

18 November 1974

READING 4

PART 1. INTRODUCTION

I don't think that we, in this Society, can get much further in answering our questions about 'normal psychology' unless we learn more about the plan on which a human being is constructed. We are told that we should get on quicker if we discipline ourselves to some extent. Yet, how can you 'discipline' your car, or the lighting and heating systems of your house, without knowing a little bit about how they are supposed to work? How little we know about the human machine, and yet it is much more complicated than any machine man himself has invented.

Such a plan was elaborated by Mr. Ouspensky in London between 1934 and 1940 in his 'Psychological Lectures', which were privately printed in this house at the beginning of World War II. But Mr. Ouspensky would be the first to agree that his terminology must be updated, and then it would at least come into line with one of the schools of neurology current today.

Where he talked about centres and parts of centres, we speak of functions and levels of function. Because it is better to regard each major function like thinking, feeling or moving, as a self-governing circuit involving the whole nervous system and capable of operating on very different levels. Let us re-state the essence of Mr. Ouspensky's teaching on this theme:

Each major function is divided into three parts which are related to the definition of the functions themselves. The first is 'mechanical', including instinctive and moving mechanisms governed by the spinal cord; the second is 'emotional' governed by the autonomic; and the third is 'voluntary and rational' governed by the forebrain.

Each of these levels is, in its turn, subdivided into three parts – mechanical, emotional and voluntary. The division of all the functions into three parts is very simple: A mechanical part works almost automatically; *it doesn't require any attention*. But, because of this, it cannot adapt itself to a change of circumstances; it cannot *learn*, and it continues to work in the way it started when circumstances have completely changed...

This is the chief criterion in studying the levels of any function. Without attention or with attention wandering, we are in the mechanical part; with the attention aroused and attracted to its object, we are in the emotional part; with the attention awakened, controlled and held on the subject by Will, we are in the voluntary part. At the same time, this method shows how to make the voluntary parts of the functions work. By observing attention and trying to control it, we compel ourselves to work in the voluntary parts...

The diagram, (overleaf) based on our Symbol of the 'circle of nine points', shows the components of complex functions in relation to the nervous system as a whole.

Although there could be several concentric circles representing different levels of the functions, we only show here an outer and an inner; the *outer* being the ordinary interaction of body and mind which is all most people know at first hand, while the *inner* represents the 'inner organ' or Soul, where all the functions are united into One under one Consciousness at the Centre.

