

# Modern Science, Psychology, and the Enduring Mystery of Consciousness: An Esoteric/Mystical Critique, Part III, G.I. Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way

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## Abstract

In continuing to develop an esoteric critique of the study of consciousness as it is undertaken by most modern psychologists and scientists, this is the first of two articles focusing on Gurdjieff's Fourth Way teaching. According to Gurdjieff, *our normal waking consciousness is a state of waking sleep* and, therefore, human beings are not properly conscious. However, Gurdjieff asserts that *human beings possess dormant faculties of higher consciousness and being that may be awakened through a process of self-transformation*. He contends that this process of "knowing oneself" is dependent upon *the systematic study of oneself and the Universe in terms of an esoteric teaching*. This article is intended to provide an introduction to Gurdjieff's teaching, while also using it to identify and elaborate upon the radical differences between an esoteric teaching's understanding of and approach to the study of consciousness and the materialist paradigm which dominates modern science and psychology.

## An Overview of Issues Confronting Consciousness Researchers

In the first two articles in this series, a review of modern psychology's peculiar history, regarding the subject of consciousness, was presented in order to identify why behavioral psychologists initially banned "consciousness" from their studies as being "unscientific"—particularly, because of its association with other such ethereal concepts as "the soul"—and how that perspective continued to influence psychologists' theoretical assumptions and methodological choices when they eventually recognized consciousness as a legitimate

topic of scientific interest. Typically, during the 1970s, psychologists' renewed interest in consciousness focused primarily on the contents of experience—particularly thinking—and tended to equate consciousness with what William James termed "the stream of experience."

In the ensuing years, as consciousness research has become increasingly the domain of brain researchers, its study has been pursued in terms of a materialist-mechanistic-reductionist-atheistic paradigm. The governing assumption, which guides that research, is that consciousness is somehow generated by the brain's physiological processes. While the evidence to substantiate that view is essentially non-existent, it is regarded, paradoxically, as a self-evident truth. There is also widespread, tacit agreement among consciousness researchers that there is no spiritual property or principle at the heart of a human being and, therefore, no need to include any consideration of spiritual properties or dimensions when contemplating the mysteries of consciousness. Further, as part of the behavioral legacy within modern psychology, there exists a convention *cum* article of faith that the scientific study of consciousness precludes any form of self-study

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## About the Author

James Moffatt was raised in Ottawa, Ontario, where he attended Carleton University and earned degrees in both Sociology and Psychology. For the past 35 years, James has collaborated with Dr. Christopher Holmes in studying, writing, and lecturing about consciousness from an esoteric mystical perspective. James resides in Toronto, where he is employed as a law clerk, and also works as a freelance legal and medical writer.

and, thus, must necessarily involve external observation. Finally, the reductive complex, which dominates modern psychology, dictates that increased precision—as determined by predictive power—demands explanations at the simplest, most rudimentary material level. Within consciousness studies, this has led theorists and researchers to either dismiss consciousness as being epiphenomenal—nothing more than a label to describe psychological functioning—or to focus on determining the “neural correlates of consciousness” which are assumed to provide the missing causal link between the brain and behavior.

The modern psychological approach to consciousness must be understood as being part of the fulfillment of Galileo’s contention that science must deal with only those primary qualities that are measurable. In fulfilling what R.D. Laing termed Galileo’s “audacious program,” modern science grew increasingly dismissive of anything which was not quantifiable, and as such, “experience” came to be regarded as nothing more than a secondary quality which, because it could not be measured, was of no particular significance. Ken Wilber has explained the distrust of the reality of experience as part of the wider dismissal of interior qualities which resulted in the collapse of “the Great Chain of Being”—or that which he terms “the Great Nest of Being”—which followed the Enlightenment and accompanied the ascendancy of modern science. The Great Nest refers to a hierarchical conceptualization of consciousness and the cosmos—a hierarchy of being and knowing—in which each lower level, while possessing its own distinct qualities and laws, is subsumed by higher levels. The Great Nest—a ladder of Creation which involved matter, body, mind, soul, and Spirit—collapsed into the flatland of matter, which modern scientists came to regard as the only realm of significance.

As part of the collapse which resulted in that which Max Weber described as “the disenchantment of the world,” Wilber says that modern science also dismissed epistemological pluralism. Thus, the three traditional ways of knowing—the eye of the flesh, the eye of the mind, and the eye of the spirit—were no longer

recognized as legitimate complementary epistemological approaches. Instead, only the eye of the flesh, which apprehended the material world through external observation, was considered to yield objective knowledge. Moreover, in legitimizing this blatant misrepresentation of both epistemology and science, materialists invoke “the myth of the given”: the contention that their empiricism involves nothing more than recording that which may be apprehended by the senses through external observation and, thus, is unsullied by any source of subjectivity.

Esoteric teachings depict humans as multi-dimensional beings existing within a multi-dimensional Universe. They claim that the level of one’s knowledge is dependent upon the level of one’s consciousness, and as such, the most objective knowledge of oneself and the Universe demands the attainment of those higher states of consciousness which involve transcendent experiences of unity and a direct unmediated knowledge of oneself and the Universe. From an esoteric perspective, the primary failing of modern consciousness research is that it does not recognize the existence and significance of scale in addressing the hierarchy of consciousness, which exists both within human beings and the cosmos. Because modern psychologists and scientists do not recognize the importance of scale, they fail to understand that a lower level of consciousness cannot understand a higher level. From an esoteric perspective, the objective knowledge of the material realm is incomplete and limited precisely because it does not recognize the higher levels in the Great Nest—the subtle dimensions—that inform and subsume it. Esoteric teachings consistently describe consciousness as a universal property which manifests, in varying degrees of subtlety and refinement, in the dimensions that comprise the cosmological hierarchy. As such, consciousness is neither reducible to human psychological functions, nor to the brain’s physiological processes. The ancient esoteric aphorism, inscribed above the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, stated: “Man, know thyself, and thou wilt know the Universe and the gods.” Esoteric teachings take the meaning of that aphorism literally: by knowing

oneself, it is possible to acquire those higher states of consciousness and being that yield an objective knowledge of the Universe and the gods.

