

The Fourth Way: A Hazardous Path (Part 2)

Anthony Blake

Introduction

Perhaps I am a holy man. A holy man is someone who can enter higher worlds at will. - John Bennett, c. 1964

This article continues the autobiographical story begun in ‘The Fourth Way: A Hazardous Path’ (2017),¹ and begins with describing how John Godolphin Bennett, a pupil of G. I. Gurdjieff, set up a school to “prepare for a time of troubles”. There follows what happened after his death and my subsequent explorations of the Fourth Way up until now.

The Sherborne Experiment

Giving away Coombe Springs to Idries Shah had relieved Bennett’s Institute of some debts but left him with few resources.² He was visited by various people, two of whom I will mention. The first was John Allen, a creative visionary combining art, science and drama in his *Synergia* community,³ who came to learn Bennett’s systematics. I made friends with him and later played a small part in the making of the extraordinary Biosphere 2 his group built in Arizona. Allen’s group studied Bennett’s ideas, which played a significant part in their development of biospherics. The other was a new age charismatic leader known to me just as ‘Leonard’. I never actually met him. It appears that Bennett was positive towards him

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¹ Anthony Blake, ‘The Fourth Way: A Hazardous Path’, *Religion and the Arts*, vol. 21 (2017), pp. 11-39.

² Shah wanted a base for his work with people. It is possible that Bennett wanted to make a break with the past and took the sacrifice of Coombe Springs as a way to do this. As Gurdjieff once said, “Must make vacuum.” In the end Shah sold Coombe Springs to developers (who destroyed everything including the *djameechoonatra*, the nine-sided hall based on Gurdjieff’s enneagram that had been erected by Bennett and his pupils) and acquired an estate in Surrey.

³ See ‘Synergia’, in Lawrence R. Veysey, *The Communal Experience: Anarchist and Mystical Counter-Culture in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

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(even providing him with champagne) but such service and respect were typical of Bennett's manners.

Bennett was keen to spread the ideas of the Work and also interested in how 'higher energies' could come into the general population. He had picked up a hint from Idries Shah that music and technology would be spiritually significant in the near future, and had taken to following up on contemporary 'pop' culture, especially events such as Woodstock. He appeared at Glastonbury and the Isle of Wight festivals; an elderly white-haired gent amongst the revelling young fans. His understanding was that music gatherings of this kind could concentrate energies enabling contact with higher powers. He remarked to us that this was more desirable than having mass sex!⁴ In this period, the late 1960s, he suffered a severe illness that threatened his very mind through uric acid poisoning. He commented afterwards that this had set him free of mind, a major *fana*.⁵ When he recovered his vision was to establish a *school* based in life conditions. But it appears that Leonard persuaded him otherwise: he should set up a centre more along the lines of a retreat, away in the country.

Bennett felt he could attract young people and so it proved. He went to the United States and called in on various campuses, even though it was August and thus the holidays, finding an audience and recruiting students. Putting aside the influence of Leonard, he was forced to find a way of dealing with a hundred students or more at a time. An old supporter provided money with which to buy a large property in the Cotswolds. So the *International Academy for Continuous Education* was born. The title reflected his wish to connect with mainstream society: the idea of 'continuous education' was a way of referring to the 'inner' or 'soul' education people might undertake in their adult years. Like many modern educationists he rejected the common view that education ceased when one 'grew up'.

A strange thing for anyone who knew Bennett's history was how thinly supported he was in his new venture. He started at the Academy with

⁴ I followed this up a little through contact with Fraser Clark, a key figure in the rave scene in London who had been in a Gurdjieff group, and his American colleague Jason Keehn. Some of my correspondence with Jason on the background ideas is at <http://www.duversity.org/PDF/CORRESPONDENCE%20ON%20RECIPROCAL%20MAINTENANCE.pdf>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

⁵ *Fana* means 'annihilation', and in Sufism is usually coupled with *baqa* or 'being': *fana-baqa* corresponds to the Christian 'death and resurrection'.

a bare handful of people to help him. The premises had to be repaired and decorated. People were coming in at the last moment. But at the very centre or nucleus of this chaotic activity was, as Bennett told me in 1971, that he “did not know what he was doing - and didn’t care.” Of course he was highly qualified, able and responsible. He could have been describing himself when he commented at one point that Gurdjieff did not have certainty about what he was doing but had, more importantly, *confidence*. And he well understood that some things can be done in a hurry that cannot be done otherwise.

The role and sense of an open but contained space plays a significant part in most creative activities. The title of Peter Brook’s book *The Empty Space* typifies this; Brook was also a follower of Gurdjieff’s ideas.⁶ In a way, the Academy in Sherborne house could be seen as a theatrical performance: one hundred students brought together in a country house for ten months to seek their souls! Bennett’s move scandalised Gurdjieffians of a traditional, conservative bent. They were in a modality themselves that required regular attendance at groups over a long, and sometimes indefinite, period. There were no manuals or curricula for Fourth Way training (at least at that time). Bennett poured out everything - or at least a great deal - during the ten months, to the extent that Robert de Ropp, an important Gurdjieff group leader, called Sherborne the ‘Bennettron’ (a reference to devices for accelerating particles). There were daily Movements classes, in the mornings a series of up to one hundred inner exercises, lectures on psychology and cosmology, highly structured practical work on the house and gardens, personal interviews and, from time to time, inputs from visiting specialists such as myself, John Allen and Anthony Hodgson (a co-worker with Bennett who consulted to Shell), as well as ventures into the use of *zikr* and meditation.

The creation of the courses held at Sherborne was a remarkable and bold step. Implicit in them was the idea that learning through groups meeting every now and then was too slow and inefficient for the times. I believe Bennett thought that modern people could pick things more quickly than those of earlier generations. Though not prescribing the *latihan* for his

⁶ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1968]).

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students he had been deeply impressed by the way the Indigenous spiritual movement Subud opened up sensation experience almost immediately.⁷

Strangely enough, he did not teach his systematics. It appeared to me that, perhaps, he did not want to risk the students thinking about the process they were engaged in because he thought it would confuse them and take too much time. But it was a strange omission; because this intellectual side was, surely, integral to the whole? One must also note that creative thinking tends to dispute authority. He welcomed those who knew nothing of G. I. Gurdjieff and the Work, and had not read books about them. I was wary of this since it increased the tendency for people to let Bennett do the thinking for them.

I myself was not attracted to attend the Sherborne course. This led, much to my surprise, to Bennett putting pressure on me to do so. The pressure was severe; but also he offered to waive the usual fee for the course in my case. Our relationship reached a climax when he revealed the suffering he was undergoing due to evil forces and I agreed to come.⁸ He then told me I was to suffer because of the Work. These personal elements are relevant because they relate to some of the more hidden hazards of this path.

Who were his friends? One of his most faithful followers shocked everyone by lambasting Bennett for his lack of friends and effective isolation. But he did this out of devotion to him. Two of the handful of assistants departed within one or two years, due to disputes. This hinted at his autocratic side, which I myself rarely saw, because I related to him in the realm of ideas. Secondly, and more importantly, there was the issue of groups.

Groups and Community

The importance of working with others, preferably of diverse temperaments and types, has long been recognised in the Fourth Way. But there were two main modalities. In the first, which is of a hierarchical nature, groups are organised by someone and people allocated by him to them. Such groups are artificial entities. In the second, people meet and learn to co-operate

⁷ J. G. Bennett, *Witness: The Story of a Search*, 4th edition (Bennett Books, 2005), pp. 339, 343-347.

⁸ Note that G. I. Gurdjieff, after his major car crash in 1924, spoke of being a victim of his “old enemies”.

because they have aims in common and need each other to realise them. Such are often not at all hierarchical but established between equals. The paradigm for this modality was written about by Gurdjieff himself, in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.⁹ Friendship, creativity and brotherhood permeate this book. No one person is the leader. I used to say to people: the remarkable men are remarkable *because they can work together*. The Seekers after Truth were obviously modelled after the ancient brotherhoods Gurdjieff wrote about in *Beelzebub's Tales To His Grandson*.¹⁰

The two modalities are not exclusive but their differences are very real. I believe this is crucial for understanding the dilemma of groups in the first sense. Bennett could attract people, maybe hundreds or thousands of people, and the introductory groups were lively and inspiring. But the question was: what happens after the introductory groups? Bennett constantly spoke of next steps. He was an avid proponent of making progress. With his usual creativity he invented new things for the groups to do. He set up 'more advanced' groups. These had a rationale in being composed of people with long experience who had assimilated some of the practicalities and knew the Work language reasonably well. Whether they were at all accomplished in Being was moot.

I believe that, since Bennett continued to organise the groups up, he was acting as authority in a way that inadvertently inhibited any *self-organisation* in them. Self-organising is essential in self-realisation. At the same time, self-organisation is notoriously hazardous.¹¹ In a practical sense, there *cannot* be a more advanced group. Advancement, as I would understand it, entails individual decision and creativity. These do not flourish in standard groups. The issue is particularly relevant in regard to Bennett. Progressive spiritual groups were the supposed topic of his last book the *Masters of Wisdom* but he never got to write about such groups in modern times before he died.¹²

⁹ G.I. Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (London: Routledge, 1963).

¹⁰ G.I. Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson* (New York: Penguin Arkana, 1999 [1950]).

¹¹ The best exploration of this idea is in William Pensing's novel *The Moon of Hoa Binh*, based on events in the Vietnam War but extending through art, science, sex and the traumas of the twentieth century. See William Pensing, *The Moon of Hoa Binh* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

¹² J. G. Bennett, *Masters of Wisdom: An Esoteric History of the Spiritual Unfolding of Life on This Planet* (Chicago: Kazi Publications Incorporated, 1996).

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In retrospect - but also evident at the time - he had a great influence on some creative *individuals*, whereas the groups claiming to follow him were usually nondescript. Individuals would not form a group and share but could be productive in their own sphere of meaning. Henry Bortoft, phenomenologist and expositor of Goethe was a case in point, going off to do his own thing while drawing on Bennett's know-how. In essence this corresponds to the paradigm of the 'hero's quest' as extensively discussed by Joseph Campbell. The 'hero', after his ordeals, must return to his community with something to give.¹³ This relates to the idea of service I have mentioned before.

Groups can only be a temporary measure. He understood their vulnerability to stagnation, as he wrote in the posthumously published book *Transformation*: he says there that after two or three years we should seriously question the value of remaining in any group we are in. Curiously, he even told me that I would get to 'where I need to be' in such a time period if I came to Sherborne. I am sure he meant it literally. He saw something real and at hand, though not very apparent to the people around him, who were still expecting to search and work on themselves in the old ways.

Unfortunately - in my eyes at least - Gurdjieff had established a pattern that entailed thinking in terms of transmission through hierarchy. The simplistic model was that first someone of 'real knowledge' sets up a group. The group develops, producing a few individuals who make progress. They in their turn might set up groups and so on. Such thinking leads to the supposition that there has to be an organiser of teachers. This was the role of Gurdjieff while he was alive. After his death an organisation was set up in which his successor in France took overall control of direction for an increasing number of groups in different countries, involving circles of elders and so on. This development, obviously, echoed the format of the churches, and was hierarchical and authoritarian. Idries Shah was reported as describing it as a kind of mafia!

¹³ The *monomyth* of the hero's journey is described in Joseph Campbell, *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949). It is also illustrated by the Amerindian Vision Quest.

The problem remains. Groups can only address general issues, concerns and approaches and cannot enable the individual realisation.¹⁴ Individual progress cannot be specified, so I believe, by any leader but must arise out of the decision of the individual him or herself. When people do make a decision, they separate from the group in principle if not in actuality. Often this means they leave, or are forced to leave, the group.

A few years before he died, I asked Bennett if he thought there was an equivalent to *kundabuffer* (an organ Gurdjieff proposed was implanted in man by higher powers to prevent him seeing reality) that operated in groups. It was obvious to me and most people that groups of people brought together and left to their own devices mostly tend to degenerate. Members do not listen to each other. Destructive ideas breed while constructive ones are silenced. In reply to my question Bennett admitted that he did not know. It seemed to me increasingly that he did not understand group processes *at least as measured by current available knowledge*. Amongst Gurdjieff's pupils Bennett was not alone in exhibiting ignorance of group processes.¹⁵ Yet it was obvious to me that enabling groups to manage themselves productively was of the foremost importance.

Bennett's path took him in another direction than educating people in self-organisation. He was seeing the stage or steps beyond the groups as he knew them must entail setting up *communities*. This had long been a vision for him. In 1947 he went to South Africa to seek a location for a Fourth Way community. Like many other followers of Gurdjieff, the experience of World War II had made him feel that Europe was finished and civilisation faced collapse. The idea of *building an Ark* to save what was important for the future was very strong in the post-war years.¹⁶ Gurdjieff, in *Beelzebub's Tales*, highlighted the frequency at which information and practices of real understanding were lost to future generations in some kind of breakdown due either to natural causes or some form of mental aberration possessing communities. With this came the idea

¹⁴ Hubert Benoit, *The Interior Realization*, trans. Graham Rooth (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2015).

¹⁵ Russell Schreiber, *Gurdjieff's Transformational Psychology* (Present Moment Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Kenneth Walker, *Venture With Ideas: Meetings with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky* (New York: Pellegrini and Cuddehay, 1952), pp. 2, 5, 136.

