transition is already there in the environment if we can 'stomach' it!

The second critical transition is very different. Here, there is a 'gap' that has to be filled by the goal of the process, the *do*, itself. It comes from within the process. One way of picturing this is as an act of 'surrender' on the part of the note si in the octave, allowing *do* to take over. This is tantamount to letting go all residues of separateness. Such an idea can be mapped onto spiritual belief systems. Whole books can be written just about the implications of these two critical transitions.

However, where do they fit on the enneagram symbol? Here we show the notes of the octave arranged around the circle.



We have the first critical transition from *mi* to *fa* associated with point 3. So, we can think of the 'extra something' entering at this point. However, there is no space for the second critical transition from *si* to *do*; and we have to imagine that it is 'enfolded' in the top point 9 as *do* plus the interval. Then, we notice that there is a (dotted) line from 9 to 6, implying an inner connection.

At this stage, the arrangement does not appear self-consistent, because point 6 appears to come at the wrong place. We have to ask ourselves, to meet this challenge: what happens to the new input that enters at point 3? This new input is itself swept up in the transformational process. According to Gurdjieff, it constitutes a new 'octave' in its own right. If this is so, then point 3 is a new *do* and point 6 appears just where it needs an intervention to correct its pathway. Of course, now we have a *third* octave starting at point 6, in which the first critical transition occurs at point 9.⁷

The inherent pattern of the symbol has now revealed that it involves no less than three independent octaves, all three of which only come together in the last 'phase' (between 6 and 9 inclusively) of the total process (we have already spoken about the example of the three 'foods' necessary for a human being). Since we have three things going on at once, we can imagine that this is the domain of 'completing change' where the original purpose is fulfilled. The 'law of three' re-appears in another guise.

The Logos

Since the implications of the enneagram symbol are so rich, there are many possible interpretations of what it means. Gurdjieff rapidly sketched powerful ideas, never in a complete way, and then enjoined his pupils to *think*. I've taken up the challenge in my own way. In doing so, I've come to call what is represented in the triangular figure the *logos* of the situation. It is the inner 'idea' or 'will' that governs all that can happen. In this guise, I see the lines 0-3, 3-6 and 6-9 as 'commands'. This command structure has to mesh with the resources of the environment, or the system will fail. When I use the word 'command' it may be misleading in that it suggests control. The better meaning of it is as a 'request' or 'need'. The difficulty is that we are not used to thinking of will except as a 'power' - which is very misleading indeed.

I often give the simple example of 'hunger' that leads to the tripartite: (a) get food (0-3), (b) cook (3-6) and (c) serve meal (6-9). Each of the three involves a different *world* of experience. The first in my example is the world of things; the second, the world of life and the third the world of experience itself. Thinking along these lines, we can see just about every transformative process we know as analogous to the arising of life on Earth. Indeed, Gurdjieff himself introduced the idea of the critical intervals in terms of the role of organic life in the organisation of the solar system, an idea too rich and complex to deal with here.⁸

If we are concerned with a manufacturing or design process, then thinking and calculating alone are relegated to the world of things. It is only when the thoughts come into collision with real materials that a different step is made and the process 'comes alive'. Then, again, only when these two are brought into the domain of people and their perceived needs can there be completion.⁹ Always, there are three commands, three octaves and three worlds.

The middle phase of the enneagram is where we have two contrasting processes going on together. Naturally enough, this tends to be an area of conflict and struggle. That is why commentators have remarked that the very mid-point, at the bottom of the figure, marks the region of maximum turmoil, or 'fire'. This 'fire' is passionate and it is needed to 'cook' the process to a sufficient intensity to become malleable to the 'higher influence' that comes at point 6. Relative to the intervention at point 3, that of point 6 is *qualitative*. This makes the action at point 5 *dramatic*, in that a decision has to be made to take another step beyond conflict and intensity.¹⁰

When the enneagram is used to project the construction of dramatic works, we see the form of tragedy appearing when the process is brought to halt at point 6 and goes no further. As Hamlet lies dying, his last words are: "The rest is silence" - indicating the unfulfilled final

phase 6-9. In contrast, in Comedy, the process completes in harmonious reconciliation. Hence the title of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Making reference to dramatic works is no aberration, since these works themselves represent an understanding of the patterns of human life.