George I. Gurdjieff's esoteric Fourth Way teaching comprises a highly sophisticated, elegant, and coherent model of consciousness that proffers a radically different understanding of the nature of human beings and their cosmic connections from that which modern scientific materialists put forth. Gurdjieff's insistence that the proper study of consciousness demands systematic self-study aimed at self-transformation challenges the epistemological assumptions that underlie and guide virtually all contemporary scientific studies of consciousness. In contrast to modern science's distrust and dismissal of experience, Gurdjieff's method demands a comprehensive understanding of experience and a dynamic dissipation of its habitual structures—in pursuit of the aim of transforming the very nature of one's consciousness and being. Gurdjieff claims that the distinctions between psychology and cosmology are, in essence, artificial; as such, his system involves the pursuit of self-knowledge through the parallel study of both oneself and the Universe. This article provides an overview of some of the fundamental tenets of Gurdjieff's teaching. The author's aim is to describe a model of the origins and nature of human consciousness which challenges modern science's fundamental assumptions, postulates, and methods with respect to the study of consciousness.

### **G.I. Gurdjieff**

George I. Gurdjieff (1866-1949)<sup>1</sup> was a remarkable, enigmatic, profound, and mysterious figure. He has been called a mystic, a master, a messenger from above ... a charlatan, a con man, an ignoramus, a "rascal sage"... and, in his own uncharacteristically self-effacing term, "a teacher of dance." While all of these terms are useful, to some extent, in coming to terms with certain aspects of Gurdjieff—or, at least, of the roles that he played—they are, ultimately, misleading and entirely inadequate in terms of capturing the singular nature of his being and his level of consciousness. Moreover, questions as to who Gurdjieff

was and how he is to be regarded must be separated from assessing his remarkable Fourth Way teaching. As the focus of this article is on his teaching, the provocative and highly significant question of coming to terms with Gurdjieff will be deferred to a subsequent article.<sup>2,3</sup>

Gurdjieff was born in the Caucasus region of what was, then, Russia and is currently Armenia. He maintained that he began, at a very early age, to experience "an irrepressible striving" to know and understand the purpose of life on Earth and, in particular, that of humanity. In pursuing his seemingly impossible aim, he read voraciously and, as a young man, he began what would become more than twenty years of travels throughout Asia in search of esoteric knowledge. Having contacted and studied with various esoteric groups, he claimed to have fulfilled his search when he discovered the existence of an ancient esoteric teaching which had been lost or, at least, had disappeared for thousands of years. As a result, he made it his mission to reformulate the Fourth Way in order to make it comprehensible to the modern mind and to bring it to the West.

Establishing himself in Moscow in 1913, Gurdjieff began working with select groups of pupils—to whom he introduced his teaching. From that time until his death in Paris in 1949, his work with various groups of pupils (primarily in France and the United States after the revolution had forced him to leave Russia) was continually changing in terms of its presentation and its emphasis. In addition to lecturing on the psychological and cosmological aspects of the Fourth Way, he worked intensively with his students to develop physical awareness and consciousness by instructing them in highly sophisticated movements, "sacred gymnastics," and Eastern dances. While the external form and content of his work was continually changing, Gurdjieff's purpose—to aid those who were seeking to awaken—remained his most immediate goal. However, the nature and purpose of his mission—his larger purpose in reformulating the Fourth Way—is as mysterious as Gurdjieff himself and continues to be a topic of intense debate.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Fourth Way**

Many of those who have written about Gurdjieff have put forth the idea that his teaching is an amalgamation of the numerous esoteric ideas, practices, and disciplines that he encountered in his years of searching and studying. They cite the existence of several elements of The Fourth Way in the teachings of other esoteric groups and schools—such as the Sufis, Essenes, Gnostics, Tibetan Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Kabbalists, neo-Platonists, Egyptian mystery cults, and Rosicrucians—as evidence that Gurdjieff cobbled his teaching together from numerous esoteric sources. William Patrick Patterson, a Fourth Way student and teacher whose lineage is directly related to Gurdjieff, argues compellingly that those making that claim have seriously misrepresented the teaching and, in doing so, misunderstood its uniqueness. As Patterson points out, Gurdjieff stated unequivocally that the Fourth Way was an ancient teaching which had appeared and disappeared over the course of thousands of years. Furthermore, Gurdjieff characterized the Fourth Way as occupying a unique position within the esoteric tradition, which he defined as consisting of four principal lines: the Hebraic, the Egyptian, the Persian, and the Hindu.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Gurdjieff said of The Fourth Way: “The teaching whose theory is here being set out is *completely self-supporting and independent of other lines and it has been completely unknown up to the present time.*”<sup>6</sup> [emphasis added] There is nothing ambiguous in Gurdjieff’s description of the uniqueness of his teaching; yet, somehow, numerous commentators have ignored his unequivocal declaration.

At the very heart of Gurdjieff’s teaching is his claim that human beings are “asleep.” What we take to be our normal waking state of consciousness, he says, is a *waking sleep*—not sleep as we normally understand it, but rather a state of *hypnotic* sleep and mechanical, associative existence. The fact that virtually no one believes or even suspects this to be true reflects both the extent to which our lives are lived out in this sleep, as well as the existence of several other unrecognized psychological illusions that are critical in maintaining our characteristic state of ignorance about ourselves. In addition to “consciousness,” we typically ascribe to ourselves the properties of

unity, will, and freedom. According to Gurdjieff, our apparent possession of such attributes is illusory. Human beings—*sleepwalkers* *sleepwalking through a sleeping world*—are machines; automatons who are not properly conscious, unified, able to *do* anything or free. We do not *know ourselves*.