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of consciously preparing for the future so that what was valuable for the meaning of human life would not be lost.

Incidentally, this idea of *preparing for the future* fused with Bennett's vision of higher intelligence *operating from the future*; and naturally led to his advocacy of learning how to communicate with higher intelligence and, in the big picture, to his concept of the emergent *synergic epoch*. The latter was far more than a humanistic vision of cooperation between *people*. Bennett's extraordinary concept was of cooperation between *different levels of being* which implied different kinds of individuality. This actually parallels current ideas about ecology in terms of co-operation with, and not exploitation, of other forms of life.¹⁷ But it went much further, starting from Gurdjieff's ideas of *reciprocal maintenance* involving all levels of existence.¹⁸

In South Africa he met with Jan Smuts, who sensibly advised him to return to Europe, and pointed out that he was not seeing the problems rooted in South Africa. It was an interesting aspect of the encounter that Smuts himself was a profound holistic thinker and had developed his own metaphysics similar to systematics.¹⁹

At Sherborne, Bennett continued to nurse his vision of a Fourth Way community and latched onto contemporary movements to do with self-sufficiency and alternative technology, the ideas of British economist E. F. Schumacher (1911-1977), renowned for the 'small is beautiful' concept - his niece attended a course at Sherborne - and so on as well as making connections with Eastern ideas of 'powerhouses' (concentrations of spiritual energy in 'monasteries' and locations of 'brotherhoods'). It was very much in sympathy with the Benedictine order, created by Benedict of

¹⁷ Callicott L. Baird and Roger T. Ames (eds), *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989).

¹⁸ Reciprocal maintenance has been seen as one of the pivotal ideas of Gurdjieff's psychocosmology. It stems from a world view in which, contrary to its otherwise marked hierarchical outlook, there is a vision of everything entering into, and being entered by, everything, described as *eating and being eaten* and which lends itself to an ecological understanding of the whole universe.

¹⁹ Jan Christiaan Smuts (1870 – 1950) was a statesman and philosopher. His *Holism and Evolution* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1926) can be seen as paralleling Bennett's later systematics.

Nursia (c. 480 - 550 AD) and was a major influence in the civilising of Europe.²⁰

The setting up of a Fourth Way community became Bennett's biggest next step. He had nursed the idea throughout his sojourn in Coombe Springs but eventually seemed to have come to the conclusion that it needed a completely fresh start. The upshot of this was that in his last days, he purchased land in the United States and inaugurated a centre there. I myself was totally sceptical, and while editing his book on the subject - *Needs of a New Age Community* - felt that he had not studied and absorbed the lessons of the last hundred years or so of attempts to start intentional communities. His attitude was far too idealistic.

He persuaded people on leaving Sherborne to get land, run farms, set up schools for children and so on. What was hardly noticed at the time was his perhaps inadvertent influence on the creation of Biosphere 2. This amazing project was in a totally different mode to small-scale farm-based thinking. Strictly speaking it was not to do with communities at all, but focused on the on the logic of *reciprocal maintenance*, and, most importantly, sought a powerful new connection between the biosphere and the technosphere that had evolved within it.²¹

There had always been a tendency for spiritual people, including followers of Gurdjieff's ideas, to embrace traditional practices such as homoeopathy and eschew technology. There is great value in learning to work with one's hands and being physical. But, partly because of Gurdjieff's propaganda against modern science, there was a certain amount of backward looking nostalgia about pre-industrial days, local ecology, and so on. Gurdjieff's penchant for new gadgetry and engineering was largely ignored. At the same time, it should be recognised that Bennett's hankering after alternative technology came with his prescient recognition of information technology. He used to delight in saying that one of the most important manifestations of spirituality in the twentieth century was the computer! After Bennett died Claymont Court in West Virginia became

²⁰ The two principles of the Benedictine Order were summed up as *ora et labora* – “prayer and work”.

²¹ The model included as its third factor the *ethnosphere* or world of values and culture. This corresponds, though not in the same words, with what Bennett called in the title of one of his books *Making a New World*; it is interesting to contrast the two approaches. J. G. Bennett, *Making a New World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

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largely a copy of Sherborne. It had no leader of sufficient power to guide it on the old hierarchical model. Idries Shah suggested, perhaps tongue in cheek, that they should hire someone from the East! A still current idea expresses it in Gurdjieffian terms as requiring no less than a ‘Man no. 5’.²²

Curriculum

Young students coming to Sherborne were shocked to see a formal timetable pinned up on the noticeboard. The idea of a school had been taken on in a literal and mundane way. The reality was, of course, that managing one hundred people without such guidelines was next to impossible. An interesting aspect is how much what Bennett attempted to do echoed the outlines of the Institute for Harmonious Development that Gurdjieff had written about in the *Herald of Coming Good*.²³ There was always ambivalence about Gurdjieff’s supposed organisations. Were the portentous outlines he wrote just to put about an interesting idea? Or did he ever intend for them to be put into practice? Bennett set up his own Institute in 1946, using its elaborate title as a smokescreen to cover up what he was actually doing. That is, he presented the Institute in an academic light while pursuing esoteric activities such as the movements and inner work. But later on, he began to take the idea of the Institute more literally. He faced the prospect of putting the work into explicit form, with a curriculum of sorts, and a series of steps.

At Sherborne, he divided each year into exoteric, mesoteric and esoteric phases. They were to apply to everybody, which diverged from Gurdjieff’s presentations where they were a property of the being level of individuals. The variety of people who came to Sherborne was extraordinary. The range included: Tibetan refugees, vicars, Vietnam vets, hippies, teachers, policemen; the old and the young, children and retirees, and so on.²⁴ This made it all the more powerful and inspiring. There was a break with the previous period. The students coming to Sherborne had little

²² Briefly, Gurdjieff proposed a scheme of seven kinds of man. The first four were on the same level and the fifth was a step above, signifying someone with their own individuality.

²³ G. I. Gurdjieff, *The Herald of Coming Good* (Edmonds, WA: Sure Fire Press, 2008 [1933]).

²⁴ Travel writer Paul Theroux encountered a Sherborne student, Richard Duffill, who had garnered his education at Working Man’s Clubs. A brief account of Theroux’s impressions is at <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/75jul/misery.htm>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

or no idea what had gone before in Coombe Springs. It seems certain Bennett welcomed this.

One of the most useful maxims Idries Shah quoted from Sufi tradition was: “Use the materials of the locality.” This can be illustrated by Bennett’s Academy adopting Morris dancing. The village of Sherborne had its own traditional style of this dancing. Somehow Bennett found someone to teach it and it became a requirement for the men (traditionally women did not dance the Morris though things have changed now). It provided a welcome balance to the Gurdjieff Movements on a number of aspects: Morris dancing was intrinsic to that part of the British Isles and not an import from another culture; it required a different way of dancing, more free; and the dances were performed amongst ordinary people, typically in pubs and not in some refined atmosphere. Most important for me to realise is how they manifested spirit culture, as distinct from a supernatural, or spiritual one. Bennett was very sensitive to the world of spirit, the second or energetic world.²⁵

In quite another fashion he encouraged to students to put on plays and musicals, and one year they did one of his favourite plays, Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, in which he took on the role of the Button Moulder, a very symbolic act though his acting was rather poor. Such things were largely a matter of finding interesting things for the students to do. There was no attempt to relate acting and drama to transformation. Interestingly, during the first year both John Allen and his group and myself, independently, came to Sherborne to offer theatrical exercises.²⁶ My own work involved implications of systematics which Bennett caught onto and directed them towards a kind of contemplative meditation, which then faded out (it is too complex to get into here).

²⁵ Bennett made much use of a scheme of four worlds, largely derived from Sufism. He discussed them extensively in his books *Deeper Man* (Massachusetts: Turnstone, 1978) and *Creation* (Bennett Books, 1998 [1978]). Briefly, they are: 1) World of the Unfathomable or Void – *Lahut*; 2) World of Possibilities - *alam-i-imkan* (the spiritual or supernatural world); 3) World of Energies or Spirit – *alam-i-arvah* (connected with breath); and 4) World of Bodies – *alam-i-ajsam*.

²⁶ John Allen’s group operated under the name of *Theater of All Possibilities*, and experimented with three-brained acting and cosmic themes. My own work centred on the process of acting and, incidentally, drew for its main exercise on Stuart Holroyd’s play *The Tenth Chance* (1958), concerning a guru called Gurdensky in an occupied city, based on stories of Gurdjieff he learned from Kenneth Walker.

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Bennett threw in such other subjects as he could manage such as learning Turkish. Later, after his death we had someone teach Japanese. The learning of other languages is, at least, an important aid for developing understanding. There were periods when students taught each other things. It cannot be over emphasised how much Bennett focused on his Academy as educational. One of his best explanations of the approach of the Academy was that it aimed at developing the powers or energies of people rather than putting in any particular content.²⁷ These were the *powers* of paying attention, moving and sensing, feeling and understanding. This was a consistent unfolding from Gurdjieff's original idea of the harmonious development of the three centres and corresponds to the ancillary concept of the spiritualisation of the centres.

Because of the limited help he had, some of the components of the curriculum came out strangely. In the first year, for example, the man leading the psychological studies spent most of the time reading from books on the French Revolution. He had been captured by Bennett's ideas on time, which included the possibility that the French Revolution was still in progress and evolving in its own time. All the various activities can be seen as providing a 'cooking medium'. The activities as such do not lead to any transformation; they can be reasonably understood in terms of cultural education. This is said with the implicit assumption that culture as such is not spiritual.²⁸ I believe that Bennett understood that even so-called spiritual practices do not transform people: anything that we can 'do' cannot accomplish anything in the spiritual world. Perhaps he envisaged the action in the Academy as constituting a kind of 'active surface' such as he envisaged obtaining between different domains in his *The Dramatic Universe*,²⁹ providing a kind of osmosis and communication.

All this has to be framed within the idea, picked up from traditional sources by Gurdjieff before him, that humans have the possibility of obtaining or realising *two* different kinds of inner body. The first is a natural body that Gurdjieff described in terms which suggest that it is proper to all human beings, though it comes about through living

²⁷ John G. Bennett, 'What makes human communication possible?', *Communication*, vol. 2, (1975), pp. 23-29.

²⁸ The Shivapuri Baba had insisted to Bennett that beauty was not a way to God but rather a distraction.

²⁹ John G. Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe* (New York: Coombe Springs Press, 1957).

authentically, undergoing suffering and receiving the *right education*. The ‘higher being-body’ is, in Bennett’s language, supernatural. One can say that it is ‘made of God’. Bennett associated the Work with the formation or realisation of this body and he came to state explicitly that “there are supernatural energies that work - we need to connect with them”. In saying this he added that “hardly anyone sees this”.³⁰

Students who so wished could attend Mass at a nearby Catholic Church on some Sundays but it was never made mandatory and they could treat it as an ancillary activity, like the Alexander technique, which was also offered to them (for a fee).

In speaking of the situation in which nearly a hundred largely young men and women were lodged together for ten months we must take account of sex and alcohol. At the end of the first year, students organised a room into which they could go to get laid. In the second year, sexual goings-on were rampant. This led Bennett to give a series of lectures on sex and energies which, though quite profound, had little effect on the situation. Concerning drinking, the nearby village had facilities to buy alcohol that some indulged in excessively. More than once staff were called out to retrieve a student lying drunk in the road. This led, eventually, to Bennett setting up a bar inside Sherborne House itself! In many ways, he was a realist. He wanted containment above all.

Bennett was quite convinced that we existed within a world of higher intelligence. One time he told us that we need to make ourselves ‘interesting’ to the higher powers. This was when he set all of us, some hundred people, to dig out weeds from the main lawn with spoons and knives in a drizzle of rain. The humour of this was obvious but it was also deadly serious. The underlying question was: what do we need to do from our side of the ‘active surface’ to enable communication with higher intelligence?

People of public renown or special achievement came though Sherborne. In the first year the students were bemused by the presence of

³⁰ John G. Bennett, *The Way to be Free* (Massachusetts: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1980), p. 60; The whole thing that Bennett is going after, what he repeatedly attempts to bring the students to see, is that there is a supernatural action beyond our minds which can work. No one comes anywhere near to seeing this. People who do not have the possibility of understanding have a place, too. But their place is paradise: a dream. If we are able to persist in saying “not this, not that” then we can become free.

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Diane Cilento who,³¹ after she left Sherborne acted in a cult film, *The Wicker Man*, directed by Robin Hardy and written by Anthony Shaffer, and had improvised ‘ancient movements’ for it based on those she had learned at Sherborne. The eccentric pop singer Arthur Brown (I am the Lord of Hellfire!) speaks of Bennett as “perhaps the greatest influence on me”. To promote one of his albums I took the Sherborne Morris dancers to perform in Ronnie Scott’s Jazz Club in London. In the last course, after Bennett had died, the doyen of progressive pop Robert Fripp was a student. We will talk of him and how he manifested the Work later. These are just a few examples.

