

17 September 1962

**PART 1**

You belong to an organisation created on the lines of a *School* of a special kind as clearly defined by the man who started it all – the Russian Philosopher, P. D. Ouspensky. In order to continue this School in the right direction, we must get as much understanding as we can of its principles and its aim.

To do that we must be in tune with the Mind of its creator and ask ourselves: What were his chief ideas, his chief contribution to Knowledge? Undoubtedly the idea of Eternal recurrence (containing a new understanding of Time) was the principal theme of his life. When finally he had met with the special System of Knowledge, the idea of Eternal Recurrence became linked with its teaching about the two Cosmic Laws (the Law of Octaves and the Law of Three Forces), particularly in relation to human life and its activities.

Though many of us for years have studied these things theoretically, the time is ripe for a more practical approach, and this we shall be studying till Christmas. We can well start by quoting from the chapter on Eternal Recurrence in his book *A New Model of the Universe* and ask ourselves questions about the implications of this very startling point of view.

Understanding of Eternal Recurrence depends on the recognition of the existence of ‘*a line which passes through every moment of time, the line of the infinite existence of a moment.*’

Quotation: *New Model* (2nd & 3rd editions) p. 473:

But how is this line formed, where does it come from and what follows out of it? This can be understood to a certain extent if life is taken as a series of undulatory vibrations.

As we should know from the study of undulatory vibrations in the world of physical phenomena, every wave comprises in itself a complete circle, that is, the matter of the wave moves in a completed curve in the same place and for as long as the force acts which creates the wave.

We should know also that every wave consists of smaller waves and is in its turn a component part of a bigger wave.

If we take, simply for the sake of argument, *days* as the smaller waves which form the bigger waves of *years*, then the waves of years will form one great wave of *life*. And so long as this wave of life rolls on, the waves of days and the waves of years must rotate at their appointed places, repeating and repeating themselves. Thus the line of the fourth



Figure 1

dimension, the line of life or *time*, consists of wheels of ever-repeating *days*, of small circles of the fifth dimension, just as a ray of light consists of quanta of light, each rotating in its place so long as the primary shock which sends forth the particular ray persists. But in itself a *ray* may be a curve, a component part of some other bigger wave. The same applies to the line of life. If we take it as one great wave consisting of the waves of days and years, we shall have to admit that the line of life moves in a curve and makes

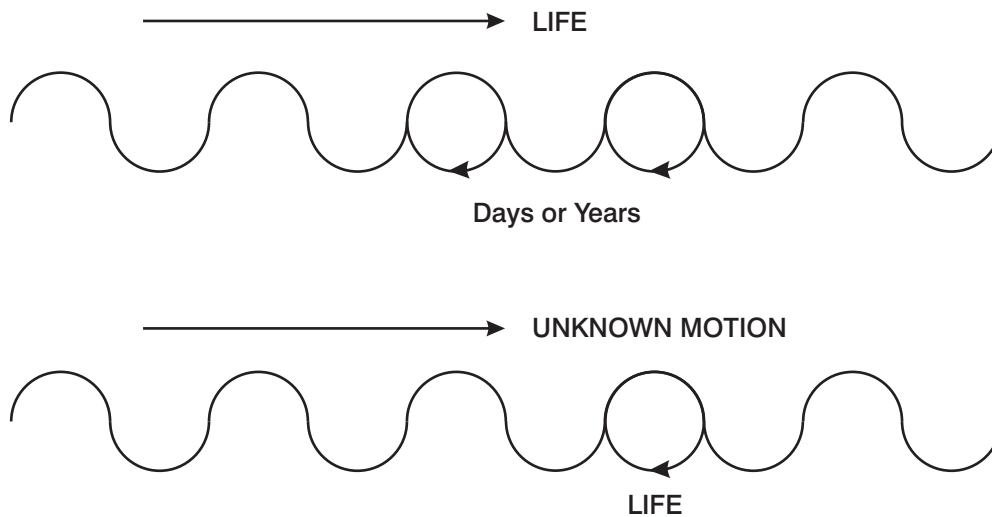


Figure 2

a complete revolution, coming back to the point of its departure. And if a day or a year is a wave in the undulatory movement of our life, then our whole life is a wave in some other undulatory movement of which we know nothing.

