

13 November 1961

PART 1

Report of conversation on the *Three Humours*, Monday Meeting, 6th November:

Dr. R. Now I want to return to the subject that people have been asking to discuss for some time. They wanted to come back to the *Law of Three Forces* and try to understand the *Six Triads in the Activities of Man*, but from a new angle. We don't want to go through the same old imitation of Mr. Ouspensky using just his examples, and so on. We would like to come at it in a different way, and I have asked Mr. MacOwan to read the first few paragraphs of this week's material with that in mind:

(After the description of the three-fold structure of the *Autonomic System* from 61/52):

Can we – in the light of experience in the last few months – express any definite feeling about the Three Forces in the inner life – in our own inner life? I think we can; but upon what basis can we discuss it? What words can we use?

There is a very definite basis for discussing it from the point of view of Physiology. The nervous system division governing the inner life of man – called the Autonomic – has three very clear divisions according to the three storeys of the house – not centres or anything; we are not dealing with centres. We are dealing with that three-fold division of that part of the nervous system which governs our own inner life – chiefly instinctive and emotional mechanisms and reflexes. Two of these oppose the third, and practically reduce it to impotence in the ordinary way. The Sympathetic division arises from the middle storey and is either damped down completely by the top storey or the nervous impulses and chemicals which are transmitted from the brain itself, or mixed with and spoilt by excitement from the Sacral Autonomic in the lower storey. That is so Dr. Watson? Although the old physiologists have not brought this into practical life – yet it is the basis?

Dr. W. Are they actually opposed – in what sense?

A. In this sense – the nerves of the Sympathetic – whichever action they have on any organ of the body you like to name – that action is opposed by the Autonomic (Parasympathetic).

Dr. W. They don't act at the same time?

A. Yes, all the time they are present and the general state of each organ of the body depends on the balance between the two; in one case there is the alerting mechanism where all the expressions and so on are alerted – the pupils are dilated, the heart beats fast, preparation for 'fight or flight' – all through the organism; and the other case, the blotting out of all this – the inhibition, the general accompaniments of sleep. Between these two extremes we oscillate all the time. Nobody knows scientifically what the real action of the middle storey by itself would be – not damped down or excited – but we in our experience know this situation. Though it is all too uncommon yet, we do know it, and we are knowing it more now than we did two years ago.

Q. Is this connected with the ancient Chinese trick of sticking pins into certain parts of the body?

A. No, it is not. It is more related to *modern* physiological methods of sticking pins into different parts of the body, but we don't have to use pins! I mean, to observe when the fire of activity and excitement arises within us – what we feel the results of this are on our sensations, and on our speech and actions; and conversely, when everything is damped down into a state of sleep or passivity. Then, having seen that we swivel between these two, to try and get examples of some third humour or chemical or activity which is neither activity nor depression; and encourage everything that brings this third and different thing, and not to encourage those things which oppose it.

I am speaking rather in the same terms of that quotation we have just had from India and which we can read again. These three humours – which we could call Carbon, Oxygen and Nitrogen on this scale of the human body as a whole – are called in the Sankhya System the Three Gunas, and their names are Rajas – active, Tamas – the passive or negative, and Sattva – the third element.

If Sattva predominates in the mind, thoughts of God, enquiry into Truth, will manifest. The mind will be one-pointed. The meditative mood will come by itself without any exertion. In spiritual neophytes the Sattvic state of mind will not last for a long time. Rajas and Tamas will try to rush in. You will have to be very careful and vigilant... Just as you squeeze out the toothpaste from the collapsible tube, you will have to squeeze out much Rajas and Tamas from this bodily tube and fill it with Sattva.

Q. Is this the principle of the Second line of work in fact?

A. It would show itself in all three lines, but we want to begin with the first line – mainly in our own personal work – in finding the difference between this third humour and the other two, and encouraging its production in the first line. Work on ourselves first, then that will show itself in work with each other and work for the School quite naturally.