People with creative specialisms of their own could make use of what Bennett taught. Those without this were more or less sent out under the slogan ‘increase and multiply’. That is to say, they were encouraged to share what they had learned by setting up groups wherever they were. They would put notices in shop windows and notice boards. Older Gurdjieff followers were often upset by their arrogance.

We have talked about the core of meaning Bennett held in regard to supernatural forces and that he did not expect many if any to understand how this was so. What the body of students took away with them was a simplistic pattern of combining movements, inner exercises, lectures and practical work. The spiritual dimension could not be packaged. Bennett had given his students confidence but could not give them wisdom. He did however inspire them, constantly seeking ways to communicate his ideals as much as his ideas. One of his most cherished legacies is the prayer “All life is one”. Created in 1972, originally intended as a short term practice, it has endured since and groups all over the world often use it at their meals together: “All life is one and everything that lives is holy. Plants, animals and man, all must eat to live and nourish one another. We bless the lives that have died to give us our food. Let us eat consciously, resolving by our work to pay the debt of our existence.”

³¹ Cilento, at one time married to Sean Connery, went on a spiritual search that led her to Bennett. She records that she once was reading Bennett’s autobiography *Witness* – which contained some photographs, including one of the great oak tree at Coombe Springs – when, looking out of her window she saw the self-same tree! She had by chance acquired a house on the development of Coombe Springs after it had been sold by Idries Shah. She made a documentary for the BBC series ‘One Pair of Eyes’ that includes some of the only footage remaining of movements at Sherborne, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPnbz58j9dQ>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

The Ending

Bennett kept and fostered contacts related to technology and management, though while at Sherborne these seemed to diminish. Amongst his most important connections were those with Eliot Jacques, Clarence King, Albert Low and also Edward Matchett, who taught creative design methodologies and contacted Bennett around 1970. The latter was significant in terms of understanding Fourth Way methodology. A crucial component of Matchett's teaching was *self-monitoring*, based on the idea that in doing a task there should be not only attention to the task but also to the *person* performing the task; his awareness, commitment, mood, sensitivity and so on.³² Self-awareness was a cornerstone of the fourth way but it tended to lack the role of a specific task in focussing purpose. A previous contact, Saul Kuchinsky, who had led a research team in Burroughs that claimed to have produced the first pocket calculator, urged that Bennett's systematics should be based on what he called "present moment need."³³

In keeping with this, Gurdjieff had emphasised in his teaching that one *must have an aim*. Amongst other things a lack of aim entails that there no means to measure one's progress. Gurdjieff said that the Work has no aim of its own, but people 'in the Work' need to have aim. An aspect of it is the engagement of one's intelligence. Nearly all spiritual ways deal in generalities of subjective states and lack anything concrete that might provide benchmarks. Gurdjieff used the term 'will tasks' to refer to aims that challenged his sense of purpose and very being. What I cannot accurately summarise due to my limited perspective and experiences were Bennett's multiple interactions with fellow Gurdjieff pupils and the various spiritual teachers he encountered. Some of the Gurdjieff group-leaders - such as Irma Popoff, Robert de Ropp and Paul Anderson - encouraged their pupils to go to Sherborne.

During the period there Bennett was visited by Idries Shah, and another remarkable Sufi - though from a very different school - Hasan Shushud.³⁴ The Sufi influence on Bennett was considerable, very much

³² Edward Matchett, 'Introduction to the Discipline of Fundamental Design Method', *Systematics*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1973).

³³ Kuchinsky produced a journal first called *UNIS: A Journal for Discovering Universal Qualities* which was a follow up to the original *Systematics*.

³⁴ Hasan Lutfi Shushud, *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia: Teachings from the Sufi Path of Liberation*, 2nd edition (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2014).

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helped by his capacity to speak Turkish, and to some degree Arabic. He kept close contact with another 'school' nearby called Beshara, which was based on the ideas of Ibn Arabi. He gave many important talks there with insights into Sufi ideas and practices that were eventually published under the title *Intimations*. Bennett's acquaintance with Sufism started in Turkey in the 1920s when he was stationed there in military intelligence, and also met Gurdjieff for the first time. It expanded with Sheikh Dagestani and Emin Chikou in the 1950s, then Pak Subuh and Idries Shah in the 1960s, culminating in Hasan Shushud in the 1970s. This was an astonishing range. He then embraced the work of the Venerable Dharmawara Mahathera, affectionately known just as Bhante, a Cambodian monk some of Bennett's students had met in India. In doing so, he accepted the practice of meditation, though as always assimilating it in his own way, even though there is no record of Gurdjieff either practising or advocating such a practice.

Possibly, as Bennett's son Ben insists, Shushud was the major influence as well as being the last. He taught the *itlaq Yolu* - way of absolute liberation - that involved fasting and a 'silent' *zikh*. Bennett even taught this *zikh* at Sherborne. Shushud belonged to what Bennett called *northern* Sufism which did not centre itself on devotion to the sheikh, as in southern Sufism, but to liberation: 'towards God, in God and beyond God'. Bennett liked the strict austerity of the silent *zikh* and was wary of introducing more spontaneous and releasing forms on his students. He once experimented with such a form that had an action similar to Subud but dropped it when a student passed out.

Bennett appreciated not only the technical aspects of Shushud's work but also his knowledge of the *Khawjagan* the 'Masters of Wisdom' whom he believed were the historical exemplars of the *Sarmoung Brotherhood* Gurdjieff had written about. The picture was resonant with Idries Shah's postulate that what he called 'Sufism' dated back 40,000 years, to the emergence of modern humans. Initially Shushud and Bennett were to collaborate on a book centred on the Khwajagan but Shushud pulled out of this (for reasons which are still disputed but were probably to do with how Shushud could not go along with Bennett's inclusivity and syncretism and, it is said, caused difficulties over payment) and Bennett

went on to write his last book *Masters of Wisdom*,³⁵ a book that he did not complete but was published after his death. Shushud himself had made a book based on the Khwajagan which was published later still under the title *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia*.³⁶

The significance of all this was in its relevance to the issue of where and how real spirituality was operating on the Earth over the period of human existence. What was the reality of higher worlds in concrete terms? Bennett took it so seriously that soon after his learning of the Khawajagan he adopted or came under Ubaidallah Ahrar (1404-1490) as his main teacher.

While criticising Bennett's methods, Hasan Bey impressed on him that "Your only home is the Absolute Void." This had, to my mind, a strong resonance with how the Shivapuri Baba had advised him. Shushud eventually agreed that what Bennett was doing was more suitable for young Western seekers than his own strict methods of fasting and *zikr*. The death of John Bennett in 1974 was not a terrible shock, though it affected people deeply. My own feeling was that he was somewhat enlightened and must have secured his welfare in whatever happens next. Students on the course were asked if they wanted to carry on without him and nearly everyone agreed. It is likely that this laid the grounds for what ensued later: the staff of the Academy were proficient and could follow the already established programme, so the program as such became a template for future activities. The inspiration, questioning and breadth of vision that Bennett had no longer operated. It was the usual thing: true artists or scientists get replaced by technicians.

I myself ventured to keep for the future whatever I had gleaned of Bennett's new insights by editing and publishing material from his last talks. These raised questions of reality, God, human destiny and the Work. They were not old formulations. To my naive surprise, the great majority of followers of Bennett took almost no notice of this material, maybe because they had been brought up to regard study as irrelevant to spirituality. It was to be decades before the books I put together found some serious readers.

³⁵ J. G. Bennett, *Masters of Wisdom* (London: Turnstone, 1977).

³⁶ Translated from the Turkish *Hacegan Hanedani*, Shushud's book drew on two classics, the *Rashahat 'Ain al-Hayat* (Beads of Dew from the Source of Life) by Mawlana 'Ali ibn Husain Safi (now translated by Muhtar Holland) and the *Nafahat al-Uns min Hadarat al-Quds* (Breezes of Intimacy) by Mawlana Abdulrahman bin Ahmed Jami.

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In contrast, the recorded talks became ever more popular. This contributed to the idea that became fixed in me that spiritual seekers usually have very little ‘mental energy’ and little interest in developing their thinking.

I believe Bennett had long been divided in himself about his work with people. On the one hand he devoted himself to reaching out to as many people as possible and trying to speak to them in terms they could understand. On the other he wanted to pursue in depth the ideas of *The Dramatic Universe* for which he needed colleagues rather than pupils.³⁷ Early on, while in Coombe Springs, he told me, much to my surprise, he was pleased to “have someone to talk to.”

The prospect of *making a contribution to science* lingered with him even when he had neither the people nor the resources to do so. I suppose that this hope - if I am right that he had such - was based on the (probably) fallacious belief that there was a ‘higher science’ (such as Gurdjieff’s ‘objective science’) which could shed light on and generate insights within ‘ordinary’ science. Though spiritual ideas have sometimes influenced individual scientists there is no intrinsic connection between them and the actual practice and results of real scientific work. Original ideas in science come from people immersed in current knowledge and practice who are grappling with specific questions. Metaphysical beliefs are no more important than temperament or artistic or technological factors.³⁸

The mathematician Georg Cantor, who developed set theory, created the scheme of *aleph* or transfinite numbers, which culminated for him in the Absolute Infinity or God. Scientists and mathematicians often strive to make a unity of their spiritual and technical understanding. I mention Cantor because Bennett used his concepts of transfinite number to lecture on the meaning of creation and the four worlds of Sufism.³⁹

Hiatus

Unusually, Bennett’s widow Elizabeth did not simply carry on with her husband’s activities but vowed to stop the Sherborne courses after their planned five years. I said ‘unusually’ because by far the dominant tendency for any organisation is to centre on its continuation and not to question its

³⁷ Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe* (1957).

³⁸ See Anthony Blake, ‘A Critical Essay on the History of Science’, *Systematics*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1965).

³⁹ See Bennett, *Creation* (1999).

validity or purpose. I was pleased with Elizabeth's decision, which I talked with her about, and supported her against the Directors of the Institute who saw only a vista of continuing 'success'.

The American community largely turned into a means of running courses imitating those that had been held at Sherborne. The high ideals Bennett proposed for Fourth Way Communities were untenable. I used to remark: "These poor people are stuck with acres of land and only the Beatitudes to guide them!" The Beatitudes were an integral part of Bennett's rhetoric for a Fourth Way community based on humiliation! The importance of humiliation for Bennett cannot be exaggerated. It was historically related to the idea that Gurdjieff followed the way of blame but Bennett had amplified it in a particularly Christian way.⁴⁰

It was inevitable for Bennett to speak of the second coming of Christ, sometimes referred to as the *Parousia*. He had shown he was hoping for signs of a divine intervention by, for example, his speculation that Pak Subuh was the Ashiata Shiemash Gurdjieff had portrayed in *Beelzebub's Tales*.⁴¹ He later suggested that this Messenger was yet to come. Bennett had outlined the theological systematics for a progressive Christianity and religion in general in volume four of *The Dramatic Universe*.

In the United Kingdom I was involved in setting up another educational Institute; this time a 'College of Continuous Education'. But then an intervention came. A previously unknown guru figure (for personal reasons I do not want to name him) based in the United States announced his mastery as equal to Gurdjieff's and found a response amidst a few of Bennett's followers, who were somewhat feeling like lost sheep in the vacuum left by his death. It turned out that this guru could reasonably be described as a cult leader, but he offered significantly new elements of practice and teaching. Even Bennett's widow was initially attracted, though this did not last long.

The yawning gap left by Bennett (he had been importuned to appoint a successor, even that I should be such, but he refused). In ancient Greek the idea of the yawning gap was called *chaos*, a word that did not mean then 'confusion'. It could have been an opportunity for a death and resurrection but it was not made conscious, and hence came to be filled

⁴⁰ Gurdjieff has been linked to the Malamati Order, who followed the "path of blame".

⁴¹ John G. Bennett, *Concerning Subud* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), pp. 35-37.

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from outside.⁴² In times of uncertainty, people look for an authority to assure them. Also, psychokinetic people, as Bennett called them, are at heart unsure of themselves. They are not entirely identified with their possessions, states, activities, et cetera but neither are they settled into some other kind of permanent equilibrium. The existential scene can be described as a collection of insecure individuals who do not have the energy to work together, and hence are tending to look for their salvation from outside.⁴³ This energy, so I believe, requires a certain *quality* and intensity and quantity are not enough. Bennett believed that, for example, the churches named in the *Book of Revelations* were bodies of people capable of carrying a spiritual impulse or an angelic intelligence but finding such in present times is highly problematic.

Interestingly enough, when Idries Shah was working with animator Richard Williams, he had him do a simple animation of the figure shown below (Figure 1). The commentator suggests that, like seeing a cube from a diagram on a page, there are two views: in one the centre is first and attracts the people and conditions, while in the other it is the combining of people and conditions that invokes the higher intelligence.

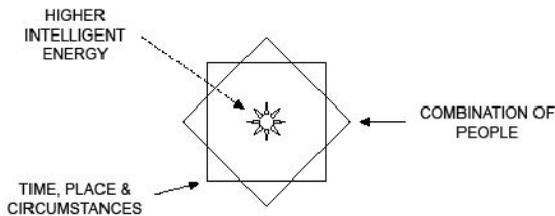


Figure 1 – Structure of an Esoteric Group.

