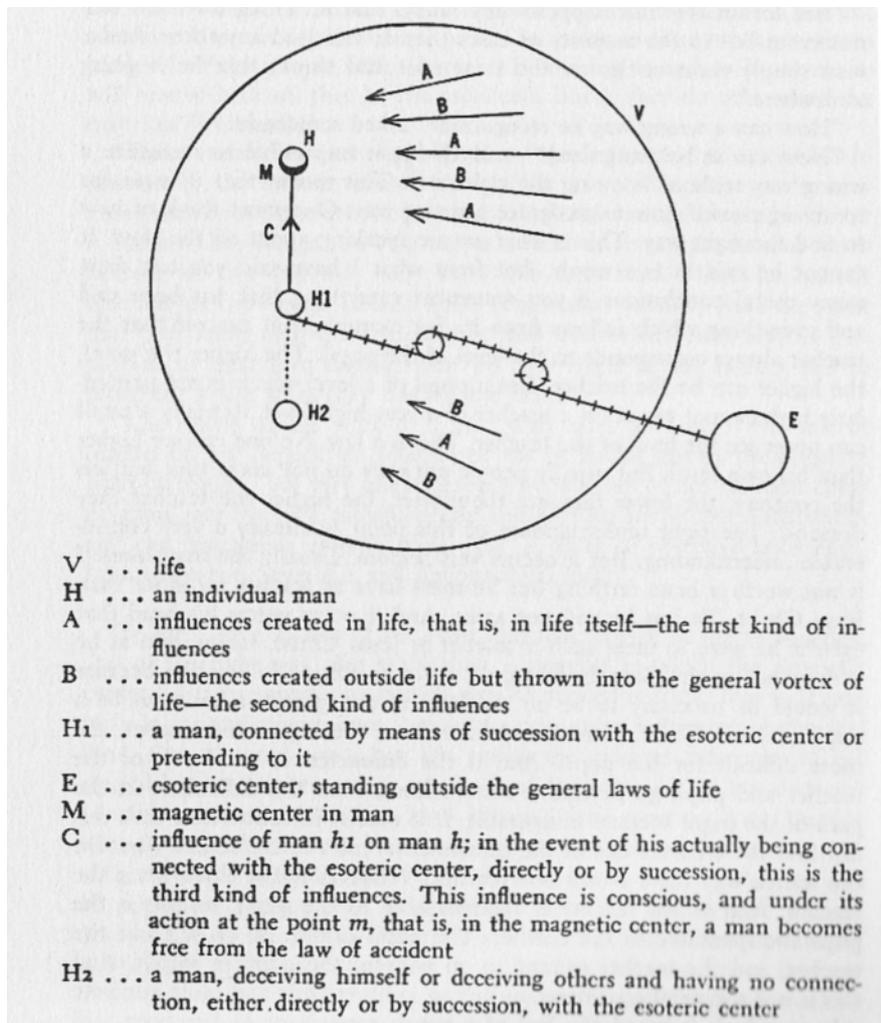


A TEACHING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Levels of knowledge (continued)

In the System there are said to be influences of the first kind, those that arise in ordinary life: interests and attractions to do with health and wealth, amusements, social status – influences A. Then there are influences of the second kind that came originally from the Inner Circle or from Schools: influences which, as Ouspensky put it in the *Psychological Lectures*, have been ‘thrown into the general turnover of life, pass through many different minds and reach a man through philosophy, science, religion, and art, always mixed with influences of the first kind and generally very little resembling what they were in the beginning’ – influences B. Finally there are influences of the third kind, from the Inner Circle (or from a School or Esoteric Centre) – influences C.



The figure was drawn by Ouspensky after he first heard the idea of influences.

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As Ouspensky's diagram shows, the idea of influences was coupled to the idea of magnetic centre. Someone in ordinary life starts to take an interest in ideas and whether through cultural interests or through some experience, he starts to collect knowledge and feelings that lie beyond the ordinary, and in so doing builds up a magnetic centre. This attracts him to a teacher or a school. Through instruction and practice he gets as far as he can. The final step needs direct help from a teacher or an act of grace.

It can be seen as a process of alchemical refinement: the wooden casket surrounding the Self is refined to silver and the silver to gold, and then the gold evaporates. Or maybe there are three caskets one within the other. Opening the wooden casket gives access to the knowledge in ordinary life, and when this is understood the silver casket is revealed. Opening the silver casket reveals the higher knowledge and when this is understood, there stands the golden casket. When this is opened the final secret knowledge is released and when this is understood the Self is revealed.

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There is a real concern that precious knowledge becomes degraded when it is released into ordinary life, so how do we take the injunction by HH to 'open the vaults'. There is a clue in Dr Roles's statement in 1961:

For myself, I visualize a day when we have a large amorphous group – people being allowed a free hand to find their own niche in whatever big work for humanity has to be done, but within that group I would like to see a School – a core – and for that I would alone feel responsible. [61/30]

So what we are contemplating, and indeed to some extent what the Study Society has been struggling to come to terms with, is to open the silver casket and to distribute the contents. So maybe that is what Dr Roles had in mind, an inner core that keeps the knowledge pure and translates it into contemporary patois, and an outer core where it is released to anyone that is interested.

If so, what are the main ideas that have affected us, and how would we present them now to anyone that comes?

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