Gurdjieff states that human beings typically exist in two states of consciousness: sleep and the so-called “waking state”—or what he sometimes refers to as “relative consciousness.” However, he asserts that there exist two states of higher consciousness that human beings can acquire, through systematic efforts to awaken, and make more or less permanent within themselves: “self-consciousness” and “objective consciousness.” Gurdjieff characterizes self-consciousness as a state in which an individual knows the truth about himself, and objective consciousness as the state in which he knows the truth about everything. He claims that, while we assume that we are normally in a state of self-consciousness when we are awake—or *that we can be at will*—such a belief is an illusion: one which is responsible for our profound failure to realize the nature of the “sleeping world” in which we exist and in which “everything happens.” Moreover, according to Gurdjieff, we mistakenly believe that we are properly conscious, unified beings who possess will. Nevertheless, he contends that self-consciousness is a human being’s rightful state—rather than the waking sleep and false consciousness system in which most people are unknowingly imprisoned—and that by working to acquire self-consciousness, an individual can begin to attain unity and self-mastery.

In broad terms, the ideas and practices that Gurdjieff taught may be understood as being a method of *awakening* and developing those higher faculties of human consciousness and being that are normally dormant. Thus, his system begins with the study of human beings, *as they are*, in order to suggest the miraculous possibilities of what they are capable of becoming through a process of *conscious evolution*. This conscious transformation of one’s being demands that one must fulfill the ancient esoteric dictum, *know thyself*. To know one-

self, according to Gurdjieff, demands the parallel study of oneself and the world; for he asserts that psychology and cosmology are integrally related and inform one another. For such study, a system is necessary; for self-study undertaken on an *ad hoc* basis or in terms of any arbitrarily selected or determined approach is useless. Moreover, in order to awaken, one must have a teacher—one who possesses a higher level of consciousness and being—in order to instruct and guide one's efforts to meet the extraordinary demands and challenges involved in fulfilling the arduous and often perilous process of self-transformation and self-realization.

The term, "the Fourth Way," denotes both the teaching's connections with and distinction from the three classic esoteric paths or ways of conscious development: those of the *fakir*, the *monk*, and the *yogi*. According to Gurdjieff, the way of the fakir involves the transformation of one's being through the discipline of the body, resulting in the attainment of will. The path of the monk focuses on mastering worldly desires through faith and devotion. The *yogi* attains self-realization through knowledge by concentrating on the development and control of the mind. While acknowledging that each of these ways can yield significant results in the quest for self-realization, Gurdjieff contended that each also imposes formidable limitations on most aspirants' efforts. The Fourth Way, he explained, was a method designed to surmount the respective deficiencies of the other three paths by coordinating the simultaneous awakening of the distinct intelligences of the body, the emotions, and the intellect. As a result, the student's development was at once accelerated and economized—especially so, because the pattern and focus of effort, which the teacher prescribed, took each individual's unique characteristics into account.

Other differences between the traditional methods and The Fourth Way, which make the latter seem particularly well-suited to Westerners, are the system's emphasis on the development of understanding through self-study and its accessibility. Although the Fourth Way contains profound spiritual teachings, it is not

a path of faith or devotion per se. Instead, it is a path of *understanding*: a method which involves what Ken Wilber terms "spiritual empiricism." Thus, one must confirm the validity of the teaching's concepts through the study of oneself and the Universe. Indeed, Gurdjieff cautioned his pupils that the willingness "to believe any old tale" was a most insidious manifestation of the state of sleep and suggestibility from which they were striving to awaken. Unlike most esoteric schools, there is no need to isolate oneself or retire from the rounds of daily life by entering a cloistered community in order to follow the Fourth Way. Instead, it is the path of *the sly man* who is, as the Sufis say, "in the world, but not of it."

### The Imprisonment of "Waking Sleep"

Gurdjieff asserts that, in our lives as we live them "normally," *everything happens*. All our great ideas about what we do and what we should do are illusory, he claims. In a conversation with P.D. Ouspensky—his most famous pupil and the author of *In Search of the Miraculous*, the classic account of their years together in Russia—Gurdjieff spoke of man as a machine who cannot *do*:

... man's chief delusion is his conviction that he can *do*. All people think that they can do, all people want to do, and the first question all people ask is what they are to do. But actually, nobody does anything and nobody can do anything. This is the first thing that must be understood. *Everything happens*. All that befalls a man, all that is done by him, all that comes from him—all *this happens*.

Man is a machine. All his deeds, actions, words, thoughts, feelings, convictions, opinions, and habits are the result of external influences, external impressions. Out of himself a man cannot produce a single thought, a single action. Everything he says, does, thinks, feels—all *this happens*. Man cannot discover anything, invent anything. It all happens.

To establish this fact for oneself, to understand it, to be convinced of its truth, means

getting rid of a thousand illusions about man ... Everything happens.

But no one will ever believe you if you tell him he can do nothing. This is the most offensive and the most unpleasant thing you can tell people. It is particularly unpleasant and offensive because it is the truth, and nobody wants to know the truth.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to this seemingly preposterous statement, Gurdjieff makes the equally radical assertion that there is an absence of unity in human beings: that we possess no permanent “I.” He maintains that, in our normal waking sleep, we lack unity—that, rather than being integrated, unified beings possessing a permanent and unchangeable “I,” we exist as a collection of many little, separate “i”s. Our “i”s are continually and unconsciously changing in ways we neither recognize nor suspect. “Every thought, every mood, every desire, every sensation says ‘I,’”<sup>8</sup> according to Gurdjieff and, therefore, we make a profound mistake when we take ourselves—as we normally do—to be, always, one and the same person. We believe erroneously that the actions, thoughts, desires, moods, and feelings are expressions of the Whole—one’s entire being—whereas, in reality, the Whole exists only in the sense of the continuity of our physical being and in the abstract, as a concept. Instead, we exist as a series of changing, unconscious, independent and frequently antagonistic different “i”s. Although there are some collections of “i”s that are more or less coherent and some “i”s are stronger than others, they have been formed accidentally and mechanically. Most importantly, Gurdjieff argues: there is, in reality, no coherent and unchangeable “I.”