These days, I have a slogan: “joining a group means losing half one’s will.” The conundrum is that groups are deep and powerful if they are composed of real individuals; whereas, for the most part, groups are composed of

⁴² This refers to Gurdjieff’s explanations of the Law of Seven in which intervals or gaps can be filled either from outside or inside, or mixedly.

⁴³ He names two “politics” of conversation as “salvation” and “revelation”. See Anthony Blake, ‘The Politics of Conversation’, at <http://www.duversity.org/libraryArticles.htm>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

people seeking compensation for their weakness of individuality. It is barely recognised how harmful groups can be if continued in the long term. A cult is just an extreme example. People sucked into a cult can be, in many cases, sensitive, intelligent, and capable people. People can be strong in the outer world but helpless in the inner world. When the inner world awakens they need understanding and help and there is no guarantee of them finding it.

New Systems from Old

In the milieu of the new guru, Gurdjieff's combination of the three traditional ways - physical, of the fakir; devotional, of the monk, and intellectual, of the yogi - assumed new significance particularly in its emphasis on the component of physical will, the way of power, exemplified in Amerindian traditions (such as that embraced by Joseph Rael in his dance ceremonies).⁴⁴ Physical ordeals were common. They went beyond the previous practice of such things as digging in the rain, or doing movements for hours at a stretch. They were painful, but it must be admitted that their character was rooted in the basic Gurdjieff practice of 'arms out sideways', which some could manage for half an hour or more (Gurdjieff spoke of one man who could do it without a tremor for an hour but pointed out he was useless for anything else!) These were not merely endurance tests but to create conditions in which people could come to understand how to relax at a deeper level and find a stillness beyond effort. The most common exercise was to hold out a bust of Gurdjieff at arm's length (see Figure 2). The objective was not mere endurance but more to *understand effort* and the relations between centres. People were often directed to put the bust down 'at the right time'. Pain and sweat were not enough.

⁴⁴ Joseph created three new dances "Long Dance," the "Sun-Moon Dance," and the "Drum Dance." These usually involved fasting and other austerities.

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Figure 2 – Copy of head of Gurdjieff (author's own image).

Gurdjieff has spoken of the need to spiritualise the three centres in us in coming to fuse them into a harmony that he called ‘having a real I’. The devotional side was allied to heart awakening, certainly related to Gurdjieff’s higher emotional centre. A paramount demand was to *speak the truth from the heart*. This was no invitation to indulge in emotional expression. The real thing was unmistakable. I myself was deeply affected by this spontaneous practice. It deepened my sense of the conscious power of speech as revelation.

There were exercises in higher thinking of some originality, involving humour and paradox, called ‘notes’. The guru used writing on pieces of folded paper generated on the spot, to be read, unfolded, folded again and passed around, a simple device but often with considerable impact. All this was quite new to most of us. As was the practice of ‘the path of the void’ involving a transformation of energies in the belly while traversing a landscape with a companion.

The intellectual side was highly significant. Study was valued, particularly study of the world’s spiritual traditions. We had a pretty wide smattering of this from Bennett but now it was even wider and investigated as a whole system. It made us realise that there were real questions involved: was there a *totality* of world spirituality? Did it derive from a *single* source or pattern? Could its elements *relate to each other* in a significant way? The way in which the range of spirituality was presented suggested that there was a world teacher called in the Hindu tradition

Dattatreya (Figure 3).⁴⁵ Such ideas were of course in some way derivative from Theosophical ones such as those of Madame Blavatsky and Alice Bailey, but the attempt to portray them in an integral system was new. I mentioned the Amerindian tradition and it was interesting that the *Medicine Wheel* took the place of the enneagram as the integrative template.⁴⁶



Figure 3 – Raja Ravi Varma, *Dattatreya* (Wikimedia Commons).

The scheme was a changing one, even at one time placing Christian existentialism at the summit of the wheel of spirituality. A version of it appeared in the book strangely reminiscent of Bennett's hope to create an encyclopaedia of spiritual methods: *A Pilgrimage of Spiritual Reading*.⁴⁷ But there was a tendency, in some ways contrary to Gurdjieff's presentation, to give Indian spirituality a prominent place. Many people

⁴⁵ See Sri Jaya Chamarajendra Wadiyar Bahadur, *The Way and the Goal* (New York: Coombe Springs Press, 1957); and Rene Guenon, *The Lord of the World*, trans. Henry D. Fohr (New York: Sophia Perennis, 2001).

⁴⁶ This was a shift of basis from the three term system to the four term system and, significantly, the Amerindian culture is largely based on the four directions. Previously when Bennett had encountered Idries Shah and asked about the enneagram, Shah deflected the question and drew attention to the octad, which features largely in Islamic art.

⁴⁷ Alexandria Foundation, *A Pilgrimage of Spiritual Reading* (New York: Coombe Springs Press, 1982).

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were sent to India on pilgrimage, to go to sacred places and meet living masters.

The early atmosphere of deep reaching enquiry and response in the moment was gradually overcome by insistent authoritarianism and exploitation of people for sex and money. This is not unusual in spiritual movements – affecting Buddhist, Sufi and other communities. But it was in radical contrast with the puritanism and innocence of Bennett. For many of us, the advent of this guru was a continuance from Bennett’s pattern of radical encounters with spiritual geniuses of various sorts. His ideas extended the range of possibilities. He gave access to direct experiences of things which we had only read about as exotic phenomena - such as giving *shaktipat* or encountering spiritual masters who were dead or distant. But his evident ability to penetrate into the motivations, the hopes and fears, the anxieties and longings of people appears to have led him into control and exploitation.

In these explanations of mine I am bearing in mind Bennett’s example of plunging into a new possibility and not being half-hearted, but also his advice to do so only for a very limited time. The new teaching had a very interesting idea connected with this. It was that any special term or word had only a limited half-life of potency; it must lose its energy or effectiveness over time. I think this idea can be taken in an even more extreme way. Most people feel that if they are doing something they think good or worthwhile then they should continue or even increase doing it; but I believe that if a practice is continued on it is liable to turn into its opposite. This was remarked upon by Simone Weil.⁴⁸

From this viewpoint practice only has value in certain circumstances and only for a limited time. Which thought leads to the question of what constitutes ‘work’ if it is so contingent. In the context of being subject to a guru or teacher it is by *their authority* that any particular activity can be called work. In a way, it is by the word of the teacher that the activity becomes ‘spiritual’. The American guru used movies and board games or anything at hand! (We sometimes watched 11-hour long composite movies!) These considerations particularly apply to the Fourth Way because - as Gurdjieff seemed to say when he began teaching - there are no fixed forms in it. There have been suggestions that a practice vital

⁴⁸ In her *Notebooks*, Weil says that if one acts beyond the actual level of one’s virtue it turns to poison or evil. Simone Weil, *Notebooks*, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 1956).

and effective in one place in time can be quite useless or even harmful in another.

In Gurdjieff's line of teaching prominent place was given to *conscience*. This clearly indicates an act in the individual which makes all the difference in what is done. When there is a heavy presence of a guru or teacher, operating within a group, it is likely that this conscience becomes covered over. There was not, nor can there be, any *method* of activating and testing conscience. This is because there cannot be anything outside of conscience capable of measuring its truth. It is the 'measure of measures'.

Authenticity is a crucial matter. Starting from Gurdjieff's picture of us being asleep, deluded and fragmented it would seem impossible for any of us to find 'the right direction', that is enter into a path which is effective for our 'salvation'. How can the blind see how to go? Bennett's theme of communication with higher intelligence pinpoints the issue. It is a conundrum.⁴⁹ How, if we are so wrong, can we connect with higher powers that we do not even see? Appearances or claims of higher powers in experiences, gurus, texts, etc. may be delusions. But the enigma itself is a *fact*. I came to consider it all important. We *cannot* know for sure what is right or true but the *realisation* of this is *essential* for any kind of authentic transformation in us. What it entails is not mere scepticism or agnosticism, which are just attitudes of mind, but a concrete grasp of mind itself. It is part of cooking the stuff of mind into a soul, which Bennett characterised as *coalescence*,⁵⁰ a reference to Gurdjieff's idea of the fusion of 'powders'.⁵¹

Voidish Genius

The guru from America put the people around him through many ordeals and difficulties but he imparted some capacity to create new types of experience into some of them. I myself was surprised to see what was possible. He helped to break many conditionings, one of which was language and another control of energies. The term *voidish* was often used.

⁴⁹ In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James gives a useful summary of the general threads of religious thought, including the sense that "something is wrong" and also that "there is help from higher powers". William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, Dover Publications Inc., 2012).

⁵⁰ P.D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (USA: The Library of Alexandria, 1957), pp. 43-44.

⁵¹ Gurdjieff talks about four stages in the fusion of the "metallic powders" leading to the formation of the "fourth body" that is immortal.

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It was related to some traditional practices such as exercise of ‘yogic language’, a supposed deep seated proto-language that involved no concepts. Voidish also applied to the creation of events and experiences ‘out of nothing’. It led me to make unusual activities, such as holding group ‘meetings’ in the midst of Waterloo Station and tapping into, apparently, streams of energy that I had thought, previously, would be possible only in ‘sacred sites.’⁵²

Voidish genius is a name for genuinely *creative* actions. Such things are usually taken in a narrow subjective way, as is the case with *kundalini*.⁵³ With my scientific background I welcomed the chance to participate in tangible actions that were environmental and shared and not merely personal states. It seemed to me that there had always been an implicit thread weaving through the hazardous path Bennett took by way of his encounters with various ‘teachers’. The Gurdjieff teaching had always emphasised *consciousness* but these new influences called on what was more than conscious. Bennett had outlined a scheme of energies in which, first of all, as Gurdjieff and he made clear, ordinary awareness was below ‘true consciousness’. Bennett made another step and spoke of *creativity* as a level of energy ‘beyond consciousness’.

Subud was a creative action. That was why it tended to reject or minimise any conscious effort. The Shivapuri Baba told Bennett directly: ‘Put aside *the veil* [our italics] of consciousness and you will see God’. This, incidentally, is the core of the mathematician Spencer Brown’s enlightenment, which he declared in 1984.⁵⁴ Idries Shah hinted at an action

⁵² Gurdjieff devised exercises involving “conscious stealing” of higher energies concentrated over sacred sites where pilgrims gathered. He claimed that the energies of prayer were distilled into a higher form that concentrated in the region above the site. Further, this higher energy was not accessible to the pilgrims as such but could be used or “stolen” by people capable of using it. My experiment showed that the centres of convergence of people need not be “holy” at all.

⁵³ Simon Weightman discusses the case of *kundalini* in his 2000 Jordan Lectures on mysticism, at <https://www.soas.ac.uk/religions-and-philosophies/events/jordan-lectures-in-comparative-religion/the-jordan-lectures-in-comparative-religion-previous-lectures.html>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

⁵⁴ Spencer Brown declared himself enlightened in 1984 and defined it as “knowing the laws of creation”. He later compared himself to the Buddha. G. Spencer Brown became famous for his book *The Laws of Form* (Portland: Cognizer Company, 1954). Henri Bortoft (and myself) had attended a course on the “calculus of distinction” delineated in this book that he conducted prior to publication. I am currently in contact with mathematical physicists who

that that went on behind any practices or efforts. Hasan Shushud's way of Absolute Liberation entailed a *fana* or extinction of consciousness altogether. Ubaidullah Ahrar put it in an extreme form:

As soon as I remember You — my secret, my heart,
And my spirit starts to disturb me during Your remembrance.
Until an observer from You used to call to me,
'Beware, beware — of remembrance beware.'
Do you not see the Real? His proofs appeared.
The meaning of totality joined Your meaning.
The rememberers when remembering him
Are more forgetful than the ones who forget to remember Him.
The Prophet(s) said, 'The one who knows Allah,
His tongue is paralyzed.'⁵⁵

Voidish genius brought all this into concrete experience including facing the conundrum of having an experience of what is beyond consciousness! Part of the phenomenology I am not able to explain is that voidishness can actualize *in the body*. I must remark that the fairly common practice of designing a hierarchy of energies or levels can be misleading. A hierarchy entails higher and lower but the meaning of this distinction *changes with level*. It is as if, when one goes to a higher level, the rules or kinds of order change. The idea of a breaking down of hierarchical order is greatly important. It gives special meaning to the level of energy Bennett called *unitive* (love). In love, *everything is equal*. I believe that this was the vision that drew Bennett on throughout his life.

Creative energy is not ultimate. This has been long expressed in the Gnostic tradition wherein the Demiurgic Creator was viewed as egoistic and that we had need of access to the compassionate and loving God beyond, to set us free from being a subject of his dreams.

Science

I reason in this way: I am a small man. I have only lived for fifty years, and religion has existed for thousands of years. Thousands of men have studied these religions and yet I deny them. I ask myself: "Is it possible that they were all fools and that only I am clever?" The situation is the same with science. It has also existed for many years. Suppose I deny it. Again the

draw on his ideas in the hope of finding a way to articulate inner experience more accurately than through mystical metaphors.

⁵⁵ 'The Muhammadan Way', *Classical Islamic Teachings*, at <http://www.nurmuhammad.com/pbuh/?p=1763>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

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same question arises: “Can it be that I alone am more clever than all the multitude of men who have studied science for so long a time?”

