

February 1960

READING 2

ALL GROUPS

PART 1

Before we go on, there are two misconceptions to be corrected. It's my fault; I didn't make myself clear.

The first is about Question 1(1/60). 'What is it people chiefly need in the world today? The answer is *'Know Thyself'*. But there are dozens of wrong ways in which these two words can be taken.

One 'wrong way' can be illustrated by some remarks at the St. John's Wood Group on January 28th:

'How does one know when one knows oneself?'

'It's when I know that I'm doing only what is necessary.'

'If I've made an effort and succeeded in stopping thoughts something can happen. The level of Being is higher when I'm aware.'

'Are you happier?'

'Yes – because I know what's happening – there's a little more light.'

'What does Dr. R. want?'

Quite frankly not just that! Though each statement was perfectly correct, the tremendous importance contained in the words 'Know Thyself' has vanished!

The serpent in Eden did better – he said to Eve: 'God doth know that in the day ye eat (of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge) ye shall become as Gods, knowing good and evil.'

I mean that to 'Know oneself' in its full sense would be like reaching the summit of Mount Everest, and to get there one would have to learn by first climbing a lot of smaller peaks.

To change the metaphor – one's consciousness has to extend to a series of mirrors. The first is that which reflects all the inner world of the body; the second is that one which reflects both the inner and the outer world at the same time; and the third is that which registers that it is *I myself* that am creating these imperfect reflections and that I am capable, through effort, of going much further so that I can know the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth.

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The second misconception is in relation to Questions 6 to 9. I learn that many of you have been worrying that some change of plan is envisaged whereby an idea of the System is to be dressed up and given to the outside world to help the progress of thought – thus violating the whole idea of School.

Categorically it must now be said that this was never the intention. We all agree that the System is a living whole which can only be understood by a few people working on themselves in a School; and a *piece* of the System cannot be isolated and given out for it would be a dead thing. Nor is it our job to try to instruct people who are running round in circles as to how to run faster. What's meant is that people who have based their lives on the System might find a way to

substitute a better interpretation of the facts now available everywhere for some current interpretation which is leading in a wrong and dangerous direction. But though we must judge what is 'better' or 'wrong' by the Principles of the System, yet the 'better interpretation' must be found from the evidence itself without even invoking the System in public. The existence of such a System, the whole idea of Esoteric Schools must, as always, remain hidden from the majority and kept only for the few prepared people who want to develop. It is hoped that the paper on 'Copernicus' will show you how such a thing has been accomplished in the past.

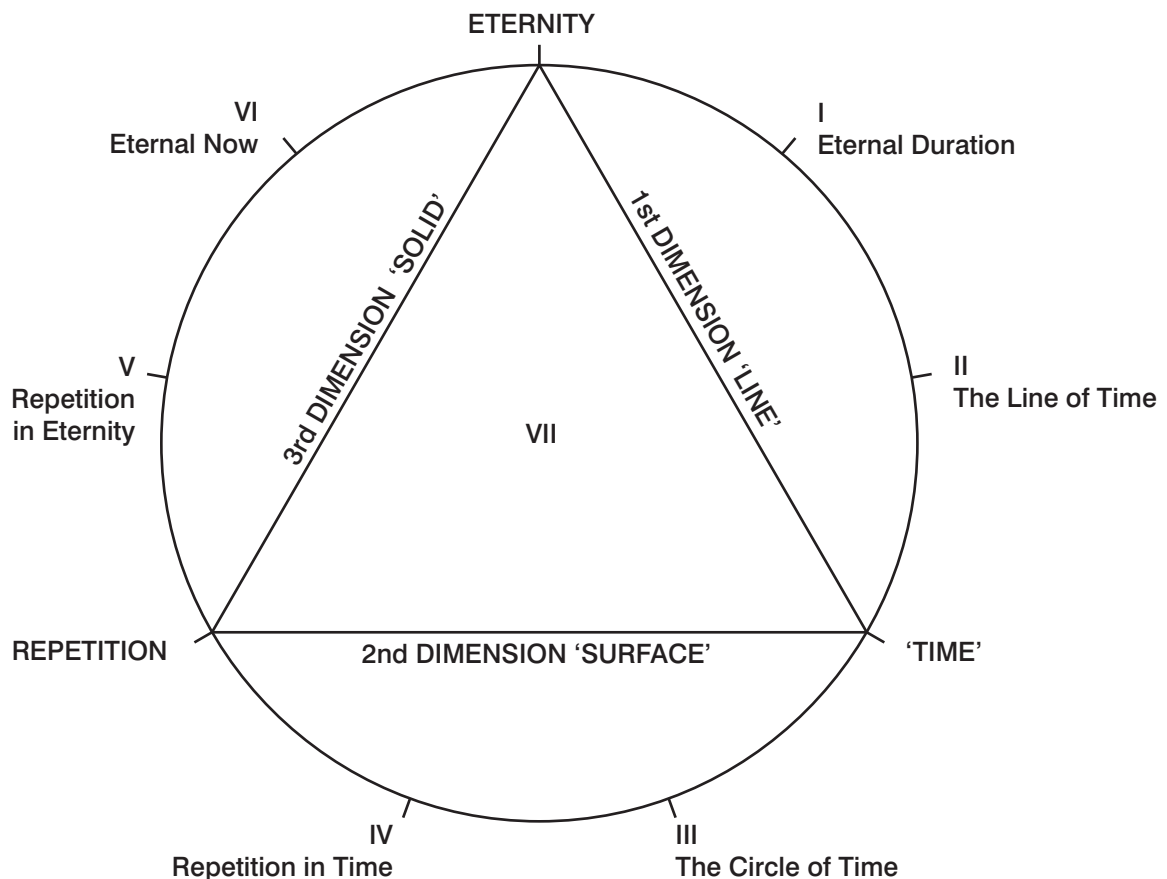
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PART 2

I was surprised on opening my Saturday morning post to find how many letters mentioned the idea of *different Times* as a burning question just now. Perhaps some of you would like to pursue the following line which has been given to all the newer people who are coming now to Colet Gardens because of their interest in the Doctrine of Cosmose and the Seven Principles of the Sankhya.

