

31 May 1965

READING 4

THE LINE OF LIFE

It has been pointed out again and again that the reason we get into such difficulties when we come to questions that really matter, is the very naive framework of our thinking. Find a new frame of thinking, and these important questions will answer themselves. Let us try this one:

The life-line of each of us is compounded of two different motions. The *first* is a motion along radii inwards toward the centre of our Being and outwards away from it. It is a movement of expansion and contraction of our consciousness.

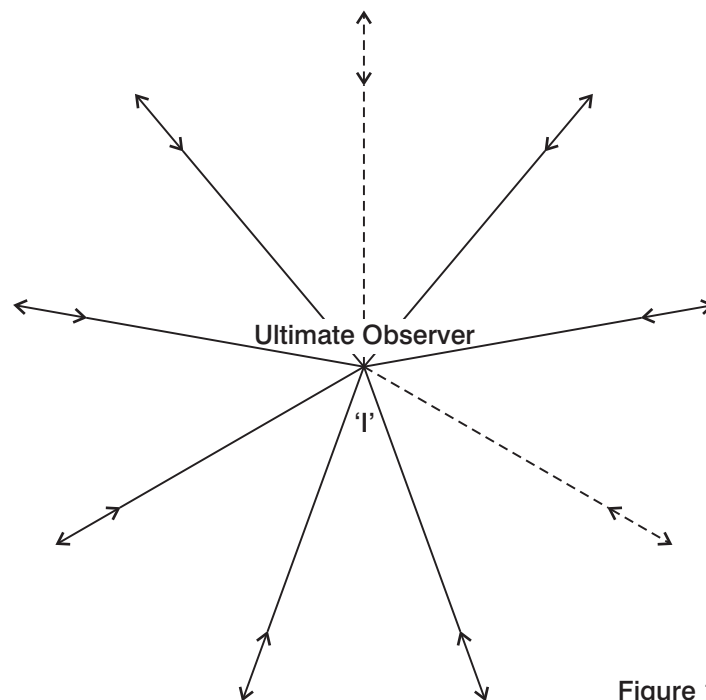


Figure 1

This kind of motion was well described in the *Philokalia* by Avva Dorotheus (7th cent. AD) quoted in *Tertium Organum* (Reprint):

Imagine a circle, in the middle its centre, and radii or rays going out of this centre. The further these radii travel from the centre, the more divergent and distant they become from one another; and the other way round, the closer they are to the centre, the nearer they approach one another. Imagine now that this circle is the world, the very middle of it, God, and the radii going out from the centre, or going towards the centre are the lives of different men. And here also, the further the saints penetrate inside the circle towards the middle of it, desiring to approach God, the closer, according to the depth of this penetration, they come to God and to each other... Understand similarly about going out from the centre – the more they withdraw from God... the more, in the same measure they withdraw from one another, and as much as they withdraw from one another, so much they withdraw from God. Such also is the property of love: to the extent that we are withdrawn and do not love God, each of us is also far from his neighbour...

If 'God' is within one, the real Self, the ultimate observer of our lives, thoughts and actions, one sees clearly what is missing in the world today; one also sees by contrast how much is possible

in a small Society like ours, based as it is on certain eternal principles. One is also clear about the only thing one can do if one falls out with a friend, namely find a common point of understanding which will bring both parties nearer their common centre.

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It would be easy if this were all, but there is also the *second kind of motion* – the revolution of these radii-rays about the centre. (Figure 2)

There are at least three such circular motions producing profound effects on our lives: *first*, the turning of the earth on its axis, dividing our days into sleeping and waking periods and tying us to our clocks and watches; *secondly*, the revolution of the moon in months or cycles of about 29 days which affects the fluids of our bodies rather as it affects the tides; and *thirdly*, the seasons and years of calendar time as the earth revolves in her orbit round the Sun. (Figure 2)