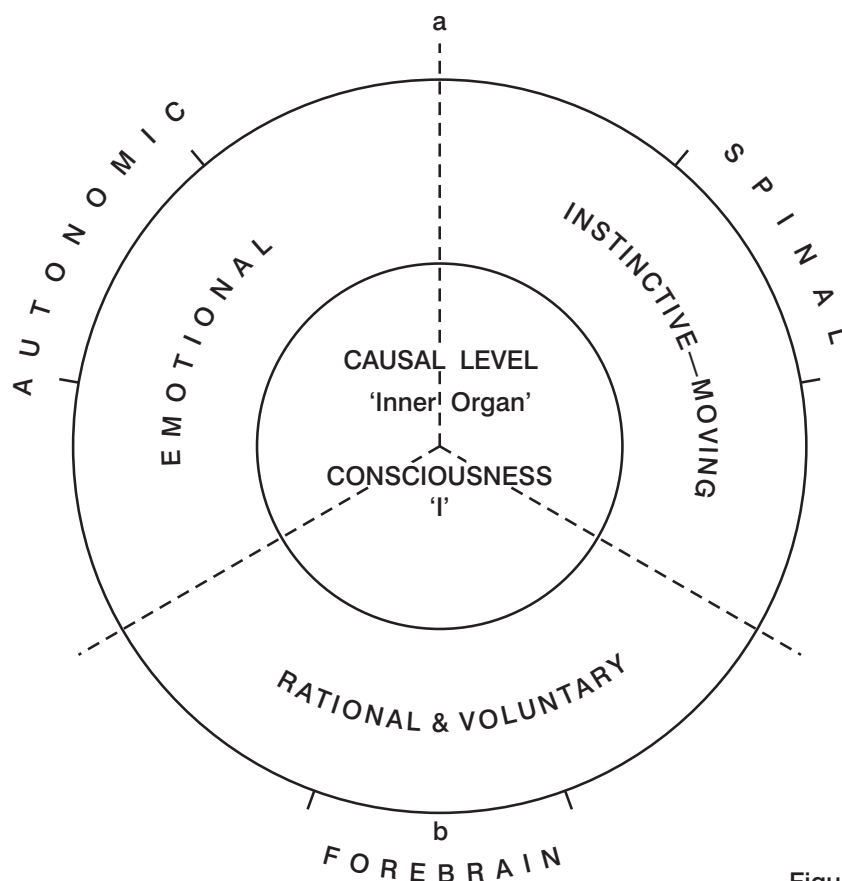


Figure 1

PART 2

We cannot elaborate here all the mechanical limitations of all the different functions, many of which you can observe in yourself and other people or read about in the daily papers. But when (rarely) the emotional part of any major function is fully aroused, it wakes up others as well, and there is a lovely feeling of liberation from those ordinary limitations which made Hamlet exclaim: 'How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world.'

Very briefly, we can sum up this state of arousal by saying that, intellectually, you get a feeling of discovery, wonder, of fresh insight into your subject; emotionally you can enjoy new and fuller feelings, or be guided by the arousal of conscience; and in the instinctive-moving realm you find yourself suddenly using new skills and inventive powers which you didn't know you possessed.

But perhaps the most striking contrast of all between those three levels, is to be experienced in the sex function – for the love between the sexes is so rarely enjoyed on all three levels.

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PART 3

Two descriptions of the Emotional function

It is usually forgotten to what extent the flow of energy in any organ of the body is determined by the fine nerves from the autonomic (which completely control its blood supply), and how much these bodily changes affect our psychology and are in turn dominated by it. Though the theories of James and Lange were elaborated on that basis long before the era of modern knowledge, and are considered faulty today, some of their observations suggest to us new lines of research.

Here is a translation of a small piece of description from the Lange monograph in 1885:

Joy: in popular language constitutes the opposite of sorrow, and an examination of its physiological manifestations agrees with this direct conception... In the case of joy, a heightening of the functioning of the voluntary motor apparatus takes place, together with a dilation of the arterioles and capillaries in the muscles... The heightened function of the voluntary muscles causes the feeling of lightness, of joy... He feels an increased motor impulse and moves alertly. Children jump, dance, clap their hands for joy... The general dilation of the capillaries in joy results very strikingly in an increased flow of blood to the skin. A child's or a young girl's skin, white and transparent, reddens and glows with pleasure. The joyous person feels warm...

Increased glandular secretion also is observed; it is a common expression of satisfaction to say 'the mouth waters' and 'tears come easily'.

Whereas the woebegone person with his slow movements, his bent figure, his shrunken features, assumes the appearance of an old man; contrariwise the joyous man appears youthful because of his swift and powerful movements, his singing and loud-speaking – 'joy rejuvenates'...

The part which the brain plays in the increased flow of the blood, as probably all parts of the body share it in a joyful mood, confirms our supposition that mental functions take place rapidly; there is a flow of ideas and fancies. A joyous person talks rapidly and fluently; his work proceeds swiftly, not only because his muscles are strong, but because he reaches decisions quickly and puts them into prompt execution...

(C. G. Lange, 1885;
translated in *The Emotions*, ed. K. Dunlop, Williams & Wilkins, 1922)

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So it is evidently very advantageous to be happy rather than sad – even though we may not skip around and sing!

But now comes the strange thing; Lange claimed to be speaking only of what he called the 'coarser emotions', i.e., those with evident bodily changes, and yet in the following quotation from St. Thomas à Kempis (c.1400), he is describing what is clearly a Spiritual emotion, yet in very physical terms:

Love knows no measure, but is fervent above measure. Love feels no burden, disdains no labours, would willingly do more than it can; complains not of impossibility because it conceives that it may and can do all things. It is able therefore to do anything, and it performs and effects many things where he that loveth not faints and lies down.

Love watches and sleeping slumbers not; when weary is not tired; when straitened is not constrained; when frightened is not disturbed; but like a lively flame and a torch all on fire it mounts upwards and securely passes through all opposition.

Whosoever loveth knoweth the sound of that Voice.

(*Imitation of Christ*, Chapter 5)

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What do you infer from these descriptions? They give rise to several questions:

Was William James right when he said it was impossible to picture a totally disembodied emotion? Has the meditation, when it becomes emotional, any bodily repercussions? What is the relation between the physical and subtle levels; which comes first? Does the hen lay the egg, or does the egg produce the hen, or is it a chain reaction: hen → egg → hen → ?

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