The Connections in and out of Time

We mentioned earlier that the law of seven was associated with steps in time as well as with changes of level 'out of time' as it were. This linear and temporal aspect is depicted in the enneagram symbol around the circle. Looked at in this way, the circle is flat. However, speaking in terms of octaves, at point 9, *do* and *do* coincide. As Eliot was to say later: "In my beginning is my end." Gurdjieff himself says that when we 'sound' the first *do*, the second *do* also sounds. In the world of pure possibility, *do* and *do* are identical. In the lower worlds, however, they are not. The enneagram is a 'many world' symbol.

The separation of beginning and end is projected from point 9 into the line 3-6: "The apex of the triangle closes the duality of its base, making possible the manifold forms of its manifestation in the most diverse triangles, in the same way as the point of the apex of the triangle multiplies itself infinitely in its base"¹¹ Within the world of possibility, two other worlds represented by 6 and 3 have their being. The three points 3, 6 and 9 represent three different perspectives on the whole, each according to a different world.

If the outer circle represents the linear process in time and the inner triangle represents the 3-world *logos* 'informing' the process, then what is the significance of the periodic figure, connecting the points 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8? Gurdjieff's explanation was in typically materialist terms: these inner lines adjust the contributions between the three independent factors.¹² The three 'substances' have to be mixed in the right proportions: not too much coarse, not too much fine; not too much order, not too much intensity, and so on. In this guise, the enneagram appears as a 'place of meeting' of the three worlds.¹³ Such an idea resonates throughout Gurdjieff's teaching as 'harmonious development'.

Much has been made of the numerology involved: the periodic figure 1-4-2-8-5-7 recurring being the decimal part of the fraction 1/7. Though this is interesting, it explains nothing. Our view is that Gurdjieff used this property of number to attract interest and focus attention on the possibility of building 'inner connections' that could harmonise the three independent contributions to the working of the whole. The periodic figure is, therefore, a symbol of the 'inner' or 'soul' life; or can be considered as a diagram of intelligence. Intelligence is born in uncertainty (on the right of the symbol) and fulfilled in acceptance (on the left of the symbol). We can also see the six-fold figure as intermediary between the *logos* of the triangle and the linear time of the outer circle. We go through life sequentially but sometimes 'hear' the music playing behind the scenes.

The periodic figure involves foresight, judgement, synchronicity, anti-causality or decision, sacrifice and remembering. It points to a very rich phenomenological field; one that has been scarcely investigated. As far as the numerology is concerned, two comments are in order. Firstly, the figure shown is one of the very few which allows for inner connections (out of time) that (a) form into a cycle, (b) represent different-sized intervals and (c) produce a left-right symmetry. Secondly, the whole form of the enneagram derives from adopting 10 as the base of the arithmetic used. If we take 12 as the base, for example, we can derive a similar figure, though with a tetrad in place of the triad. In this eleven-point symbol, the very same six-fold periodic figure appears as in the nine-point symbol, and in the same way (taking 1/7 but in the 12-base arithmetic).¹⁴ Such properties of number, though interesting as we have said before, do not and cannot explain anything. As Gurdjieff said to Bennett, to paraphrase, 'leave off the mathematizing and go for being'.

The *movements* provide a way to 'feel and sense' the properties of the enneagram. This is particularly true for understanding the pattern of the inner periodic lines 1-4-2-8-5-7. In most of the movements, the 'class' is arranged in six 'files' and, in many cases, these represent the points of the enneagram figure, excluding the triangle. The movement called

'No. 17' is known as an enneagram movement. At its start, each of the files performs a movement that represents one of the points 1, 4, 2, 8, 5 and 7. Then, they do a 'multiplication', in this case, multiplying 142857 by two to obtain the same digits in another arrangement: 285714. The people in file 1 displace to the position that was file 5 and everyone else moves correspondingly. After a sequence in their new positions, they return to their original places. The multiplication is repeated, this time to make 428571. The files move accordingly, and so it proceeds. In each cycle, the arrangement 142857 is restored, but taken by different files according to the multiplication.