To this rather grim and unforgiving depiction of human beings’ sleeping, mechanical existence, Gurdjieff adds one potentially positive element: that *it is possible to awaken and escape this imprisonment*. Further, he states unequivocally that it is possible to achieve unity by uncovering and apprehending the real “I” element which exists within us, but which must be attained through the process of awakening. To cultivate the realization of “I” within oneself is an unimaginably difficult, subtle, and complex process, according to Gurdjieff,

but one which is essential to becoming what he terms “a man without quotation marks.” Gurdjieff often said that, for a serious person, the possibility of escaping the imprisonment of the sleeping world can be the only thing of real importance. But few people give any thought to escape—for the simple reason that hardly anyone realizes that he or she is in prison, and would not believe you if you told them so. And even fewer people are interested in making an effort to escape, because to do so means long and hard work.

Within Gurdjieff’s system, awakening depends on the development and acquisition of consciousness. But the acquisition of consciousness must begin with the realization that, in our normal waking state, we are typically not conscious. When Ouspensky, who was thoroughly schooled in western psychology and philosophy, stated that it is generally agreed that “consciousness” is indefinable, Gurdjieff dismissed the objection as being nothing but the parroting of what he termed “rubbish” and “the usual scientific sophistry.” He countered by identifying the definitive feature of consciousness and the means by which it must be studied:

... you *can know* consciousness only in yourself. Observe that I say you *can know*, for you can know it only when you have it. And when you have not got it, you can know that you have not got it, not at that very moment, but afterwards. I mean that when it comes again you see that it has been absent a long time, and you can find or remember the moment when it disappeared and when it reappeared.<sup>9</sup>

By studying consciousness within oneself, it is possible to observe that there have been periods in which consciousness has been absent—that one has been asleep—but one is only capable of realizing that this is so only *after* regaining consciousness. Continuing, Gurdjieff explains that:

You can also define the moments when you are nearer to consciousness and further away from consciousness. But by observing in yourself the appearance and disappearance of consciousness you will inevitably see one fact which you neither see nor

acknowledge now, and that is that *moments of consciousness are very short and are separated by long intervals of completely unconscious, mechanical working of the machine.* [emphasis added] You will see then that you can think, feel, act, speak, work, *without being conscious of it.* And if you learn to see in yourselves the moments of consciousness and the long periods of mechanicalness, you will as infallibly see in other people when they are conscious of what they are doing and when they are not.”<sup>10</sup>

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Gurdjieff’s characterization of the normal waking state as consisting of “long intervals of completely unconscious, mechanical working of the machine.” Certainly, there are numerous Fourth Way pupils who would readily attest to the fact that, by observing themselves, they have determined that it is not only entirely possible to *think, feel, act, and work without being conscious of it*, but also to assert that this lack of consciousness is indeed the principal feature of our normal waking consciousness. And, as Gurdjieff says, once one begins to understand that people are not properly conscious, the extent to which *everyone* “thinks, feels, acts, and works without being conscious of it” becomes increasingly apparent and alarmingly obvious. Nevertheless, this is not a “fact” which one can or should attempt to establish by argument; its truth—or lack thereof—is entirely dependent upon each individual’s efforts to study one’s own waking state with an open and receptive mind. With that qualification in mind, it is fair to say that Gurdjieff’s characterization of the waking state as a state of sleep and his claims about the possibility of observing the appearance and disappearance of consciousness within oneself iden-

tify critical aspects of consciousness which, with few exceptions, have escaped modern psychologists and scientists—because they do not study consciousness within themselves. Between the poles of “waking sleep” and “self-consciousness,” there exists a continuum of degrees and gradations of self-awareness. Once one becomes aware of this hidden variable of consciousness, begins to observe its vicissitudes, and attempts to actively alter one’s experience of it by trying to be more conscious of oneself, one undertakes the study of a new psychology.

Amongst contemporary psychologists who theorize about and study consciousness, the nature of the waking state is, typically,

of little or no concern. Most psychologists subscribe to the assumption that there exist two fundamental states of human consciousness: sleep and the waking state. Further, while the waking state may be thought of as varying in terms of degrees of alertness, most psychologists simply do not regard any such variations as being significant. By contrast, Gurdjieff’s contention—that the waking state is typically a state of “sleep” and that there are moments when people are more consciousness—is the basis for a radically different understanding of and approach to the study of consciousness. To the extent that he characterizes the normal waking state of consciousness as consisting of extensive periods of “completely unconscious, mechanical working of the machine,” Gurdjieff is in agreement with the behaviorists regarding the utility of describing the waking state in terms of conditioning and the mechanisms that underlie the laws of behavior. However, in contrast to the behaviorists, Gurdjieff maintains that consciousness may be studied within oneself and that it is possible, by doing so, to not only dramatically change, but

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*transform*, one's level of awareness and consciousness to such an extent that one is not functioning mechanically. This claim is, of course, something which not only the behaviorists, but most modern psychologists either deny or ignore.

### “Know Thyself”

**K***now thyself.* All esoteric teachings are premised on this succinct, profound, and enduring aphorism. To know oneself, Gurdjieff says, is to know that one is not properly conscious: that, instead, one functions mechanically in terms of one's conditioning and acquired habits. Therefore, one must become properly conscious through a process of self-transformation. But work to develop consciousness begins with studying oneself as one is now and, in Gurdjieff's teaching, that task involves the study of one's machine:

... man must study the structure, the functions, and the laws of his organism. In the human machine everything is so interconnected; one thing is so dependent upon another, that it is quite impossible to study any one function without studying all the others. In order to know one thing, one must know everything. To know *everything* in man is possible, but it requires much time and labor, and above all, the application of the right method and, what is equally necessary, right guidance.<sup>11</sup>

In order to awaken and develop consciousness and being, Gurdjieff said, it is necessary to begin by studying oneself in terms of a system. In the Fourth Way, self-study begins with the processes of “self-observation” and “self-remembering.” Pupils begin to observe themselves in order to acquire an understanding that, indeed, the majority of their lives consist of being in a state of “waking sleep.” Furthermore, the process of self-observation is organized and guided by the application of Gurdjieff's teaching: an undertaking which requires extensive study in learning an entirely new psychological framework and the distinct language and principles of knowledge in which it is articulated.