If I reason impartially I shall understand that I may be more intelligent than one or two men but not than a thousand. If I am a normal man and I reason without being biased, I shall understand that I cannot be more intelligent than millions. I repeat, I am but a small man. How can I criticize religion and science? What then is possible? I begin to think that perhaps there is some truth in them; it is impossible for everyone to be mistaken. So now I set myself the task of trying to understand what it is all about.⁵⁶

Bennett entitled his organisation ‘The Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences’. Its first stated aim was: “To promote research and other scientific work in connection with the factors which influence development and retrogression in man and their operation in individuals and communities; to investigate the origin and elaboration of scientific hypotheses and secular and religious philosophies and their bearing on general theories of Man and his place in the universe; and to study comparative methodology in history, philosophy and natural science.” With this wide remit we can see how Bennett’s investigations into spiritual methodologies, his development of systematics and entry into educational research fitted. Another feature of it was acceptance and assimilation of modern science. Bennett largely – though not entirely - avoided any dalliance with ‘occult science’ and his studies of scientific method made with his colleagues were serious efforts in the history and philosophy of science (my own subject at Cambridge). However, he did not make much of modern psychology. I sought to remedy this.

Working with Bennett’s cosmological psychologies I was struck by his insistence that higher worlds were not far away as if in some distant land, or furthest star, but intimately with us, here and now. He was very fond of Francis Thompson’s poem *In No Strange Land*:

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry- and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob’s ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.
Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry- clinging to Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,

⁵⁶ G. I. Gurdjieff, *Views From the Real World: Early Talks in Moscow, Essentuki, Tiflis, Berlin, London, Paris, New York, and Chicago As Recollected by His Pupils* (London and New York: Penguin Compass, 1984 [1973]).

Not of Genesareth, but Thames!⁵⁷

Bennett's attitude suggested to me a kind of 'hyper-reality' of ordinary life, like existentialism aflame with Christ. The challenge Gurdjieff had laid down was that we were shams, pretend humans and we had to get real.⁵⁸ It seemed to me that, pathetic as I was, I could stick to this idea and see what I could make of it for myself. None of the traditional ways had faced this directly; though, once the idea gets hold of you, *it can be seen everywhere*. The common notion of looking for the *antecedents* of Gurdjieff's ideas is rather trivial; it is better to *look forward*.

This was and is not a matter of isolated effort or enquiry. Every moment of awakening is intrinsically connected with every other. In this sense, traditions, religions, movements, etc. seem empty names. It is in the nature of lower mind that it looks outside for agencies to blame for its misfortunes and also for agencies for its salvation. As I learned from group psychologist Gordon Lawrence (see Figure 4), there are two 'politics of conversation' - i.e. fundamental ideologies - one of *salvation* and one of *revelation*. The first looks for answers, and looks for them outside of itself. The second looks for meanings and looks for them *amongst the people involved*. It is concerned with what is *between* them. The two viewpoints reflected the two views of the reconciling force in the Gurdjieffian treatment of the triad: in the one view, the reconciling is *above* the other two, the active and the passive, a rather religious idea; while, in the other, it is *between* them and therefore hazardous.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Francis Thompson, *Selected Poetry of Francis Thompson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), pp. 130-142.

⁵⁸ Reference here can be made to the speculative science fiction of Philip K. Dick, and his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), which was made into the film *Blade Runner* (1982) in particular. He challenges the idea that we are "human" and not just "replicants" or simulations of men and women. In his novel there is a "Voight-Kampff" machine test to discriminate between real and replicant humans (reminiscent of the famous Turing test for human intelligence in computers).

⁵⁹ In Bennett's scheme of Four Cultures see *The Dramatic Universe* (New York: Coombe Springs Press, 1957). Here, there are two that relate to God as Creator in one case, and God as Saviour in the other. The creator attitude puts salvation and meaning above us while the saviour attitude locates them amongst us, hence subject to hazard.

The Fourth Way (Part 2)



Figure 4 – Author in conversation with Gordon Lawrence (author’s own image).

Not only neurology was introducing us to the dynamic notion of the plastic brain but psychology, especially in the form of group analysis, allied to recent thinking about information and cybernetics,⁶⁰ was generating a new view of ‘higher information’. There was something abroad that bypassed old notions of *teaching*.

Transmission

The idea of transmission like that of teaching suggests something coming from somewhere and going to somewhere else. I like to use phrases like ‘matrix of understanding’ and contemplate not so much a message but a *medium* (I belonged to the age of Marshall McLuhan). After all, Idries Shah once said: ‘The teaching is like air’, a simile that Bennett embraced. For purposes of organising my thoughts I adopted a fourfold scheme of media of transmission:

CONSCIENCE

PRACTICES TEACHERS

TEXTS

⁶⁰ This is a rich and complex field including the quantum coupling of observer and observed, the development of second-order cybernetics by Heinz von Forester and others, and the rediscovery of dialogue by Patrick de Mare and others.

Texts

The story of Gurdjieff and his writings is complex and hardly resolved to this day. Suffice it to say that he appeared to have turned to writing after realising he could not transmit what he wanted *through people*. He also claimed that his magnum opus *Beelzebub's Tales* could of *itself* awaken the subconscious intelligence within its readers.⁶¹ Bennett's own magnum opus *The Dramatic Universe* was a response to *Beelzebub*,⁶² and my own writings can be seen as a series of footnotes to Bennett's writings. Words were very important for Gurdjieff. He went so far as to say he could not communicate what he wanted to his students *because they did not have enough words*. In Russia, he told Ouspensky: "You do not know how to read. If you could read your own books I would sit at your feet."

Having spent many years listening to and reading Bennett I was well aware of his passionate wish to speak to people clearly and reveal to them what he saw of the Reality. I also felt that capacity for reading had much diminished in people. I take reading and writing as a profound yoga (in the *Raj* sense of Patanjali). The 'answers' are clearly written in the books but few people are able to read them there. Once one can read, then the usual dichotomy assumed by most between book or verbal knowledge and such possibilities as 'direct truths of the heart' vanishes. At the same time, articulation of inner experience becomes possible; which is the key to self-direction and communion with others.

Practices

In Sufism there are two related terms: *ilm* (knowledge) and *hal* (state). Gurdjieff often referred to knowledge and being and the need to keep them in balance. Separately they are like the blind scholar and the stupid saint. Practices tend to evoke states. They can serve to help people be receptive to higher influences (though they often as not do the opposite). I have earlier mentioned the practices of movements, sensing, visualisation and the 'morning exercises', as well as such things as the Subud *latihan* and the

⁶¹ Gurdjieff writes in Chapter 48 of *Beelzebub's Tales* that he intended "by means of the first series, to destroy in people everything which, in their false representations, as it were, exists in reality, or in other words 'to corrode without mercy all the rubbish accumulated during the ages in human mentation'; by means of the second series, to prepare, so to say, 'new constructional material'; and by means of the third, 'to build a new world'," p. 1184.

⁶² Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe* (1957).

The Fourth Way (Part 2)

zikr of Hasan Shushud. I believe such things can be interpreted as acting like ‘carrier waves’ for what, for lack of a better term, I would call ‘higher information’. The key factor is some kind of *initiation*, the step of *realisation of the practice for oneself*. Just performing a practice is not enough.

The transmission of practices, for the most part, is through an *oral tradition*. This means person to person contact. It was made very clear in Subud where people were ‘opened’ to the action of the *latihan* by people who had been previously opened, a chain reaching back to Pak Subuh himself. Gurdjieff himself described his transmission of an exercise, say, as working through “illustrative inculcation.”⁶³ For my own part I have seen that a step is needed for anyone to ‘get’ any practice and am reminded, in this context, of Gurdjieff’s saying that ‘all initiation is self-initiation’. The person transmitting an exercise is called upon to be *really* doing it while he is passing it on to others. They, in their turn, have to make it real.

Bennett developed a corpus of more than a hundred exercises; that is, forms of structured attention of certain form and sequence. Most of them derived from Gurdjieff but Bennett came to add other ingredients from Sufism and Hinduism (*latifas* and *chakras* for example) and his Christianity (as in the exercise of ‘the eye of the needle’). For me they were like texts constructed on the basis of the psycho-cosmology of Bennett’s understanding of the fourth way. But I felt they were largely practised by people without any understanding of this. Once understood, however, it opens the way to all kinds of ‘themes and variations’ in this medium. It seemed to me that here was a way of ‘experimental metaphysics’ in which one could not just think about ideas of human reality but experiment with them. John Allen called his sessions for people of this type ‘lab’, short for ‘laboratory’. John was an engineer and writer who founded a work group in Santa Fe incorporating many of Bennett’s ideas. His exercises or ‘labs’ were rooted in acting and he helped me see a wider range of possibilities in the inner exercises than before.

I proceeded as far as I could to experiment with people from this standpoint, often making a start by asking for someone present to say what they would like to look into. My purpose was to encourage people to be experimental and empirical and not so much ritualistic or attached to

⁶³ G. I. Gurdjieff, *Life is Real, Then, Only When ‘I Am’* (USA: Library of Alexandria, 1975), p. 148.

experiences. I insisted that people find out or create a reason for doing the exercise as *integral* to the exercise. Though I cannot justify it here, I would say that what I came to do was very much in the line from Gurdjieff's encounters with people in his groups. Also, it was for me axiomatic that if a practice was authentic in its reflection of human nature then it would naturally evolve and lead the practitioner into *unknown territory*.

Teachers

In the medium I call 'teachers' I want to include all those transactions in which people's souls are touched, that is their non-delusional self. This entails an intimacy. A teacher is someone who takes on a *conscious role* with respect to another person or persons. It is something very hazardous. In the first instance there is the uncertainty in teacher and student finding each other. But I must also address the probability that there are teachers acting on different levels. There are teachers who just dish out 'the teachings' as a matter of rote. The teachers who transmit something that has life or energy are on a different level. Such I believe can convey a practice. Usually, they do so to a *group* rather than to a specific individual. When one comes to the latter we have teaching on yet another level. Such teaching must be conscious.

What is possible with a group and what is possible one on one are different. In Bennett's terminology of selves, the latter takes place in the *divided self*.⁶⁴ Here is the place of what he called 'will type' and what others have considered to be the place of 'knots in the heart' or 'chief feature' or other glimpses of some intrinsic deep seated twist in the psyche that prevents transformation. It is like having one's *own* original sin. At the same time it is the platform for liberation, the seat of possibly conscious choice (hence we are divided):

True Self	the seat of conscience
Divided Self	the seat of consciousness
Reactional Self	the stuff of emotional images
Material Self	the stuff of routine

⁶⁴ The term "divided self" refers to Bennett's scheme of selfhood, which, like many of his constructs, is fourfold. Bennett ascribes desire, character, and self-awareness to the third, divided, self. It is divided between higher and lower in itself. R. D Laing's "divided self" in the book of that name is the mentally disturbed ego caught in contradiction. See Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Tavistock Publishing, 1959).

The Fourth Way (Part 2)

In other contexts such as that of animistic cultures and shamanism, the teacher relationship is dedicated to the continuation of the line: the medicine man has to find someone to take his place when he is dead.⁶⁵ The literature sometimes speaks of the shaman having to ‘hook’ the pupil rather than the pupil seeking the master.⁶⁶ The third level of teaching is rare. One wonders whether, for example, the relationship of Alfred R. Orage with Gurdjieff was of this kind. In the literature the example of Rumi and Shams stands out.⁶⁷

Conscience

According to Gurdjieff’s character Beelzebub, over the gates of Purgatory is written: “Only he can enter here who is able to put himself in the place of these the other results of my labours”. Which serves to introduce the idea of dialogue - in at least its ideal manifestation - as a teaching without teaching. It is the domain of conscience. Patrick de Mare, the doyen of the dialogue process through what he called the ‘median’ group (size 15 to 25 people) named the ultimate goal of dialogue as *koinonia*, which he usually translated as ‘impersonal fellowship’. Though it will seem obscure, I want to say that only through conscience can we really *see* that we are the same.⁶⁸ I take Gurdjieff’s words literally: if we can enter into the place of others - or *see* how and why we are equal - then we are *ipso facto* in Purgatory. Purgatory is the ultimate place of the Work.

What is a teacher according to the fourth level? He or she touches the True Self, which is creative. This was thought by Bennett to be the place where the Subud initiation took place, hence the common experience that ‘nothing happens’ for many people when they are ‘opened’. It has happened, but beyond consciousness. Then there are contemporary ‘saints’ such as Sri Anandamayī Ma or Mother Meera who hardly teach anything

⁶⁵ In Gurdjieff’s idea of the “staircase” leading from life to another level, a “law” is that no one can ascend to a higher step without helping someone else fill the place he is vacating.

⁶⁶ This was dramatically portrayed in Alain Tanner’s film *Light Years Away* (1981). Further, Simone Weil insisted that in the Gospels there is no mention of man seeking God, only of God seeking man.

⁶⁷ Shams or Shams-i-Tabrīzī is credited as Rumi’s spiritual teacher. They are depicted as united in love of God and each other.

⁶⁸ Gurdjieff had inscribed on his father’s grave the following: I AM THOU, THOU ART I, HE IS OURS, WE BOTH ARE HIS. SO MAY ALL BE FOR OUR NEIGHBOUR.

but transmit a grace. Gurdjieff would say that such gifts have to be paid back (by work for other people) before they can truly benefit.

