

Enneagram. Questions

We meet the enneagram, the universal symbol, in the System and in Advaita in a number of examples: cosmoeses, the ray of creation, the food table, levels of being and the ladder of self-realisation. Ouspensky tried out other examples: the days of the week, the planets. Dr Roles worked out still others: the atomic table, development of animals. The enneagram has been used for personality assessments. There are obvious applications to planning and project management.

Nearly all of these examples show a hierarchy, some with transitions in an ascending order (food table, from coarse to fine), others in a descending order (ray of creation, from fine to coarse). Most of them have an explicit or implicit time sequence. Many of them are cyclical. Is there a limited number of categories?

Apart from being a useful map of the whole of creation, the ideas of the enneagram could be helpful in understanding one's personal situation. After all, we live each day and each year, we plan things, we work, we make efforts to wake up. If we saw these processes as a whole, and always in relation to a permanent centre, it might help to release us from a state of ignorance and bondage.

Rather than bring examples to the enneagram, is it worth trying to bring the ideas of the enneagram to one's life?

How would one do this? How might it help?

(Discussion)

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Dr Roles wrote in 1969:

Mr. Ouspensky pointed out (in his third Psychological Lecture) that man, being unable to distinguish between the imaginary and the real in himself, has come to believe "in the possibility of a simultaneous and mechanical development of all human features" -

"Think for a moment", he said, "of a caterpillar imagining itself a butterfly, or of an egg imagining itself a bird, or of an acorn imagining itself an oak. The result of these imagining will be a big caterpillar, a big egg, and a big acorn - and this would be an approximately true picture of a human being imagining his next phase.

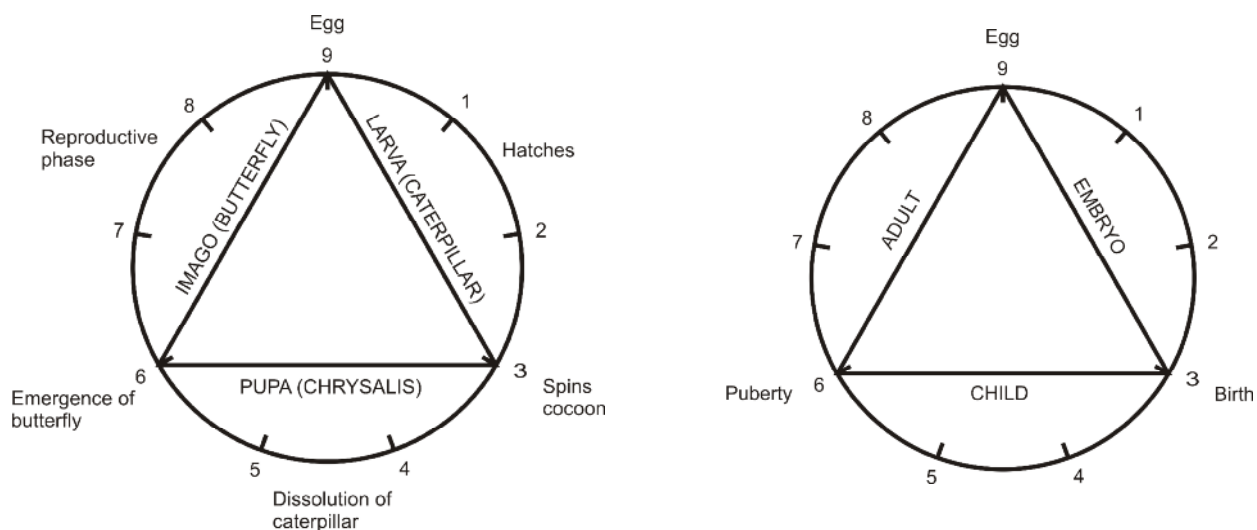
I say approximately true, because a caterpillar, an egg and an acorn are comparatively passive beings ... while man can speak, he can write books, he can invent social theories, he can start wars, and all this on the basis of lying to himself and to others."

Lying was defined as "speaking about what you don't know as if you knew and could know it."

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One gets some insight into our 'next phase' by looking at one of these examples. Dr Roles used the analogy of the metamorphosis of a butterfly from a caterpillar a number of times, often quoting the naturalist E Grant Watson's account of the process (available on request). Briefly, an egg laid by a butterfly hatches into a caterpillar; the caterpillar pupates and is transformed into a butterfly; the butterfly hatches out, goes on to mate, lays eggs; and so on. There are then almost

three separate lives: the caterpillar, the pupa, the butterfly. Of these the life of the pupa is the most miraculous as almost the entire body of the caterpillar is dissolved up into a sort of mush, becoming as it were the yolk of an egg for the metamorphosis into the adult butterfly. This process is still a mystery. The diagram on the left shows the relevant enneagram (adapted from 80/10).



Studies of higher vertebrates such as ourselves using modern molecular biology techniques have thrown a great deal of light on some of the steps which take place in embryonic development (diagram on right). In the transition from a single fertilized egg to the fully developed embryo, the first phase involves a simple division of cells, ending up with around 1000 cells in a ball, all apparently identical. There is then a process called gastrulation that establishes the basic shape, followed by neurulation, when the brain and nervous system are laid down, and finally organs, limbs etc develop their shapes. When a developing egg is seen in a microscope the process seems magic; it seems there must surely be some central controller. In fact there is not, as such; the process works mostly work by chemical messengers diffusing from one part of the embryo to another and changing the genetic make-up of cells to turn them into different tissues. The plan is built-in and more and more of it is disclosed as development proceeds. But what then about the centre?

Is there anything we can learn from this for our own development? Is the plan already there waiting to be deployed? What about the centre of the plan?

The analogy in the butterfly example is of course the analogy to our present state – regarded as caterpillar-like, and requiring an extensive remodeling job if we are to shape up as butterflies. Nature has not yet made the process automatic. As Ouspensky pointed out, we tend to view things from the point of view of the caterpillar or the egg or the acorn. Samuel Butler wittily pointed out, seen from the perspective of the egg,

A hen is only an egg's way of making another egg. [Samuel Butler, *Life & Habit*]

We are intelligent enough to appreciate there is a 'next phase', but we think it will fulfil all our caterpillar, egg, acorn wishes. In some sense the 'caterpillar has to die, or 'digest' itself before becoming a butterfly. This Aphorism belonging to our Western system expresses the same idea:

"A man can be born again; but before he can be born he must die; but before he can die he must first awake."

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