Initial attempts to self-observe do not involve analyzing oneself, but simply studying oneself

in order to become aware of one's state of waking sleep and the extent to which everything which one does is essentially an expression of one's conditioning. Having acquired an understanding of the fundamental principles operative in the human machine's functioning, one begins to analyze one's observations, in terms of the teaching, and to acquire self-knowledge.

Concurrent with initiating the process of self-observation, the Fourth Way pupil also attempts to remember himself or herself. The concept of self-remembering is as profound, dynamic, and almost as elusive as consciousness itself; one's understanding of what it means to remember oneself changes as one's knowledge and understanding of oneself becomes increasingly more complex and comprehensive. In its most basic sense, self-remembering involves trying to be present such that one is aware that *I AM here, now, in this moment.* Self-remembering means bearing witness to oneself: that is, being impartially aware of oneself as one thinks, feels, and acts. Attempting to do so quickly reveals the startling truth that is extremely difficult *to remember to remember oneself.* But even when one does succeed in remembering to self-remember, that state and one's resolve to remain in it soon passes: unconsciously and imperceptibly yielding to the waking sleep which inevitably, like the monster of the deep which consumed Jonah, resumes its silent rule by swallowing one whole.

In attempting to explain why he characterizes our normal waking state as a state of “waking sleep,” Gurdjieff asked the pupils in Ouspensky's St. Petersburg group to describe the most important thing that he or she had noticed during self-observation. There were various interesting observations offered in reply, but no one stated what should have been most obvious, as Gurdjieff explained:

Not one of you has noticed the most important thing that I have pointed out to you... That is to say, not one of you has noticed that *you do not remember yourselves.* You do not feel *yourselves*; you are not conscious of *yourselves.* With you, “it observes” just as “it speaks,” “it thinks,” “it

laughs.” You do not feel: *I observe, I notice, I see.* Everything still “is noticed,” “is seen.”... In order really to observe oneself one must first of all *remember oneself.* Try *to remember yourselves* when you observe yourselves and later on tell me the results. Only those results will have any value that are accompanied by self-remembering. Otherwise you yourselves do not exist in your observations. In which case what are all your observations worth?<sup>12</sup>

Gurdjieff’s emphasis on recognizing the distinction between the “I” and “it” within oneself comprises a discrimination which is at once so subtle as to be invisible without repeated efforts to self-remember, and yet is of such profound significance that it should be regarded as providing a critical insight into the proper study of consciousness. Moreover, despite the remarkable difficulties encountered when one first begins to work at remembering oneself, the effect of experiencing those instances of self-conscious awareness serves as the key to unlocking the most essential secret about the nature of consciousness: *that, typically, one is not properly conscious, but with effort, one might be.* In addition, ongoing efforts to remember oneself begin to provide one with a sense of why Gurdjieff contended that people are incapable of even imagining the profound possibilities that they would realize if they were to awaken and become properly conscious.

What did Gurdjieff mean when he asserted that “you do not remember yourselves?” How does “self-remembering” relate to “self-observing?” Ouspensky explained that, whereas self-remembering involves attempting to be aware of oneself—to sense and feel and be aware that *I am here*—self-observation always involves directing one’s attention at a definite function in oneself: such as one’s thoughts, emotions, movements or sensations. While self-observation involves focusing on a part of oneself, self-remembering is an attempt to remember the whole by feeling one’s “I.” Thus, self-remembering always involves a division of attention: such that one part is focused on the content of whatever mental, emotional, or physical process or activity in which one is

engaged, while the other part consists of *being aware of oneself being here.*

Viewed from another perspective, the elusive concept of “self-remembering” may be construed as “self-forgetting.” It involves “being present” in such a way that one is removed from and free of the continual stream of thoughts, dreams, images, and concerns by which one is usually carried through the waking hours ... the host of feelings and concerns about oneself and the world in which one is normally invested ... the plurality of interests and the parading legion of changing “i”s with which one is identified ... the habitual physical postures and processes which unconsciously govern the body and determine its states of presence ... in sum, all that in which one’s consciousness and experience of one’s “I” is almost wholly absorbed and embedded. To the extent that one can free oneself of attachment to these usual constituents and configurations of one’s normal self (or, more correctly, selves) one *forgets* one’s usual self. And in that sense, “self-remembering” consists of “self-forgetting.” With time and effort, a radically different “I” emerges and is realized in the novelty and wonder of simply sensing and feeling *I am here.* In such rare instances, one’s experience of oneself and the world is especially vivid and unforgettable. The illuminating and inspiring discovery which the practice of self-remembering reveals is that the experience of oneself and the world—in all of its meaning, mystery, and wonder—is dramatically transformed through the accumulation of those moments in which one awakens, even momentarily, and remembers to *be here, now.*

Nevertheless, the simple fact remains: the act of remembering oneself is much more difficult than it would seem to be. Having repeatedly failed to do so—other than for the most fleeting moments—Ouspensky soon concluded that Gurdjieff was neither exaggerating the extent, nor the importance of people’s inability to remember themselves. In addition, he realized that the concept of “self-remembering” was the key to understanding Gurdjieff’s other comments about consciousness: that one can know it when one has it, and one can know—*when it comes again*—that it has been absent for a long

time. As much as Ouspensky was chagrined by his inability to remember himself, Gurdjieff explained that this was an extremely important realization. As he explained, most people would angrily dismiss the claim: that they cannot and do not remember themselves. But Gurdjieff states that: "If a man really knows that he cannot remember himself, he is already near to the understanding of his being."<sup>13</sup>

The more that one attempts to remember oneself, the more one experiences the singular tension that results from that practice: that is, self-remembering provides a distinct taste of the extraordinary possibilities of what it would mean if this were one's normal waking state, while at the same time, the difficulties in maintaining those moments of self-consciousness are indisputably and alarmingly obvious. In Sufism, the transition from the state of normal waking consciousness to the state of self-consciousness is likened to emerging from underwater and breathing the air; an apt description of the immediate and undeniably exhilarating sense of existing in a fundamentally different medium that self-remembering inspires.