I think it is more than a pious sentiment to say that conscience is the ultimate teacher. Gurdjieff called conscience ‘the representative of the Creator’, or God. It is important not to reify conscience as a thing or organ. In conscience, ‘teaching’ does not come from anywhere but *can inform our acts*. It was the core of the mission of Ashiata Shiemash, the enigmatic ‘messenger sent from Above’ in *Beelzebub’s Tales*, who changed people’s lives through awakening them to a perception that had been long buried within them.⁶⁹ I believe that such an action can obtain in dialogue, being mindful of Gordon Lawrence’s ideas of the ‘politics of revelation’.⁷⁰ It may be literally true that people can be in a teaching according to conscience through their speaking together. It always struck me with great force that Ashiata Shiemash used no miracles or special powers but simply talked with people.

Service in the Wider World

John Allen pointed out to me that Russia at the time Gurdjieff was there was home to many ‘cosmocists’, that is scientists who adopted a cosmic view of terrestrial matters. These included the biogeochemist Vladimir Vernadsky whom we have mentioned before and Konstantin E. Tsiolkovsky, sometimes called ‘the father of space travel’. Allen and his colleagues followed this trail and it led them to be among the first westerners to be admitted to the ‘forbidden cities’ of Siberia with the coming of *glasnost* where they found scientists such as Evgenii Shepelev who had experimented with closed systems including humans. The upshot was that they embarked on a journey of innovation and discovery having the aim of finding out how to support human life on other planets. NASA engineers had paid almost no attention to developing a viable self-sustaining organic environment, relying on transported supplies of food, water and oxygen.

I was involved with the company Allen established with friends, called Space Biospheres, and was engaged to help them write a popular

⁶⁹ Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*, p. 359.

⁷⁰ W. Gordon Lawrence, *Tongued With Fire: Groups in Experience* (London: Karnac Books, 2000).

The Fourth Way (Part 2)

book about their enterprise, Biosphere 2.⁷¹ It was a three-brained activity involving science, art and engineering. Biosphere 2 was an ‘image’ of our terrestrial biosphere built in Arizona (see Figure 5). It proved a popular draw and attracted much media attention, until the tide turned and it became subject to attacks in the media that led to a gun-point take over by their main financier. For me the project was a totally extraordinary and much to be welcomed example of creative experimentation in the real world. This was ‘the Work’ in new guise perhaps. But it had been an esoteric experiment perhaps doomed to failure. It challenged too much of mainstream culture and science to be allowed to survive. Its fate paralleled the suppression of heresies in medieval times.

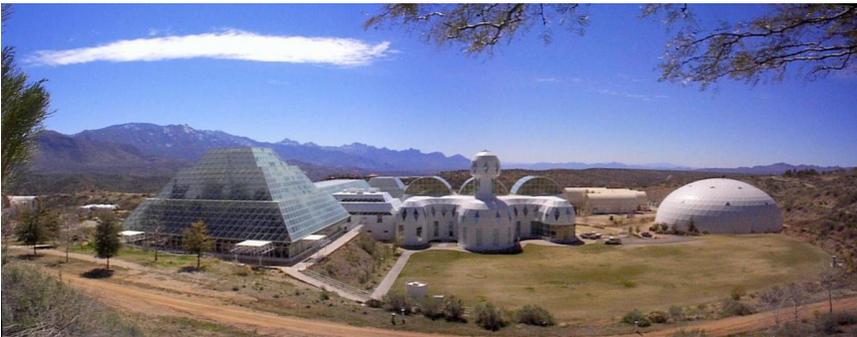


Figure 5 – Biosphere 2 (Wikimedia Commons).

In the early days of being with Bennett, I was drawn into educational research and the seeds were planted which have grown since into various projects. As a research fellow I was led to practice and facilitate small group discussions. As part of the educational research conducted by Bennett’s Institute *structural communication* was developed from the framework of systematics. As we said before, this led to the invention of a teaching machine. A commercial company ‘Structural Communication Systems Ltd.’ was set up to propagate and exploit the method in both

⁷¹ John L. Allen and Anthony Blake, *Biosphere 2: The Human Experiment* (New York: Viking Adult, 1991).

schools and business, but it folded within a few years. However, the method re-emerged in the twenty-first century and is still in development.⁷²

There is a work of being able to speak about the Work in reasonable and transparent terms, something in which Bennett excelled. But each person has to do this in his or her own way. It took some time before I could really speak with my own voice. It is not a matter of using old jargon and constructs. To speak is a wondrous thing. It is necessary that people 'speak the work' but it is a very hazardous undertaking. Speaking and oral tradition are vital in the fourth way. This is because there has to be some element of person-to-person action that cannot be mediated by any technology. As Bennett's student Simon Weightman acknowledged, speech is the *being* aspect of language.⁷³ Gurdjieff himself appears to have made speech a strong practice: his remarks and conversations are legendary, and what matters in them is not so much in what is said but how they fuse minds into a significant moment.

But language in all its aspects was a field of a good work. Bennett's lead us into a realm of mentation by form through his invention of structural communication, a way of sharing understanding and not just knowledge. Speaking together became for me a major domain of real work, work I simply called *dialogue*. I came to know of David Bohm's advocacy of dialogue as 'going through meaning' and sought out the doyen of this kind of meeting, Patrick de Mare, who became a mentor and colleague.⁷⁴

The most important aspect of dialogue that gradually dawned on me was that it involved people treating each other as equals *on the level*. I saw that this was no wishy-washy 'everybody's opinion is equally valuable' miasma but a very high demand. The quality was not given but a hoped-for outcome, corresponding to the Pythagorean ideal of friendship. This friendship and also true dialogue were only possible between equals.

⁷² Anthony Blake, 'Gurdjieff and the Legomonism of "Objective Reason",' in Carole M. Cusack and Alex Norman (eds), *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 237-270.

⁷³ Simon Weightman adapted Bennett's cosmic triad of Function, Being and Will to designate three facets of language: Function – language; Being – speech, and Will – meaning. See Simon Weightman, 'Aspects of the Significance of Language,' *Systematics*, vol. 6 no. 4 (1969).

⁷⁴ See Rachel Lenn and Karen Stefano (eds), *Small, Large and Median Groups: The Work of Patrick de Mare* (Leiden: Karnac Books, 2012).

The Fourth Way (Part 2)

This realisation brought me back to the seminal experience I had had during the seminar called *A Spiritual Psychology* when Bennett told me that people were equal *only in their will*. Dialogue became for me the field of discovery of such equality, which could not be experienced by any one person or authority but had to come into being through all the participants accepting each other as human.

The DuVersity

I became increasingly concerned with method and technique. What could people do together that might pay off in terms of understanding themselves better? I wondered about the issue of 'superior information' which involved bypassing conditioning and altering perception. Just telling people things was obviously next to useless. My wonderings led to the formation of a non-profit organisation I dubbed *The DuVersity*.⁷⁵ The title harked back to the days with Bennett, when we young men around him dreamt of there being a 'dramatic university'. The 'DU' of DuVersity also picked up on Bennett's idea of 'unity in diversity and diversity in unity'. It led to the slogan 'diversity creates new forms of unity'. It was very much centred in Bennett's *The Dramatic Universe*,⁷⁶ systematics, and the prospect of communication with higher intelligence as well as other projects he left behind. But I wanted very much to bring things up to date and embrace findings in mainstream research. In particular I felt that followers of the fourth way tended to be backward-looking while the world was opening up in new ways. It was no longer useful to posit some esoteric truth in contrast to what was happening *en masse*. And certainly not useful to fix it in some archaic mode.

Out of the accidents of my own search and encounters I acquired knowledge and techniques in various psychological fields. These were developed through a series of seminars in the 1990s, during which I attempted to speak of or share work ideas without adhering to their customary terminology.⁷⁷ The series progressed in a way that gradually reduced the amount of lecturing and increased the amount of participation:

⁷⁵ The DuVersity was founded in 1998 by Karen Stefano and myself. See www.duversity.org. Accessed 23 November 2017.

⁷⁶ Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe* (1957).

⁷⁷ These were transcribed and eventually published in three volumes as: *The Reading of Experience* (2012); *Making a New World* (2012); *Inside the Present Moment* (2012).

the idea of a *participative* consciousness beyond *an observing* consciousness became paramount. This led to the idea of a workshop methodology that would bring together several influences that had helped and informed me. My personal inclination towards embracing diversity and finding new ways of integration led me on to pursue this aim. I devised a workshop consisting of seven distinct methods which are listed here, together with their sources:

- Inner exercises – Bennett
- Movements – Gurdjieff
- LVT – Bennett at al
- Tissue paper collage – Wallace⁷⁸
- Social dreaming matrix– Lawrence
- Dialogue (Median Group) – de Mare
- ILM (Neural Education) – Matchett⁷⁹

The mistake I made was to assume that giving people the seven practices would lead them to integrate them as I felt I had done. This was quite unrealistic in many ways. One of them was that relatively few people could perceive the form or design of a method distinctly from what they experienced from it. Most were unable to operate at a level in which the several forms could be understood as ‘the same’ and therefore could coalesce.⁸⁰ They were experienced *extensively* rather than *intensively*. The problem of integration appeared again and again. People could appreciate the work of somebody who did it but could not do it for themselves. It seemed to require a fluidity of thought that was not widely available.

Another instance of this arose in my attempts to run conferences based on themes which Bennett had initiated such as time and higher intelligence. Through the DuVersity I and colleagues brought together people from various schools (though still having some connection with Bennett and his work). But the experts who contributed to the conferences did little more than repeat their usual presentations with little regard for the topic and almost no exchange with each other.

⁷⁸ Dr Edith Wallace was a Jungian psychotherapist who studied under Emma Jung and John Bennett. She devised her “Tissue Paper Collage” method while at Bennett’s Academy in Sherborne.

⁷⁹ ILM or “immediate learning method” was derived from Edward Matchett’s “neural education”, based on listening to music to make a connection with what he called “media signals” or creative influences.

⁸⁰ Gurdjieff mysteriously emphasises the idea of “sameness” in a passage in the Third Series of his writings as the key to the development of the third brain or understanding.

The Fourth Way (Part 2)

My friend Robert Fripp of King Crimson fame has gone another way, and far more effective. He concentrated on a single thing - performance with a guitar - and through this got a response from thousands of people as they participated in a learning process (based on a tangible structure - a particular tuning he invented).⁸¹ It was a lesson that took me a great deal of time to appreciate.

The DuVersity also undertook ‘pilgrimages’ to Egypt (see Figure 6), Peru and so on and incidentally inspired astro-archaeologist Richard Heath to investigate early megalithic culture in the context of the work on ancient harmonic theory by Ernest McClain. I met McClain (see Figure 7) twice before his death in 2014 and his work helped me expand the domain of systematics.

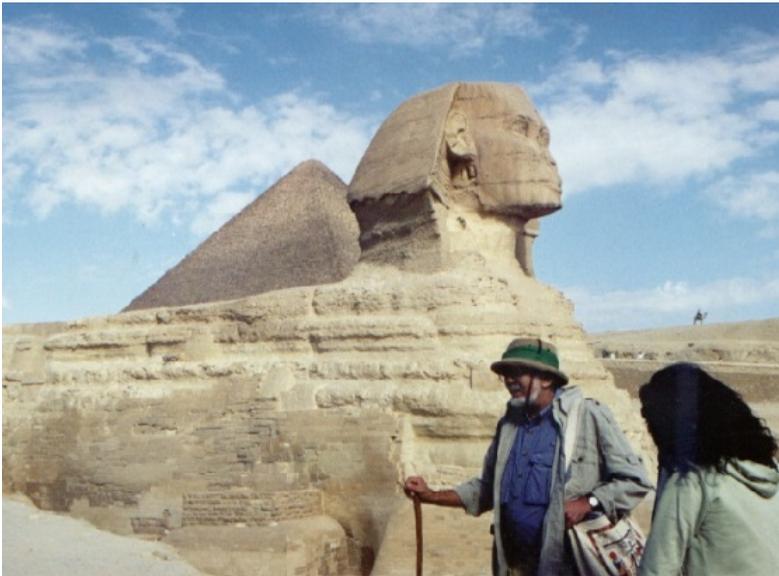


Figure 6 – Tour guide, John Anthony West, also with Gurdjieffian background, in Egypt for DuVersity tour 2002 (author’s own image).

⁸¹ David G. Robertson, “‘Tuning Ourselves’”: Fripp, Bennett, Gurdjieff’, *Religion and the Arts*, vol. 21, nos. 1-2 (2017), pp. 236-258.

The Fourth Way (Part 2)

After experience with people both in business and in education became clear that people could only use such techniques with a facilitator and, more significantly, they were usually unable to see what contribution the method made to their results. It was an example to place besides Gurdjieff's third force blindness and Bennett's eternity blindness. I thought of it rather as *structural* blindness. This had serious consequences. Bennett's systematics, for example, which was relatively easy for me to grasp and use could only be taken up by most people if they were shown specific examples concerning something that interested them. They could not generate valid systems for themselves in new fields, which was rather the point.