As I have already pointed out, in our ordinary conception life appears as a straight line drawn between the moments of birth and death.

But if we imagine that life is a wave, we shall get this figure:

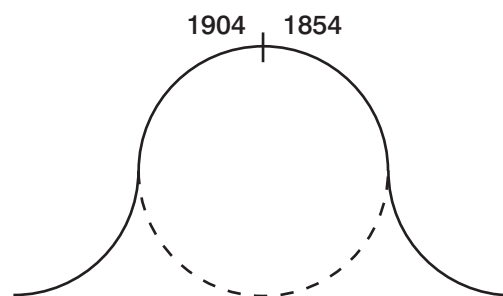


Figure 3

The point of death coincides with the point of birth.

#### COMMENT

The Circle of life can be subdivided into any units you like – about eighty years, or about 30,000 days, or an infinite number of moments 'Now'. Lines passing through any moment *Now*, are radii connecting any point on the circumference with the centre of the circle. We have taken a step towards answering the question at the beginning of the quotation about the 'line of the infinite existence of a moment'.

Now let us ask ourselves some further questions:

Can we form any conception from our experience of the ever-repeating days in the line of our lives like quanta in a ray of light?

What are some of the implications that follow from the fact of the continued existence of a moment?

Is it possible to think of one's life as a circle or wave – a moment in some larger wave?

Can we really relate human lives to the time of the earth as our clocks and calendars attempt to do?

How is an identical relation between the births of different people preserved when we know that the relation between their deaths is quite different?

This last question can lead on to the realisation that there is something else wrong about our usual idea of Time. To quote again:

For us, time can have different duration but it always has the same speed. But where are proofs of this? Why not suppose that time in certain limits (for instance in relation to human life) always has the same duration but *different speed*? One is not more arbitrary than the other, but with the admission of this possibility the question disappears.

#### EXAMPLE

Take the astonishing production of certain creative artists like Mozart. We think of him as being born of January 17th 1756 and dying on December 5th 1791 at the age of 35 – that is, with only half an average life-time of three score years and ten. At the age of 6 he is touring Europe as a pianist (an infant prodigy who has already composed 5 Minuets); and by his death he has 626 major compositions including vocal music (Masses, Cantatas, religious and secular), a dozen Operas, and also orchestral music (including 49 Symphonies and about that number of Concertos), and much chamber music. From the *content* of his life you would suppose it to have the usual duration but to be run at twice the speed. And his correspondence, in fact, reveals that he is composing during the night and writing down his compositions by day!

Why should so many great artists have been thought to die young and yet reveal astonishing maturity in their work?

We have to admit however that there are many different possibilities in human lives. Some nonagenarians live very slowly like a slow-motion film and nothing much happens; while others, like Sir Winston, have lives which are long and very full at certain periods (during World War II, he seemed to live at 2 or 3 times the usual speed!). Then there are many whose lives are broken – not complete; children dying in infancy, either learning to live or dropping out of life; all these different possibilities we ignore.

Final question: If we were to realise that our lives repeat like gramophone records which can be played again and again, what profit could we gain from this realisation?

#### PART 2. DIFFERENT TYPES OF REPETITION

So far we have only related human life to the special case of a circle, that is, of absolute repetition without the slightest change. But that, as Ouspensky points out, only applies to one or two classes of people.

He writes (p. 480):

In this connection it must be recognised that as regards the character of the repetition of their lives people fall into several types or categories.

There are people of absolute repetition, in whose case everything, both big and little, is transmitted from one life to another.

There are people whose lives have each time the same beginning, but go on with slight variations, upwards or downwards, coming to approximately the same end.

There are people in whose case lives go with a definitely ascending tendency, becoming richer and stronger *outwardly*.

There are people whose lives, on the contrary, display a clearly marked descending line, which gradually destroys all that is alive in them and reduces them to nothing.

And there are people whose life contains an *inner* ascending line, which gradually leads them out of the circle of eternal repetition and causes them to pass to another plane of being.

Let us first examine the type of lives in which absolute repetition is inevitable.