## The Light of Consciousness

In a remarkably succinct and insightful statement about his pupils' fundamental misconception of consciousness, Gurdjieff explained why consciousness must be studied systematically within oneself:

Your principal mistake consists in thinking that you *always have consciousness*, and in general, either that consciousness is *always present* or that it is *never present*. In reality, consciousness is a property which is continually changing. Now it is present, now it is not present. And there are different degrees and different levels of consciousness. Both consciousness and the different degrees of consciousness must be understood in oneself by sensation, by taste. No definitions can help you in this case and no definitions are possible so long as you do not understand *what* you have to define. And science and philosophy cannot define consciousness because they want to define it where it does not exist. It is necessary to distinguish *consciousness* from the *possibil-*

*ity of consciousness*. We have only the possibility of consciousness and rare flashes of it. Therefore we cannot define what consciousness is.<sup>14</sup>

This extraordinary passage identifies that which is, from an esoteric perspective, the fundamental flaw in modern psychologists' and scientists' understanding of and approach to the study of consciousness. They have consistently and repeatedly failed to recognize that consciousness is *a property* which is always changing, and as such, our normal waking state of consciousness does not constitute a single, undifferentiated, and unified state. By working to become conscious, one begins to recognize the variability of consciousness within one's waking state, but one cannot acquire these *experiences of consciousness* by simply *thinking* about consciousness. Modern psychologists think and reason and attempt to know consciousness by studying bits and parts of other beings, but those activities involve searching for consciousness where it does not exist and where it cannot be known and understood. You cannot directly observe consciousness in others. You cannot stain it, put it on a slide, and peer at it through a microscope; you cannot observe it by extrapolating it in analyzing aggregate statistics; you cannot decipher it by examining the results of an EEG, an MRI or a PET scan of the brain or by using any other marvelous scientific instrument. One can only know consciousness by studying it within oneself and by *experiencing it within oneself*. As Gurdjieff says, scientists and philosophers have failed so thoroughly in their attempts to understand consciousness because they do not understand what they are trying to define and, consequently, "they want to define it where it does not exist." Furthermore, his comment about the necessity of distinguishing consciousness from the *possibility* of consciousness can only be properly understood by relating that discrimination to the singular dynamics involved in making concerted, ongoing efforts to self-observe and to self-remember. Disciplined attempts to study consciousness systematically within oneself provide one with an inchoate understanding of the hidden and profoundly mysterious nature of consciousness, while compromising the first tentative

but meaningful steps in its acquisition.

In effect, trying to practice self-remembering represents the introduction of the most revealing and instructive change possible in studying consciousness. As such, self-remembering represents an elegant, important, and practical psychological experiment which is at once illuminating and transforming. Repeated attempts to self-remember document the fact that our normal waking state is a waking sleep, while revealing that *consciousness must systematically be studied within oneself*. In contrasting this esoteric methodology with that of western academic psychology and philosophy, Ouspensky opined that: “Real psychology begins when a man realizes and bears in mind that he does not remember himself, and that nobody remembers, and yet there is a possibility of self-remembering ...”<sup>15</sup>

While Gurdjieff maintains that the proper study of consciousness involves self-study, the profound mysteries regarding the nature of consciousness remain. Whereas modern psychologists have typically assumed that consciousness is reducible to the psychic functions—such as thinking, sensing, feeling, imagining—and/or the brain’s physiological processes, Ouspensky argues that consciousness is *a substantive property which is entirely independent of the psychic functions*:

...consciousness ... is a background upon which thoughts, feelings and sensations reveal themselves. This background can be more or less bright. But as thoughts, feelings and sensations have their own separate life, and can be regarded independently of this background, so can it be regarded and studied independently of them.<sup>16</sup>

Ouspensky adds that our psychic functions may be likened to machines that work better in light than in darkness. By attempting to observe and remember ourselves, we increase the light of consciousness—the background—which enables our psychological functions to be more efficient.

For Gurdjieff, *consciousness is substantive: it is something separate from our psychological functioning*. He likens it to *light*: an equation which is to be understood literally, metaphori-

cally, and alchemically. As consciousness is regarded as manifesting both psychologically and cosmologically on different levels, Gurdjieff describes humans as multi-dimensional beings existing in a multi-dimensional cosmos of varying levels of consciousness.

Within the singular dynamics of studying oneself systematically, Gurdjieff states that the mysterious process of acquiring consciousness begins to suggest how and why consciousness is to be equated with light. He explains that self-observation:

... throws ... a ray of light onto ... [one’s] inner processes which have hitherto worked in complete darkness. And under the influence of this light the processes themselves begin to change. There are a great many chemical processes that take place only in the absence of light. Exactly in the same way many psychic processes take place only in the dark. Even a feeble light of consciousness is enough to change completely the character of the process, while it makes many of them altogether impossible. Our inner psychic processes (our inner alchemy) have much in common with those chemical processes in which light changes the character of the process and they are subject to analogous laws.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the process of studying oneself systematically at once motivates one to continue to attempt to remember oneself and acts as a catalyst for self-transformation. Moreover, Gurdjieff explains that self-observation, if properly conducted, leads an individual to realize:

... that it is precisely because he is asleep that he lives and works in a small part of himself. It is precisely for this reason that the vast majority of his possibilities remain unrealized, the vast majority of his powers are left unused. ... He sees every function as it now is and as it could or ought to be.<sup>18</sup>

To summarize: modern psychologists long ago rejected any form of self-study as being “unscientific.” Nevertheless, attempts to self-observe systematically and to self-remember may be regarded as experimental procedures: that which Ken Wilber terms “spiritual empiricism.” Systematic self-observation readily dis-

pels modern psychologists' peculiar conviction that consciousness may only legitimately be studied through external observation and that any attempt at self-study will be hopelessly contaminated by subjective variables. Whereas psychologists have equated "scientific objectivity" with eliminating themselves from their studies, esoteric teachings are based on the premise that objectivity is to be realized through the transformation of one's being and the acquisition of higher states of consciousness. For Gurdjieff, the study of consciousness must involve systematic self-study and self-transformation; attempting to study consciousness solely through external observation is absurd. By acquiring the faculties of higher consciousness and being, "the knower" is transformed, as is the quality of her knowledge. The shocking difficulties that one experiences in remembering to self-remember and in maintaining that state, when one does manage to remember oneself, dramatically reveal the hidden complexity of our normal waking consciousness. As such, the idea—that our normal waking state is "a waking sleep"—becomes increasingly plausible and realistic as one accumulates the data gleaned from attempts to self-observe and self-remember. Gurdjieff puts forth the radical idea that consciousness is substantive—that is, it is not simply a term to describe our psychological functions or even the contents of our experience, but rather is *some thing*. Considerations of how and why consciousness should be regarded as being substantive will be elaborated through the exposition of other aspects of Gurdjieff's teaching.