This is the subject of conversation for the first part of this week if you are interested in it. I would like you to think of it not in terms of order of action of the Forces at present, but in relation to the different proportions in the mixture. I have checked this up being very ignorant, but just as the mixture in the carburettor of a car between air and petrol vapour determines the whole performance of the car[†]... so the mixture of the three humours – the proportion of them – determines the performance of man.

The point of view I want you to think of is the *proportion* in the mixture of these three – the exciting, the depressing, and the third – the loving, sympathy. It is a question of a proper balance of the two, because if the two – active and passive – are nearly balanced, then the third can come in. This is an interesting thing, because people who are out on the path of Self-development often think that excess of activity – extremes of posture, etc. ... are required; but it is *balance* that is required – on that analogy.

Q. Could you say something about squeezing out the toothpaste?

[†]The third element was discovered to be temperature.

- A. That is a natural method by which you retreat from both activity and from depression in the direction of this third kind of energy; and if you found a method that could do this would you not be rather pleased? It begins with the natural balance within a man, which is shown in his outer life as the Sattva – this third thing, which accumulates, and exudes from him if he has enough of it.
- Q. Can one have too much of it?
- A. It depends on what you want... I think at the moment of death one wants all one can possibly have. One cannot live like that always; one would like to have moments or days when it was 90% (it will never be 100%, the Three Forces – the Three Humours – are always there), but one would like 90% more often.
- Q. I wondered how much you thought we would be able to have it when we have to carry out ordinary jobs with ordinary people?
- A. That is the restraining factor that we have to live as ordinary people. We do our ordinary work and live our ordinary lives with a nice warm proportion, but for special occasions we need 90%.
- Q. Is it an aspect of transformation of negative emotions into positive?
- A. When the mixture reaches the right proportion, when there is sufficient Sattva present, then transformation – the Second Conscious Shock – becomes possible; and like the first it comes in jerks, but each one more powerful. It is not a single thing once and for all; but as the Sattva accumulates this transformation becomes possible, and then it runs out again; again it accumulates, and more transformation is possible.
- Q. Is not this accumulation of Sattva what the meditation is designed to help us with?
- A. But if we threw it all away the other 23 hours of the day it will not accumulate so well! The meditation will produce it, but we must remember to hang on to it. Talking is one of the chief ways of burning it up, and also running with the throttle full out is another way.

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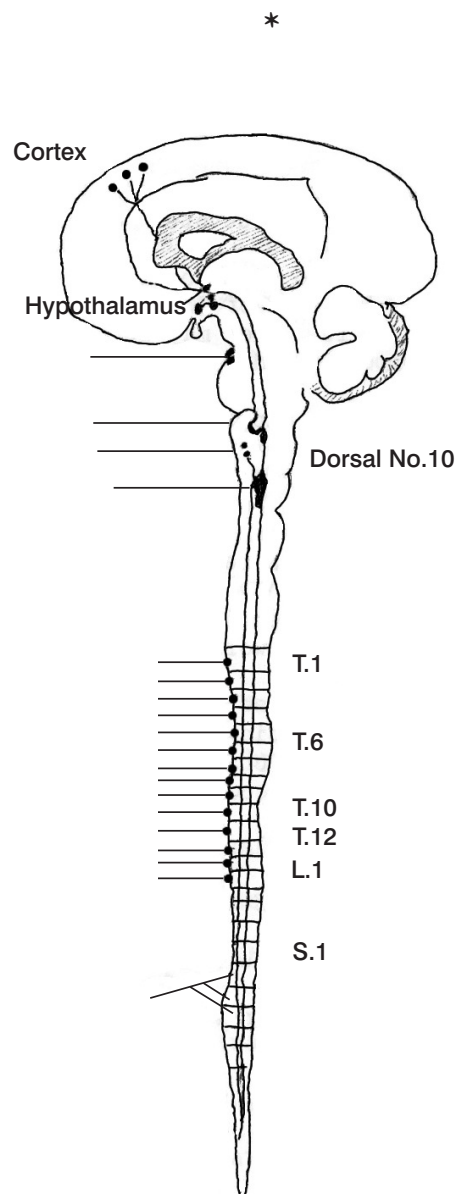
PART 2