In receiving a summary of your meetings last week, I was told that 'What seems to be needed now is a simple statement of the principles relating to time and its dimensions.' Appalled at this, I felt that what seems to be needed is a super-mind like that of Pythagoras and Democritus and Kepler and Newton and Einstein and Schrödinger rolled into one! But since it is a principle of this Work that we must be for ever tackling the impossible, let us tackle this!

As always, it is the symbol of the triangle (the law of Three) inscribed in the circle (the law



of Seven) which comes to our aid. Let us take the sides of the triangle as the three Dimensions of Time on the analogy of the three dimensions of space – the line, the surface, the solid. The apices of the triangle will represent the three aspects of time that we can apprehend as we look from our small window at the Universe. Some events we see ‘in Time’, as we say – Passing Time, Change – thus we see ourselves and other people growing old with the passage of Time. But many events we see as Repetition – the recurrence of illnesses and epidemics, the tides and the seasons of the year, the succession of days and years, the motions of the planets in their orbits.

But in comparison with those, there are orders of Being in the Universe which to us appear relatively stable – outside Time and Change and Repetition as we know it. At one end of the scale – the Galaxy, the Sun and the ‘fixed stars’, against which we measure the movements of the planets, and at the other end of the scale, crystals, atoms and atomic nuclei. But we must remember that we never talk in absolutes, for everything is relative to the observer and the scale of space-time is a sliding scale. We must remember also that the words ‘infinity’, ‘eternity’ are not here used in a loose and woolly sense but are capable of precise mathematical definition.

Old text-books on the Calculus usually introduced the subject in words like this:

We can form no conception of a quantity *absolutely* infinite. Nor are the terms ‘great’ and ‘small’ applicable to quantities in themselves, but only in their relation to each other or to a common standard. One quantity is greater than another when it contains the other more than once; it is infinitely great in comparison with the other when innumerable repetitions of the smaller make no practical or measurable difference to the larger. The smaller is, then, infinitesimal in relation to the larger and not only can be neglected but must be neglected if accuracy is to be achieved.

(Elements of the Differential and Integral Calculus, William Smith, 1859)

It is moreover a principle of the calculus that there are different orders of infinity. A *penny* (1/240 of a pound) is infinitesimal in relation to £1,000, but in relation to the National Exchequer it is an infinitesimal of another order. A *second* (1/3600 of an hour) is infinitesimal in relation to a year, but what does one second count in relation to a geological epoch?

Looking again at the diagram, we see that the word ‘Eternity’ is a period of Time big enough to include innumerable units or moments of Time, just as we have used the word ‘Infinity’ to describe a volume that can contain innumerable units of space. We can then fill in the remaining six points on the circumference and keep this diagram for future reference, since it will be of great value in our study of the ‘Seven Principles’.

In gazing at this apparently intricate picture, I would ask you not to be over serious or you will land in a slough of despond. Try to laugh a little at the complicated way in which we have to describe something which is really simplicity itself. So I recommend that you say to yourselves in the words of W. S. Gilbert:

‘Is it weakness of intellect, birdie’, I cried,
‘Or a rather tough worm in your little inside?’

(Pause for discussion)

We would like to conclude this Part this evening by asking you the question which underlies so much confusion in all the pseudo-religions and philosophies which claim to study human life and fate:

How do you distinguish ‘*Repetition in Time*’ from ‘*Repetition in Eternity*’?

(Short pause)

All text-books accept without question that in the philosophy of Pythagoras the chief place was occupied by *number*. But the Greek word ‘arithmos’ did not mean simply *number*, and is best translated by the word *repetition* as you can tell from the following passage from the later *Commentaries* of Simplicius which is about the only authentic account that has come down to us:

The Pythagoreans said that the same things are repeated again and again.

In this connection it is interesting to note the words of Eudemus, Aristotle’s disciple (in the 3rd book of *Physics*). He says: Some people accept and some people deny that time repeats itself. Repetition is understood in different senses. One kind of repetition may be in the natural order of things (*eidos*), like repetition of summers and winters and other seasons, when a new one comes after another has disappeared; to this order of things belong the movements of the heavenly bodies and the phenomena produced by them, such as solstices and equinoxes, which are produced by the movement of the sun.

But if we are to believe the Pythagoreans there is another kind of repetition. That means that I shall talk to you and sit exactly like this and I shall have in my hand the same stick, and everything will be the same as it is now and time, as it can be supposed, will be the same. Because if movements (of heavenly bodies) and many other things are the same, what occurred before and what will occur afterwards are also the same. This applies also to repetition, which is always the same. Everything is the same and therefore time is the same.

(Translated by P. D. Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*, 2nd Edition, p.468)

It is clear that if the word ‘arithmos’ is translated ‘repetition’, this passage describes just what we have been talking about, but if it is translated ‘number’ in the usual way, it makes nonsense.

And if the idea of the repetition of human life is taken as meaning ‘Repetition in Eternity’, it can mean something altogether different from naive theories of Reincarnation which cannot be upheld because they try to describe a human life in terms of repetition in historical time.

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