## The Centers

Gurdjieff claims that, in order to be capable of understanding the nature of consciousness and the mind, it is necessary to realize that rather than having one brain or mind, human beings possess seven distinct "brains" or "centers" of intelligence.<sup>19</sup> Each of these "centers" is an independent mind which has its own way of knowing, type of memory, speed of operation, and energies. Although the centers are said to be distributed throughout the entire physical organism, each one has its own locus of concentration or center of gravity within the physical body. According to Gurdjieff, there

are five lower centers that are responsible for the normal psychological functions and, therefore, govern the normal waking state. But, in addition, there are two higher centers that constitute supernormal faculties and are responsible for experiencing higher states of consciousness and reality.

The five lower centers are: the intellectual, the emotional, the moving, the instinctual, and the sexual center. The *intellectual center*, which is located in the brain, governs all mental functions such as thinking, reasoning, comparing, predicting, and abstracting. The *emotional center*, which is localized in the complexes of nerves of the sympathetic nervous system, is responsible for all emotional processes and registers impressions in terms of appetitive dimensions such as one's likes and dislikes, pleasantness and unpleasantness, etc. The *moving center*, which is responsible for all learned movements, is located in the spinal column. The *instinctual center* governs the body's innate functions, such as the metabolic and sensory process. It is located within the lower brain structures and the spinal column, as well as within the body's organs. The *sexual center*, which is located in the sexual organs, is responsible for sexual functioning and procreation. Although the moving, instinctual, and sexual centers are independent minds, they typically work so closely together as to constitute the physical organism's intelligence. For that reason, Gurdjieff spoke of man, in his normal state of consciousness, as "*a three-brained being*" which functions *intellectually, emotionally, and physically*.

In addition to the five lower centers, there are two centers of higher consciousness: the higher emotional and the higher intellectual center. Because of the difficulty of translating the faculties of the higher centers and their operation into the language of the normal centers—Ouspensky compares the task to a blind man attempting to speak of colors—Gurdjieff says very little about them and the realities that they apprehend. Higher knowledge exists, Gurdjieff says, but it can only be acquired through *the conscious functioning of the higher centers*. The critical point which Gurdjieff does stress about the higher centers is that there is no need

to develop them: they already exist within us. However, because of the imbalance and dysfunction that plagues the lower centers, and the lack of harmony and co-operation between them, we are unable to experience the higher centers. Thus, Gurdjieff states that, in order to experience our higher faculties of consciousness, we must purify and refine the functioning of the lower centers. By doing so, he says, we may become fully developed and know ourselves as “seven brained-beings.” And only by doing so, Gurdjieff claims, is it possible to truly acquire objective knowledge; the level of one’s knowledge, he says, is determined by the level of one’s consciousness and being.

Fourth Way pupils observe the operation of the different centers within themselves and learn to discriminate between their proper and improper functioning. Gurdjieff maintains that, because the centers are susceptible to various classes of “wrong work,” they operate mechanically at a very low level of consciousness. Moreover, he maintains that systematic self-observation reveals that each of the centers can function with varying degrees of consciousness for varying durations of time. While self-observation and attempts to self-remember certainly reveal the potential richness of human consciousness, the more immediate and disconcerting realization is the discovery that it is extremely difficult to be conscious in even one center at any time and that, typically, each of the centers functions quite automatically and mechanically.

Self-observation also reveals that one may also be “centered” in different ways: that is, one center is often dominant, depending upon the nature of one’s activity. Thus, when a task requiring abstraction or some form of mental calculation is involved, one would be primarily

active in the intellectual center; whereas when one is involved in an athletic activity or physical labor, one would be primarily centered in the moving/instinctual mind. As you sit reading these pages, you are most likely to be intel-

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lectually centered—as you focus on processing and attempting to interpret the meaning of this presentation. At the same time, you are, in all likelihood, only vaguely aware of your body and your physical state of presence as you sit reading. Further, unless something you have read has evoked or prompted some extremely strong emotional reaction in you, you are not likely to be particularly aware of your emotional state.

Thus, the nature of one’s experience will depend, in part, upon how one is centered. But it will also depend on the degree, the intensity, and the duration of how consciously the center is operating. When one begins to understand, through self-observation, that this variability of consciousness is also applicable to the interaction of the three centers—that is, one might be more or less conscious in one, two, or three centers—the complexity of the possibilities for experiencing consciousness become apparent. In addition, the importance of attempting to bring the centers into balance and harmony in order to increase consciousness begins to become a reality. Gurdjieff explains:

... we must understand that every normal psychic function is a means or instrument of knowledge. With the help of the mind we see one aspect of things and events, with the help of emotions another aspect, with the help of sensations a third aspect. *The most complete knowledge of a given subject possible for us can be obtained if we examine it simultaneously with our mind, feelings, and sensations.* Every man who is striving after right knowledge must aim at the possibility of attaining such per-

ception.<sup>20</sup> [emphasis added]

If we think of consciousness as light, it becomes all too clear that our centers operate, most of the time, in darkness or, at best, in terms of a very low level of illumination. The task of attempting to become more conscious in each of the centers and to bring them into harmony depends, in the Fourth Way, on learning to overcome the different types of “wrong work” which keep each of these independent minds operating at the most unconscious, mechanical level. Gurdjieff’s identification of the various classes of wrong work that impede each of the respective centers from working consciously represents a critical focus of pupils’ efforts to study themselves. In addition to the specific categories of wrong work—which will be examined in detail in an ensuing Fourth Way article—Gurdjieff also states that wrong work consists of the various centers attempting to do another center’s work.