I was left with the conundrum that what I wanted to convey was rooted in *consciousness* but this was the very thing which most people could not summon up for themselves. It was impossible to 'teach' the Fourth Way as a reality to anyone without this ingredient. I've used the term 'conscious energy' from Bennett's terminology because I know none better but its meaning is embedded in his structural scheme of energies and cannot be understood in isolation apart from it. In passing I have referred to other elements in it such as creative energy and unitive energy. They are ascribed to the category of 'cosmic energies' which largely means unrestricted by space and time; the ultimate energy in the scheme is called 'transcendental' for obvious reasons. Probably, Bennett regarded the cosmic energies as 'supernatural'.

Such terminologies are far from being universally accepted, but I find them useful and they are part of my story, my narration. They imply a critical interface between the living and the 'cosmic' which is the locus of human discovery of itself. It is the region of transformation in that some marriage of the two sides may be possible. Consciousness already 'flows' into art and science where it is somewhat specialised, but it seems to me that Gurdjieff and Bennett had a broader view, allied to the concept of 'conscious evolution'.

Alignment with the cosmic energies (one cannot be said to control them) belongs to profound mysticism. The Shivapuri Baba who was a strong influence on Bennett, made his central practice meditation on the meaning of life and regarded religions as 'crutches' to be used only if one did not have the strength to go directly. He also eschewed beauty and the

arts as distractions.⁸² Hasan Shushud advocated that Bennett should ‘make the Void his home’ just as Gurdjieff had told him that he should seek *le soleil absolu* (the Sun Absolute, beyond Paradise). Gurdjieff, right from the start of his mission, declared that ‘real consciousness’ (he called true self-consciousness) was essential for right relation to higher forces. He also claimed that it was our *birthright* but for various environmental reasons had become inaccessible or buried in the subconscious.⁸³

Bennett’s scheme of energies helped me see how consciousness was the first of a series of higher energies (sources of ‘sacred impulses’) that transcended ordinary awareness in progressive degrees. It was like a gateway to them. But it was not free of hazard. Consciousness brings temptation. It is the fuel of egoism and, mythologically, related to the fall of angels.⁸⁴ Every step down from the Ultimate (if there is such a thing) is a limitation or privation (*kenosis* in Greek). The fourth way seems to aim at *connecting the different levels*, so it must have an open programme. It is not simply about ‘raising level of consciousness’ but involves *understanding* how the different levels or worlds relate to each other and the whole.⁸⁵

Which leads me to the terminology that replaces ‘Fourth Way’ with *the Work*. At times I’ve criticised the term ‘work’ from the standpoint of physics in which work = force x distance, because that only represents effort. I would prefer the term *action* because action = energy x time – and reminds me at least of something like inspiration. In one of his last lectures, Bennett struggled to articulate the sense and meaning of the Work in a way which seems to combine the physical concepts of work and action.

One good advantage of the word ‘Work’ is that it doesn’t readily lend itself to being made into a being. We don’t feel ourselves inclined to talk about ‘Mr Work’ or ‘His Holiness, the Work’. At least we have that big advantage:

⁸² John G. Bennett with Thakur Lal Manandhar, *Long Pilgrimage: The Life and Teachings of the Shivapuri Baba*, 3rd edition (Lower Lake, CA: Dawn Horse Press, 1983 [1968]).

⁸³ Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 142.

⁸⁴ Milton’s *Paradise Lost* can be seen to describe how the Divine Reality is subverted or constricted into personal experience. Gurdjieff’s accounts of “disasters” afflicting humankind may also represent the same trauma: an act of limitation as must obtain between levels might well be seen as disastrous. Though Gurdjieff spoke in the context of his view of human history, through time, there is also the sense of a “timeless” structure. In the Hindu tradition such transitions are treated as steps of ignorance. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: J. and R. Tonson, 1759).

⁸⁵ This is reflected in various attempts to specify six distinct forms of action based on the three terms of a triad. See Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe* (1957).

The Fourth Way (Part 2)

we have here a word that we are not in real danger of turning into a being like we've done with God. We also are not likely to fall into the mistake of thinking that the Work exists in the sense that we've fallen into this confusion of thinking of the world as existing, as if it was something in itself. We realize that the Work has to be talked about in a different way from that. We are not the Work, we don't do the Work, we are not in the Work. The Work isn't something independent apart from us all. At least there are a whole lot of confusions we shan't fall into if we're reasonably careful when we talk about Work. It is not a small thing this. Because if we can get something right about this maybe we can get a whole lot of other things right too.

One great advantage of the word 'Work' is this: we don't really separate the Work from the worker. If we see that it is so, we have something very, very important: when we use the word 'Work' we are not talking about ourselves, we're not talking about what we do and yet we ourselves and what we do are there; and the Work is also what is done to us, its action upon us. It is altogether true to say that the Work is an action upon us. It is also true to say that the Work is what we do. It is also true to say the Work is the reality of our whole life. The beauty here is that you have a word that can, possibly, mean something to us that won't bring in a false separation. It doesn't mean for a moment we wish to say that the Work is everything...⁸⁶

The Present Moment

Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards -
Søren Kierkegaard (Journals IVA 164 [1843])

This narrative is a reflection of my life – my character, influences upon me, circumstances, and choices and so on. Any conclusions I draw are coloured by these. One of these is that the fourth way requires a *variety of people*. This has many facets, including making use of a resonance or correspondence between diversity amongst people in the contextual group and diversity in oneself. It is also to enable understanding. It is next to impossible for a single person to see anything 'all round' from all angles. These are some of the reasons why I came to see dialogue as an essential education for 'the Work'.

There are in fact many indications that the fourth way as it has emerged has tended to concentrate on well-educated white middle class professional people. It is striking and worrying how few black people are included. Leaving aside the latter, as I said in my story of Coombe Springs

⁸⁶ J. G. Bennett, *Sacred Influences: Spiritual Action in Human Life* (New Mexico: Bennett Books, 1989), p. 55.

and Sherborne, Bennett attracted people from all walks of life and valued diversity. He even said to me on one occasion that ‘we (him and I) are no good for each other’, the reason for saying this was that he valued difference and we thought so much alike.

A life has many diverse encounters and diversity may be strung out in time. I have spoken of the multiple impacts I had via Bennett but there was a whole stream of encounters and influences which came upon me, as is the case for anyone who ‘seeks a way’. At the time, a meeting might seem a random event but in retrospect prove a critical turning point. We cannot tell in advance. The way is hazardous and reveals a logic only, if at all, in hindsight (as Kierkegaard pointed out).

Taking a bird’s eye view of one’s path in life it might appear like a ‘drunkard’s walk’ but may also suggest some element of ‘intelligent design’. In the fourth way, we relate everything to the here and now; what is inside us as well as what is outside us *cannot be separated*. I have not spoken much of Bennett’s enquiry into and valuing of *hazard*, yet it is the foundation of everything he did. To say that it means that doing anything is subject to uncertainty, and risk is involved, is not enough. Bennett saw it as the key to how we, for example, engage with the world process, or natural order. In crude terms, how freedom enters into and creates through accident and necessity substantial meaning.⁸⁷ His series of lectures on the subject hardly scratched the surface of what this implies. Though Bennett claimed that the core ‘message’ of *The Dramatic Universe* was hazard, he never managed to draw out what he meant in explicit terms.

He lived his life as he did to *demonstrate* it! The importance of diversity and hazard extends into the invention, transmission and development of transformational *methods*. It is a curious thing that many people imagine we can have a set method for our evolution or personal transformation, as if such a method could be effective separate from the exigencies of individuals, their lives and histories. The practice, modality or form of a method cannot stay still without decay. To continue to be

⁸⁷ Bennett’s scheme of triads in its six forms embraces both order and freedom as aspects of a complete action. The latter is given the form of a hexad. See Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe*.

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effective for concrete individuals in real time it must itself transform and evolve.⁸⁸

How does this square with trying, for example, to establish an exercise Gurdjieff taught more than fifty years ago as accurately as possible? This is meaningful precisely because of the fifty year gap. One has to recreate the genesis of the exercise. Idries Shah, in his ‘Declaration of the People of the Tradition’, attempted to spell out the vision of a transformational path that is endlessly changing, adapting and developing. Claiming to represent the ‘tradition’ from which Gurdjieff got his ideas, he one time claimed it dated back 40,000 years. This is to tie ‘the Way’ into human evolution, that date often cited as the birth of creativity (in Europe at least).

The knowledge to which we refer is concentrated, administered and presided over by three kinds of individual existing at any given time. They have been called an “Invisible Hierarchy” because, under ordinary circumstances, they are not in communication or contact with ordinary human beings; certainly not in two-way communication with them. In one sense, the way to the knowledge passes through a “chain of succession” in which perception of the ordinary man must have help in attaining a higher degree of contact. Religion, folklore and the like abound with disguised examples of this progress. Many manifestations, taking religious, magical, alchemical, psychological and other forms, are, in reality, vestigial parts of the science to which we refer. Very often, procedures, which are considered to be “Ways of Truth” and the like, are neither more nor less than traces of techniques which have been used in the past to attain the link referred to above.

One of the “difficulties” in this quest for knowledge of a higher order is the very existence, or rather the misuse, of these survivals. That which was, as it were, the chrysalis for a butterfly becomes a prison for the caterpillar which tries to use it to become a butterfly himself. He fails generally to realize that he has to make his own chrysalis.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ In an interview the theatre director Jerzy Grotowski speaks about the need for innovation in the work. See Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds), *Gurdjieff* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004): “How to struggle against dilution and at the same time, in this rigorous fight, make possible the step toward an ongoing investigation? In the case of Gurdjieff one finds these two aspects: tradition and research. The burning question is: Who, today, is going to assure the continuity of the *research*? Very subtle, very delicate and very difficult”, p. 101.

⁸⁹ Documents sent to groups in an early, introductory phase of Idries Shah’s work; ‘Declaration of the people’, first published edition 13 April, 2007, at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/223039265/Declaration-of-the-People>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

As Gurdjieff once said, in so many words, the Work itself has no aim and it is we who need aims, which must always be particular and individual. Understanding of the practices should not stay still in any fixed form. I believe that there is not any clear cut division between what came from Gurdjieff and other ‘spiritual explorers’ such as those Bennett made contact with. However, as an individual I must choose to go this way or that, at any critical juncture. Restricting oneself to one line or interpretation may be sometimes the most intelligent move.

There remains a component of looking to the past and maintaining materials. Interestingly, in regard to Gurdjieff’s movements which themselves are threatened with entropy and diminution, a major role has been played by Gert-Jan Blom who has recovered the orchestral versions of the music for some of the early demonstrations in 1923-1924. Blom was apparently told to do this work by Gurdjieff himself in a dream, but he shows no interest in any current Gurdjieff groups.⁹⁰

Fresh light is always needed. Which means the cultivation of independent practical methods in touch with what is sometimes called ‘the energy of the times’. In Sufism, from Islamic tradition, new elements of the way enter through the enigmatic figure of El Kidhr, the ‘Green One’. This is to personify the influence of higher powers, which Bennett referred to as ‘sacred influences’. I was led to dialogue as providing a new vantage point on what ‘work on oneself’ means. In making the assertion, Dialogue = Self-Remembering, I was first of all merely following the ancient way of the unity of opposites; but the equals sign signifies an *act* of transformation or understanding not an external identity.

Both dialogue and self-remembering are exactly in and of the present moment; both represent intention in the face of the unknown. They

⁹⁰ Blom also edited and published the extant recordings of Gurdjieff playing the harmonium. I have a project to study and preserve the series of movements made by Gurdjieff at the end of his life, called “The 39”. Gurdjieff claimed antecedents for his sacred dances in Buddhist, Islamic, Greek and Christian traditions. Another friend Gerard Houghton and colleagues have filmed traditional Buddhist dances in Bhutan and Ladakh at the behest of the Royal Family of Bhutan and leading Buddhists to preserve them, because there is a lack of new generations of dancers. The archives are an unparalleled resource now available to the public in the archives of the New York Public Library. See Gert-Jan Blom, *Gurdjieff/de Hartmann. Oriental Suite: The Complete Orchestral Music 1923-1924* (Basta, 2006).

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are the epitome of hazard. The audacity is in equating what appears to be an individual act (self-remembering) with what appears to be a collective process (dialogue). I believe them to be the two halves of the same coin (or rather like the two pieces of the *boolmarshano* I have mentioned before).

A basic practice such as ‘self-observation’ seems straightforward but requires a deep understanding of mind and observation that has hardly yet begun to emerge. Intelligently, Gurdjieff avoided any set definition or description and this is particularly important for the critical act of ‘self-remembering’. Such phenomena are not just ‘mental’ or ‘subjective’ but we do not have the language to describe them accurately. I myself have tried to make use of recursive mathematical forms and believe that mathematics will have a crucial role to play if ‘the work’ is to advance.