These are, first of all, people of deeply-rooted, petrified, routine life. Their lives succeed one another with the monotony of the hand of the clock moving on the dial. There can be in their lives nothing unexpected, nothing accidental, no adventures. They are born and die in the same house where their fathers and grandfathers were born and died and where their children and grandchildren will be born and will die. National calamities, wars, earthquakes, plagues, sometimes wipe thousands and hundreds of thousands of them from the face of the earth at one stroke. But apart from such events their whole life is strictly ordered and organised on a plan. Let us imagine a merchant in an old Eastern town living in the fixed conditions of the established routine life which has gone on unchanged for whole centuries. He sells carpets in the same shop where his father and grandfather, and probably his great-grandfather, sold carpets. His whole life from birth to death can be seen as on a map. In a certain year he takes a wife, in a certain year he puts his eldest son in the shop, in a certain year he wins a lawsuit against his neighbour, always using the same obvious method, and always in the same year, day and hour he dies, always of the same cause – of having eaten too much pilaff.

There can be no new events in the lives of such people. But it is just this absoluteness of repetition that creates in them some vague consciousness of the inevitability of everything that happens, a belief in fate, fatalism and, at times, a strange sort of wisdom and calmness, in some cases passing into a kind of ironical contempt for people who are restless, seeking for something, striving after something.

To another type of people of the same category of exact repetition belong historical personages: people whose lives are linked with the great cycles of life, that is to say, with the life of peoples, states, countries – great conquerors, reformers, leaders of the masses, revolutionaries, kings who build up empires, kings who destroy great empires, their own or their enemies', all these belong to this category. There can be no change in the lives of these people either. Every word they pronounce affects the destiny of nations. And they must know their parts perfectly. They can add nothing of their own, they can omit nothing nor change the meaning of what they have to say.

This type is especially clear if we take weak historical personages, those men whom history puts forward as though intentionally responsible for parts when empires or whole cultures are to be destroyed, such people, for instance, as Louis XVI or Nicholas II.

They do nothing, and they do not want to do anything, they only wish to be left in peace, and yet each movement, each gesture, each word of theirs, even words that seem to be uttered by mistake, such as the famous 'senseless dreams'<sup>†</sup> have significance and either

---

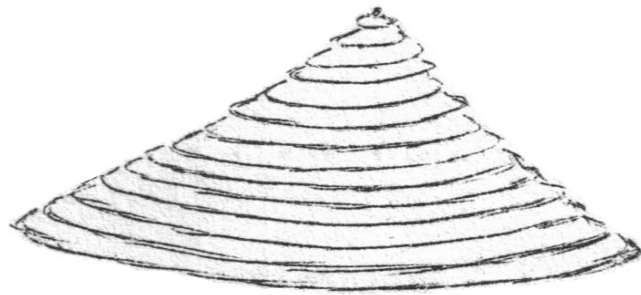
<sup>†</sup> The words of the Emperor Nicholas II which were used by mistake when receiving representatives of the 'zemstvos' and towns in 1895.

begin or end a historical period; and all of them, without exception, lead to the ultimate catastrophe. Not a single word can be left out, and even mistakes must be repeated.

‘Strong personages’ – Napoleons, Caesars, Genghis Khans – are in no way different from weak personages. They are pieces on the same board, and equally they cannot do anything themselves, cannot say one word of themselves, cannot either add anything to or subtract anything from what they *must* say or do.

In the case also of people who constitute the crowd on the world’s stage repetition is inevitable. The crowd must know its role very well at any particular moment. No expression of popular feeling during patriotic manifestations or armed revolutions and insurrections, during coronations or revolutions, would be possible if the crowd could be ignorant of its role or forget its role. And this knowledge is possible only through constant repetition of the same thing.

Change is only possible if you introduce another dimension – a third co-ordinate by raising the centre of the circle so that repetition forms a slow spiral whether downwards or upwards:



Discussion

### PART 3. REGENERATION

Reference was made in Part 2 to people who sound rather like us – ‘people who are restless, seeking for something, striving after something’. What are the possibilities here? Such an upward process cannot be the same thing as ‘evolution’ in its commonly accepted sense, namely the multiplication of forms from a prototype to variation in genera, families and species. It is more akin to that other phenomenon in Nature – metamorphosis or complete transformation, often by a succession of stages. This change in human lives – which corresponds to what the System calls ‘Change of level of Being’ – is perhaps best described by the word ‘Regeneration’, which will be discussed during the coming weeks. For such people Schools exist, Schools similar to the one created for us.

\* \* \*