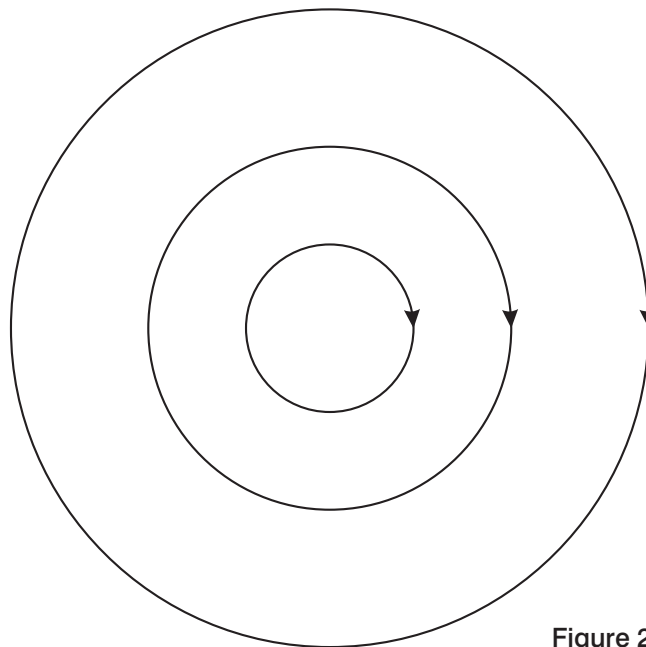


Figure 2

[Our whole Solar System is of course also revolving in one of the arms of our spiral nebula – the Milky Way, while all the galaxies and nebulae are thought at the present time to be receding; but these motions are too big and too slow to have any effect on us, though they probably determine the ages of the earth.]

The resultant of these two kinds of motion gives the curve of a man's life-time. (Figure 3) This picture does not contain any idea of a *general* past, present and future.

This has been expressed mathematically thus:

If the points round the whorls represent the number of vibrations of a sounding body in a given time (i.e. their frequency) then... a point travelling along the curve (in a clockwise direction) will represent a tone continuously falling in pitch, and the curve passing successively across any given radius represents the passage of the tone through successive octaves.

(from *Higher Mathematics*, Mellor, 1939, p.117)

You can see that the time of the earth moves on in days and nights, seasons and years; decades, centuries and millennia (historical time) and millions of years (geological time); but each of our lives occupies a very small segment of historical time. We see how inescapable are Mr. Ouspensky's words:

Man is his life. His life is his time. The way of measuring time, *for all*, by means of such phenomena as the apparent or real movement of the sun or the moon, is comprehensible as being convenient for practical purposes. But it is generally forgotten that this is only a formal time accepted by common agreement. Absolute time for a man is his life... If I die today, tomorrow will not exist *for me*... Death is really only a return to the beginning...