This complex dance produces the concrete feeling of moving along the inner lines of the enneagram. As Gurdjieff always insisted, unless the body and feelings are involved, we *cannot understand*. This does not mean that performing No. 17 automatically produces an understanding of the enneagram. We can even see why: the triangular figure is missing, for example. To achieve a consciousness of the *logos* is quite another matter than following through the multiplications.

Another aspect of the development of the Gurdjieffian methodologies has been in the realm of 'inner exercises'. Such exercises are not identified with the vague connotations that the word 'meditation' has today. Some of the inner exercises are very exact and demanding. Bennett gave a very special place to what is called the 'decision exercise'. Though it would not be proper to describe it here, this exercise actually works in terms of the inner lines of the enneagram.

It Moves

Practitioners of the enneagram sometimes report that they come to see the enneagram as a 'moving diagram', not simply when they do the corresponding movements, but also in *contemplation*.¹⁵ This is a good test. The 'third' dimension that can be perceived through the stereoscopic fusion of the law of three and the law of seven not only shows a depth in space but also in time. Once it is seen as 'moving' then time itself appears in a different light. Gurdjieff insistently distinguished the enneagram picture from any naive concept of 'perpetual motion'. What it depicts is self-renewal within an ecological matrix. The periodic figure is a symbol of what Bennett called 'ableness-to-be' that he saw as so crucial in the 'war with time'.¹⁶ Our quest for 'immortality' is shown as concerning the practicalities of gaining a hold on the *present moment*.

The 'movement' of the enneagram is rather like a spinning action that enables something to enter into itself through its environment and not in isolation.¹⁷ What we see, then, in the flat picture drawn on a page is merely a caricature of the reality. Maybe each of us is born with our own 'typical idea' that has to be fulfilled in time, even though time appears to rob us of everything that we attain. In this respect, the idea of 'cosmic laws' is widely misunderstood. Such laws are 'cosmic' only in being ubiquitous, applying to every concrete situation in which we may find ourselves. They are not as the 'laws' of physics, which largely concern what is impossible: they concern what is possible, but *not guaranteed*.¹⁸ Hence, they are embedded in complexity and uncertainty, involve different worlds and go beyond what we can know. We have received numerous teachings about the hidden knowledge of the past but now we need to attend to the mysteries that are enacted in our own being and circumstances, here and now, as we lurch uncertainly towards a terrifying - or inspiring - future.

The significance of Gurdjieff's insistence on 'the reciprocal maintenance of everything existing' - his own formulation of the basic principle of ecology - becomes ever more cogent. Of particular interest is the possibility that the enneagram leads us to consider our thinking as a purely material process that requires an encounter with life to energise it and a joining with higher influences, or information on a global scale, to redeem it. Rudolph Steiner's book *The Redemption of Thinking* also guides us along similar lines. We are at a similar position to the man in a shop approached by a Sufi, who asks: "Do you have leather? Do you have

thread? Do you have nails? If so, why do you not make shoes?" E. O. Wilson in his masterful *Biophilia* argues that the love of organic life is essential for understanding.¹⁹ The World Wide Web linked by Internet has given us glimpses of a global interconnectedness, even though the principles of social organisation it might entail remain elusive. The enneagram is a tool for putting the ingredients together and making a meal that can really nourish us and satisfy our needs. It does not tell us what these ingredients are. Our task is to 'eat' the world before it consumes us.

A challenging implication of Gurdjieff's teachings is that we are 'food' for something. Here, he stands resolutely against the view that humans are the acme of creation. We do not know what we are feeding or what this will develop into. In speaking of three octaves, we left unspoken the question: where do the second and third octaves proceed further? In the ancient Sumerian hymn, the *Enuma Elish*, human kind is created to make sacrifices to the Gods and worship them so as to serve the maintenance of the creation.²⁰ Gurdjieff develops this idea in his own mythology. Willy-nilly, humans must *serve*, both Great Nature (or *Gaia*, in contemporary language) and the Gods (or the *noosphere*).²¹ We can do this consciously or unconsciously. If we serve consciously, we can 'spin' ourselves a soul.

Such 'wild' considerations are included to indicate the range of meaning implicated in the enneagram symbol: from kitchen to cosmos, as it were. By treating it as a piece of occult lore, many people have missed its immediate and practical use as a way of deepening our understanding of what we do in life.