There is also the idea of ‘The Work itself’. The quotation from Bennett we gave earlier puts it as well as anything we have heard. It connects with the idea of ‘the Work working’. From the very beginning of my contact with Bennett and those around him it was common to hear the phrase ‘the Work works in spite of ourselves’. We know that our efforts and even just remembering the work are sporadic moments. Can there be a twenty-four hour action with no relapse? It is not a matter of a permanent *state*. Bennett said of himself that he was not conscious all the time but *only when needed*. He was keenly aware of the misunderstanding most people adopt in treating consciousness as theirs, rather than as something that comes into play according to some higher logic. That is the point he strived to express: there is a higher logic (or higher ‘laws’). An implication is that there are worlds in which ‘we’ have a different presence than in our everyday one. The Work is about how we can relate to these possibilities. For that we need to be *weaned from dependency on images of ourselves*. We must find out ‘what works’ in this regard.

Here is my picture of the four elements or sources of the fourth way. It is a symbolic expression in which each of the elements is ‘mutually relevant’ to the others. I like to imagine myself situated in the middle as in a ‘field’ made of the four sources in a process of response and action:

THE WORK

HAZARD

METHODS

DIVERSITY

I do not know what works in advance of what I do. My doubts and confusions persist in various guises and there is no end to them. My questions reach towards a *quest* that underlies them, that reminds me of Heidegger's trenchant statement "Man is the question of Being". This appears to have no temporal terminus. Bennett produced the enigmatic statement that progress is only *within the present moment*. The idea of getting better tomorrow is delusional. Many people I know in the fourth way have, in effect, given up on the idea of any 'improvement tomorrow'. What remains is a daily discipline of remembrance and appreciation of 'work with others' – now, no longer a matter of following any teacher but coming together as equals, which is the *hardest test* of our reality.⁹¹

I believe there has been a change in the general understanding of 'work' from regarding it as a matter of effort and being active towards seeing it as somewhat more receptive. Efforts may be relevant to our being but do not transform us. Practices do not produce a soul. But they may help us to be sensitive to higher influences. What is really at stake? The movement of attitude to the work appears to me to closely follow what was laid out theoretically by Bennett in his treatment of triads as well in his own path. The active, receptive and reconciling elements may be seen as *phases* in the realisation of something. I believe we may come to some sense of the reconciling akin to the Holy Ghost, the inspiration of communities (churches) and of dialogue, a mutuality of making meaning that supersedes any traditional idea of 'teaching'.⁹²

At the moment, one of my main projects is 'The Conversation'. Whenever I can, I seize the opportunity to open (and record) a conversation with anyone connected however loosely with the fourth way. Since, as I believe, the Fourth Way has escaped from the clutches of old top-down organisation it is to be found, if anywhere, amongst the 'ordinary' people who 'feel' its action.

⁹¹ This reminds me of the saying of Jesus in the Gospels: "When two or three are gathered in my Name then am I with them," Matthew 18:20.

⁹² In explaining Gurdjieff's symbol of the enneagram, Bennett did so in terms of his "cosmic triad" of Function, Being and Will constituting the three "octaves" which weave together to create a new whole. Colleague John Kirby has taken this up in his thesis of the three ages of the church in which the present time is to be seen as the phase of Will and the Holy Ghost. See John Kirby, 'The Religious History of Man as Unfoldment of the Triad of Reality (Function, Being and Will) in *DuVersity Newsletter* issue 28, at <http://www.duversity.org/PDF/FBW%20part1.pdf>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

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In my introduction to the 1999 edition of Bennett's *A Spiritual Psychology*, I anticipate some of the concerns which have been voiced here:

It has only been since the 1950s and much more recently that new ideas on the working of groups have arisen. The question now being addressed is precisely how can people come together to cooperate in finding their way—without authority being invested in one person? This has a strong bearing on the present book. Bennett shows us a model of the combination of our spiritual and material natures—but only for the individual. In practice, our search and experience and practices take place within a “community of selves” and not in isolation. The collective situations in which we find ourselves can largely determine what it is possible for us to realize. We have to address how we are together if we are to make headway in our quest. This means that we have to address how we can communicate on the more subtle levels of experience. Strangely, this has never appeared as a prominent feature of the methods used in spiritually-oriented groups. For this reason, such groups have tended to revert back to old models of authority-based guidance.⁹³

Appendices

Appendix 1: A Gathering in Wales 2016

During the last fifty years or so, many if not most of the ‘old guard’, direct heirs of Gurdjieff’s authority in some shape or form, have died, leaving their groups and followers in a kind of vacuum. Acting leaders have emerged sporadically but very few claim any intrinsic authority. People want to go on meeting together and doing something they can identify as ‘work’. Such identification has tended to be, one might say, formulaic. Typically, if one looks at a ‘work weekend’ there will be some combination of: an inner exercises or ‘sitting’; practical work; Gurdjieff movements, and meetings on themes. Other ingredients are sometimes thrown in such as meditations, *zikrs*, music and art.

Mr Bennett was a hard act to follow. A polymath, he had considerable intellect and knowledge of science and mathematics, wide experience of spiritual techniques from many cultures, was capable of speaking their languages, had short but intense interactions with Gurdjieff, was creator of the ten month intensives held in Sherborne, writer of many

⁹³ J. G. Bennett, *A Spiritual Psychology* (New Mexico: Bennett Books, 1999), p. 9.

books including the formidable *The Dramatic Universe* in four volumes and so on.⁹⁴

The question of what to do in the absence of a leader who takes the role of a superior intelligence or wisdom had been in the minds of some people around Bennett even while he was alive, but nothing had then seemed practicable. When he died, a few people felt the need to find ways of working together in a democratic way, no one wishing to claim authority. At the same time, the formulaic legacy of a 'work day' persisted. And engagement with Bennett's many profound ideas was never strong, largely reducing to merely reading from his books with desultory discussion.

A series of annual gatherings in Wales for people interested in Bennett's legacy was inceptioned several years ago. Evidently, people wanted to be together and do things together and share in common meanings, but it was inevitable that the old formulas would come into operation, because it is not an easy thing for people to self-organise without direction or a structured framework and create new forms. A small group ran the decision-making for the program by default. In effect, the meetings were 'disjoint'. My own involvement was as someone who was very familiar with Bennett's ideas, but who also had a sceptical attitude to some of these ideas and to the prospects of achieving a self-organising group. I had, for some time, been looking into self-organising methods and this led me to dialogue, first through the physicist David Bohm and then through his therapist and mentor Patrick de Mare. I persuaded the organisers of the events in Wales to allow me to convene dialogues as part of a programme. There was quite some resistance but, over a few years, acceptance and understanding grew. I was delighted to see emerge some understanding of the difference between dialogue and discussion, coupled with the recognition that discussion rarely led to meaningful communication.

What is more difficult to put finger on was the maturation of the people involved. It was as if the times were changing and we were all moving into a different world (maybe a 'new world' as Bennett spoke of in his book *Making a New World*,⁹⁵ which book became the overt theme of the last two gatherings). While numbers of people attending diminished, depths of meaning increased. And while the formulaic continued, new ingredients

⁹⁴ Bennett, *The Dramatic Universe* (1957).

⁹⁵ Bennett, *Making a New World* (1976).

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were entering and being absorbed. For example, in the domain of meditation, besides the Bennett traditional (derived from Cambodian monk Bhante and practiced for more than 40 years) Green meditation, there was an input from Christian contemplation from a new source. Many people made independent contributions, treating with respect the work of others. I can best delineate the direction of change as just in this independence and individualisation of the 'work' in people. All had 'ripened' in their own way, and found a marriage of work with life.

In various communications I have often remarked that I understood Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* as portraying not so much special people but simply people who were remarkable in their ability to work together and accept each other.⁹⁶ I had begun to dare entertaining the thought that we could be and might be *already* such 'remarkable men (and women)'.

An important idea was voiced during the last event this year in Wales. I emphasise how much mutual exchange occurred in the dialogue sessions and not in any formal discussions. The theme of the seminar was the same as in the previous event two years ago: Bennett's idea of making a New World. This time, there was not even a reading from his book of that title. People were able to give voice to what making a New World meant to them. It emerged that there was a generally shared feeling that the work had turned into a receptive mode and was no longer centred in active will.

A strong idea put forward by Patrick De Mare, especially concerning dialogue, is that mind is between brains rather than in brains. This came to the fore during the week we spent together. In every activity, it seemed to me that we were participants in a medium, one that permitted us to be and act together, a medium that permeated our actions and experiences without imposition. Whether sitting in silence, chanting, moving or speaking there was a sense of 'swimming' in an intelligent and loving medium; which I would label the work in a new sense of the word. One of Bennett's many simple but revelatory utterances was: 'the Work works'.

Without any need of self-deprecation, abject humility or the like, I felt or believed that the people were making no proprietary claim on the work as they might have had in the past. They were simply happy to join

⁹⁶ Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963).

in. What the particular activities were scarcely mattered. We spent most of the day clearing litter from a beach and it was the same as meditating or doing movements (see Figure 9).



Figure 9 – Author, foreground right, with group picking up litter from a beach (author’s own image).

This was the miraculous; very ordinary in many ways but the real deal, or so I believe. We cannot repeat it, because any imitation separates us from the moving spirit. Yet we can also do old things in the new spirit. I dare to call it new. Further, I wonder it is the case that if we have now moved from the active to the receptive attitude, we may live to see a further movement into the reconciling will when we might happily be friends of God.

Appendix 2: Philosophy and Work

THINKING – WORK – DOING

Thinking can be felt as painful or a useless pursuit. The word ‘thinking’ can be thought of in various ways, for example: just what passes through my head; focusing on the future with intent, or reasoning about what is true. There are countless more. An established modality of thinking is in philosophy, usually considered as something detached from action given time to reflect on universal questions under such headings as epistemology

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- how do I know? - ontology - what really is? - and theology - what makes reality real?

Both East and West have traditions of reflecting or meditating on truth, though they may differ markedly. They might be associated, though not identified, with Buddhism on the one hand and Christianity on the other. The point is to think as directly as possible on knowing the truth. Thus, for example, we find Descartes exercising doubt in a way that the three modes of epistemology, ontology and theology are combined. Eastern meditation might come to the 'emptiness'.

Putting aside the extremes of philosophy, the very same questions concern us all. But we say, 'if we can stop to question'. We have to draw back from life, try to see the wood for the trees and ask questions of ourselves. However intermittently, weakly, confusedly we all have a search for truth, the question of what is real. Intensive and sustained effort in this direction can go very far. Shivapuri Baba says that if we persist in asking, 'what is the meaning of life?' we will come to see God. A physicist like Dirac can discover antimatter without leaving his room.

But, for the most part, especially about questions which deeply disturb us such as who or what we are, we come to an impasse. The sense is that we have to do more than merely think to really know. There are abstract things that can be surely known, such as in the proofs of mathematics which provide certainty in their own terms. But not such things as who or what am I?

In the story of Hamolinadar recounted in Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales*,⁹⁷ this philosopher of ancient Babylon pursues the question of whether man has a soul to the point of despair. He abandons reason - the reason he has been using - because it gets him nothing substantial. In *Beelzebub's* story, he then flees into the countryside to 'grow maize', interpreted by Bennett as 'work on himself'. We do not know how he then fares.

The recognition of thinking, say, being inadequate is built into Gurdjieff's remarkable explanation of understanding as a fusion and harmonisation of three kinds of intentionality (a word deliberately chosen over the old term 'centre') associated with thinking, feeling and acting. In Bennett's descriptions thinking can follow or obey the will to see, feeling

⁹⁷ Gurdjieff, *Beelzebub's Tales* to his Grandson.

the will to be, and acting the will to do. These three modalities of will have to be realised in practice. We are not considering how this is done because it is a direct matter. When the will to see is exhausted in thinking the will to be can come into play but the goal is for them to come together eventually.

We identify this transition with beginning to 'work on oneself'. Work on oneself concerns being and, pragmatically, is centred in the feelings. In crude terms, we take our ideas 'personally', enter a realm where what is real is what is actually coming to be in us, in our flesh and blood so to say, our bodily presence.

We could picture this in terms of making experiments in ourselves. Something like experiment is needed to enable us to pass from the realm of possibilities, beliefs and abstractions to the real. To understand, what I am, my being, must change.

Most people project their thinking outside of themselves so that they themselves do not have face changing who or what they are. These projections create a world of delusion. We need to bring it all 'home to roost' 'as it were: here and now in the present moment. Going into the present moment with purpose is to work on oneself. I test my beliefs in my very existence. This is a kind of intentional existentialism.

However deep work on oneself goes it is not the end. It appears that some people find their inner work empties, falls vacant. Maybe Bennett went through this in the 1950s when all his efforts seem to come to nothing. Perhaps this is the 'dark night of the soul' as described by St John of the Cross.

We come to what Gurdjieff described as the supreme goal of the human individual, which is *to do*. One way of looking at this is to say that, 'Well now I am sorted out, this is the time to get on with the job'. What is the job? - it is what is needed to be done. Who decides what is needed? If we call it God, it is to say nothing but still something. Working on oneself is then a distraction, just as dwelling on one's own virtues distracts from love of God.

Many people recognise how authentic acts do not involve thinking but appear spontaneous without planning or analysis. We want to make the further step of saying that they do not require consciousness of self, as work on oneself demands. In the third realm of doing, consciousness can be understood almost as an aberration, a glitch. It is an almost inexplicable realisation, almost impossible to articulate. 'Doing the will of God' is a

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wrong form of expression: it is that what we call God does us in the doing.