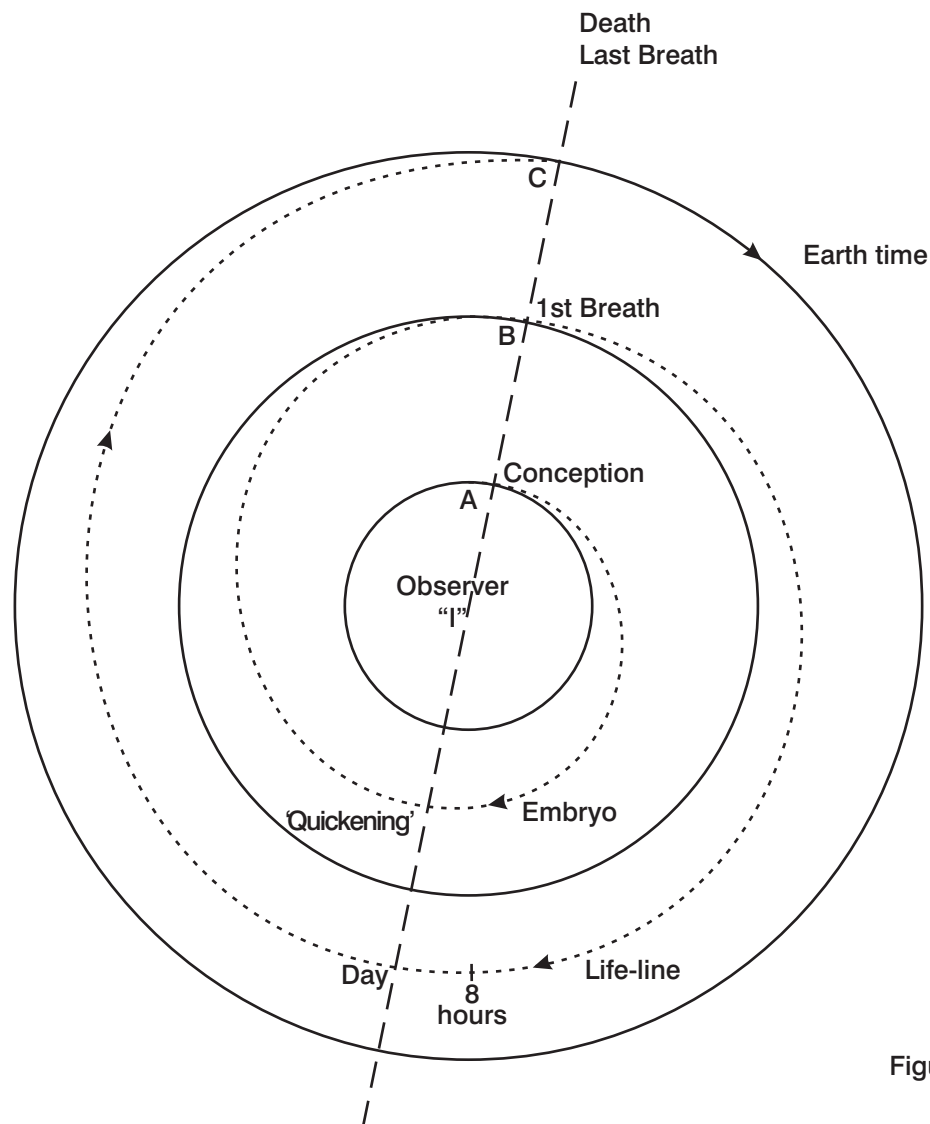


Figure 3

When the time comes... it will be as though all his clocks were put back (from C to A, Figure 3) and from this moment started again with their usual movement.

(*A New Model of the Universe*, 2nd Edition, pp. 476–7)

Let us now try to answer the fundamental question, ‘Whom am I?’ He must be some constant *observer* of all my inner nature and all my outer actions. But there could be only one *constant* observer; just as there is only one Commander-in-chief who ‘sees’ the whole campaign, although there may be many different army units and many different individual signallers. What is most important is that there should be good liaison between them and the Commander-in-chief (i.e. in Consciousness).

As to the nature of that observer, J. W. Dunne in his book *An Experiment with Time* (2nd Edition, Black, 1929) – though starting from very different premises and following a far more complicated argument – arrived at this same conclusion (p.205):

We may sum up, therefore, by saying that this superlative general observer is the fount of all that consciousness, intention, and intervention which underlies mere mechanical thinking; and that he, in his intersections with the cerebral substrata, is incarnate in all mundane conscious life-forms, in every dimension of Time; and that he

must – owing to the unity of the network thus formed in himself and the ability of his attention to range over that network's full extent – contain in himself a distinct *personification* of all connected conscious life.

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CONCLUSION

One very topical conclusion is, I think, worth drawing from all this. The *two movements that make up the curve of life are equally important*. The retreat from life (say along a radius toward the centre) *alone* is fraught with great danger and is, moreover, selfish and useless. It is 'escapism' and is at the basis of the condition known as schizophrenia and also of the present wave of drug taking.

In a talk by Bruce Kenrick called 'Drugs as Escapism' (*Listener*, May 27, 1965) he replies to a recent article by Alexander Trocchi (himself a taker of heroin and marijuana) who was advocating these drugs 'as one door on to that other face of reality left behind by Western Civilization', Kenrick said:

I must confess I feel that Trocchi's views have a great deal in common with the caricatures of the old-time evangelist calling on people... to turn away from the world and to do no more than become preoccupied with what goes on in their private souls... Trocchi is surely right in claiming that material progress leads only to material progress. But is it not also true that the exploration of inner space leads only to the exploration of inner space? And undoubtedly what brings significance into the life of an individual... is that – while discovering more of his own inner world – he should at the same time break out of that world into the larger world of Society in order to help re-fashion Society, to do something about the needs of other men.

Which brings us directly to 'meditation' as a means of expanding the work of our small Society in the world, as part of the great work of building a bridge between the Inner and outer circles.

The Shankaracharya divides the day into three periods of eight hours (Figure 3) – eight hours of activity governed by Rajas; eight hours of rest and sleep governed by Tamas; and the remaining eight hours which should be governed by Sattva, devoted to Sattva. This should lead both to Spiritual growth and success in life.

In the eight hours of work we are running round the curve keeping pace with external conditions; in the eight hours of rest we withdraw from the circular movement altogether and sleep outside of 'time'; our direction during the eight hours of Sattva is inwards to the Source of our Being along radii at each moment 'Now'.

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