For those who can understand the jargon, this is a description with diagram from the recent text-book (*Foundations of Neuropsychiatry* by Stanley Cobb, Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore, 1958). The picture shows clearly the three divisions – the Cranial and Sacral Parasympathetic opposing the Sympathetic in the middle storey, the one depressing, the other exciting:

From the functional standpoint the autonomic nervous system is entirely motor and has two main divisions: the *parasympathetic* (cranio-sacral) and the *sympathetic* (thoraco-lumbar). These two divisions, generally described as antagonistic, are sending nerve fibres to the same organs but for opposite purposes. For example, the cranial autonomic supplies the iris with constrictor fibres, while stimulation of the sympathetic fibres in the neck dilates the pupil. This idea of mutual antagonism, however, may be overdone and made into too neat a schematisation. Besides the anatomical division into sympathetic and parasympathetic is the chemical division of the autonomic nerves into adrenergic and

cholinergic. Most post-ganglionic sympathetic fibres produce an adrenin-like substance to stimulate their end-organs. Almost all parasympathetic fibres produce acetylcholine. Yet there are some cases where the sympathetic has cholinergic fibres (sweat glands) and the parasympathetic has adrenergic (vagal-accelerators). All preganglionic fibres are cholinergic. The concept of autonomic balance thus becomes one of chemical gradients; the adrenergic branch of the autonomic system may predominate over the cholinergic, or vice versa. Keeping this balance near the mean is the function of homeostasis. The adrenergic discharges are usually diffuse, influencing the body at large. They appear mostly in emergency situations. The cholinergic discharges act locally on organs or areas of tissue specifically stimulated.

The figure shows diagrammatically the origin of the main autonomic nerves and their distribution.



The Autonomic Nervous System (Diagrammatic Simplification)

— Central and
Preganglionic fibres

PART 3

The three humours of the internal life of man which underlie his physical and psychological life are very like the three elements which underlie changes in the weather. Two of these – temperature and humidity – we appreciate directly through our sense organs. The third – pressure – we vaguely feel but it has to be measured precisely by a barometer. Yet its fluctuations determine the changes in the other two.

It is valuable to realise that all our ordinary psychology is just ‘weather’ and completely transitory. But why believe in it? Anyone who has flown knows well the moving experience of starting up in the rain, and then at 15,000 or 20,000 feet rising above the cloud ceiling to the blue vault of heaven and the sun. All up there is unchangingly bright, but looking down through a rift in the clouds you see the country and its cities in rain and shadow. Through the mind and emotion we can rise above the weather set up by the three humours.

These considerations will give the following talk by the Shankaracharya on 29th October added significance for us:

A real devotee is one whose mind is not attached to worldly things but is wholly devoted to God..

There are those who drink of the world and those who drink of God. The drinkers of God may be in the world but they are not impressed by it. They may be abused and beaten but their thoughts will be on God, and they will not feel pain.

Pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow – these are all due to our imagination. None of these really exist. The Hindu words for pleasure and pain – Sukha and Dukha – for example. Syllables *su* and *du* have no meaning, but the syllable *kha* means Sky, or Heaven. Sky is never changing. When it rains, sky remains as sky; and when the sun shines, sky remains as sky.

So we, too, should remain unchanging and blissful in the changing circumstances of worldly life..

Man fears death because he has never known death. How can he know it when he is Everlasting and never dies? When we say a man dies, it means he has only changed his outer form, his body, as we replace a garment when it becomes torn.

The way up, the aeroplane, is the love of Heaven, of unchanging Truth and Light. The substance of this Love is the Nitrogen – Sattva. We store it up, treasure it. When the mixture of the three becomes right with Sattva predominating, we are airborne.

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