NOTES

1. This drawing appears in C. S. Nott's book *loc. cit.* p.7
2. On objective language see, for example, *In Search* p. 295. On symbology, see *loc. cit.* p. 283
3. aspect of the law of seven is extensively discussed in Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales*, chapter XL 'The Law of Heptaparaparshinokh'. See also Bennett's *Talks on Beelzebub's Tales*, 'Law of Sevenfoldness'. Peter Brook has written a beautiful account of this law in his article 'The Secret Dimension'.
4. refers to Mendeleev in *Beelzebub's Tales*, p. 844
5. See *In Search* pp. 123-35
6. In particular, Gurdjieff Grasped the concept of the *biosphere*, a concept that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and was investigated by Vernadsky and his school in Russia as a *cosmic phenomenon* having its own 'laws' at the same time as Gurdjieff did. The idea of the biosphere only surfaced in the west in a strong way some fifty years later and is still not accepted by entrenched ecologists.
7. Russell Smith in his excellent exercise in numbers *Cosmic Secrets* ascribes the shift in the 'notes' of the musical scale to the imposition of a three-fold division of the octave. This is a useful way of thinking about the mutual combination of three and seven in regarding the same whole.
8. See *In Search* pp. 138-9. Gurdjieff says that organic life on Earth fills the interval between the mi and fa of one of the cosmic octaves of the Creation and this is its *function*. However, life itself has consequences for further evolution.
9. See the article by Clarence King in *Enneagram Studies*, 'The manufacturing Process'.
10. The title of Bennett's book *The Dramatic Universe* refers to 'drama' as uncertainty *plus will*. This is the domain of what he calls 'hazard'.
11. See *In Search*, p. 288
12. See *In Search*, p.292
13. This phrase is from Bennett's *Deeper Man*, p.244
14. If we use base-12, then we take the numbers of the two laws to be *five* and seven, and not *three* and seven, because: $5 + 7 = 12$; $3 + 7 = 10$. $1/7$ in base twelve gives us 0.186t35 recurring (where 't' stands for the digit ten). This suggests that the enneagram is merely representative of a whole class of constructions in which two complementary systems

'interfere' in the sense that two beams of light can 'interfere' with each other to produce a structured pattern.

15. 'Contemplation' is a subtle idea that appears in Gurdjieff's teachings to mean something like an all-over awareness of experience through a form. I call it the 'reading of experience'. Bennett attempts to explain the concept in his *Gurdjieff, making a New World*; but even he, I think, fails.

16. This is a title of a critical chapter in Bennett's *The Dramatic Universe, Vol. IV*

17. I feel that the *sampo* of Finnish myth described in the epic *Kalavela*, is much the same as the enneagram. After the smith Ilmarinen (i.e. the demiurge) forges the *sampo*, it begins to 'grind': "First for food it ground a chestful, And another ground for barter, And a third it ground for storage." (quoted in Santillana and von Dechend's masterpiece *Hamlet's Mill*, p. 102). The *sampo* has three sides and nine roots, and so on. The idea of 'grinding' is similar to our spinning and the lines quoted as are near to the idea of three 'octaves' as one can get!

18. See the discussion of Gurdjieff's 'laws' in Bennett's *Gurdjieff, the making of a New World*, Appendix 2

19. See the prologue to his book.

20. After the defeat of the first 'Gods' Tiamat and Apsu, the victorious Gods appoint the Annunaki to care for the maintenance of the universe. Finding this tedious, the Annunaki create humankind to do it for them. This picture of humankind as being invented to produce a 'caretaker energy' without regard for its own welfare is strongly echoed in Gurdjieff's own mythological account in *Beelzebub's Tales*. According to Beelzebub, the 'angels' were only concerned with becoming 'archangels' and had no conception of what it was like to be a 'three-brained being' on the surface of a planet.

21. These are loose associations. The Gaia of Lovelock corresponds with the biosphere. The connection between the 'gods' and the 'noosphere' is more tenuous. The biosphere regulates energies, while the 'gods' regulate *information*. We can understand this without knowing what the gods 'are'.