The emotional center’s wrong work consists of “identification,” “self-love,” “vanity,” and “negative emotions.” However, it is *identification* which is perhaps the most subtle and yet influential form of wrong work. Gurdjieff states that people live constantly in an identified state: that is one’s emotional presence always consists of an attachment to or investment in or fusion with whatever one is feeling or thinking. This unconscious, automatic investment of oneself in everything which captures one’s interest and/or attention is particularly insidious because it keeps one’s various “I”s alive and creates the illusion of unity. Because identification comprises the emotional medium in which and through which we exist, it is practically as invisible as the air we breathe. Therefore, it is very difficult to imagine why one would want to dis-identify and how one would do so, if so inclined. However, as Gurdjieff explains, the state of self-conscious awareness, which one seeks to nourish and develop through the process of self-remembering, demands that one not identify:

Identifying is the chief obstacle to self-remembering. A man who identifies with anything is unable to remember himself. In order to remember oneself it is necessary first of all *not to identify*. But in order to

learn not to identify man must first of all *not be identified with himself*, must not call himself ‘I’ always and on all occasions. He must remember that there are two in him, that there is *himself*, that is ‘I’ in him, and there is *another* with whom he must struggle and whom he must conquer if he wishes at any time to attain anything. So long as man identifies or can be identified, he is the slave of everything that can happen to him.<sup>21</sup>

When one begins to recognize identification in oneself and in others, it becomes apparent why one must attempt not to identify and, especially, not to identify with oneself. Observing how people are identified when they argue or when they are driven by some desire or strong emotion, it becomes clear that they *become* their words and desires, as Gurdjieff says, and that “of themselves nothing remains.”<sup>22</sup> In that state of emotional presence, it is impossible to remember oneself. Moreover, because people identify most readily with that which interests them, the danger of identifying with one’s teacher and teaching is particularly fraught with peril for even the most earnest spiritual seeker. It was that danger which led Gurdjieff to both act in ways that frequently caused his pupils to examine their relationship with him and to change the presentation of his teaching in order to preclude his pupils from becoming identified with any particular formulation of it.

Within modern psychology, identifying “the parts of our being” involves, for the most part, dualistic conceptualizations such as the mind and the body, the brain and the body or the functional equivalent of the mind and behavior.<sup>23</sup> Gurdjieff’s model of humans as beings possessing seven brains is nonsense from the perspective of modern science and psychology. However, when it is approached with an open mind and a willingness to accumulate data through the process of self-study, it poses an extremely provocative challenge to conventional contemporary knowledge and, at the very least, serves as a useful heuristic by which many anomalies and enigmas associated with “the mind and the body” may be reconsidered. When considering humans as “three-brained beings,” the complexity of the normal waking

state begins to become apparent. By regarding consciousness as separate from the psychological functions and positing that it may manifest with varying degrees of intensity, frequency, and duration, it becomes apparent that describing the quality of the waking state must be undertaken in reference to a matrix of variables—most of which modern psychologists never acknowledge, let alone examine. Moreover, Gurdjieff's claims regarding the significance of “wrong work,” as being pathological factors that limit the consciousness with which each center functions, identifies sources of psychological dysfunction that, for the most part, are not acknowledged within modern psychology.

### A Microcosm of the Macrocosm

Gurdjieff's cosmological ideas are so complex and demand such extensive study and contemplation that the ensuing presentation is admittedly superficial. Nevertheless, by touching on some key elements of his cosmology, the author's aim is to elucidate the framework in which the critical concept of “a substantive consciousness” may be placed and, in doing so, provide the basis to understand why Gurdjieff contended that self-study involved both psychology and cosmology and, consequently, his psychological teachings informed his cosmology, and vice-versa.

According to Gurdjieff, modern science's conceptualization of a Universe composed of non-sentient matter, which is governed by the operation of blind and purposeless “natural” laws, is entirely erroneous. Instead, he claims that we live in an animate, intelligent, multi-dimensional Universe: one in which a hierarchy of discrete world orders—each of which is distinguished by distinct gradations of materiality and consciousness—descends or devolves from the Absolute or the supreme source of all Creation. Through this involutory process, a succession of seven worlds or planes is created; each of which consists of progressively denser levels of materiality and lower levels of consciousness, and transmits energy and intelligence to the level below it. Moreover, because the materiality of the higher worlds is more rarefied than the worlds below them,

they interpenetrate the matter of the lower worlds, while informing and sustaining them.

*Everything in the Universe is material*, Gurdjieff claims. Therefore, his teaching is, in a sense, more materialistic than contemporary philosophical materialism. However, that assessment must be qualified by the explanation that Gurdjieff *attributes cosmic and psychic properties to matter* quite unlike anything which modern science recognizes. In addition, he distinguishes between matter and materiality: that is, while matter is everywhere the same, there exist different gradients of materiality depending upon the qualities and properties of energy being manifested. And because Gurdjieff depicts *everything* in Creation as existing in a state of vibration, he says that the level of consciousness of anything is given by the density of its materiality and the frequency of its vibrations. Hence, consciousness varies directly with the frequency of vibration and inversely with the density of materiality: that is, a higher level of consciousness is associated with a more refined level of materiality and higher frequency of vibration. Gurdjieff asserts that the Universe—rather than being the manifestation of the dualities of matter and energy, within time and space—is the product of the interaction of triads of forces and influences. Therefore, he states that the complementarity of matter and energy must be extended to include the third property of consciousness. For Gurdjieff, then, matter possesses consciousness and consciousness is material.

Gurdjieff asserts that there exist two “fundamental cosmic laws”—*the Law of Three* and *the Law of Seven*—which are responsible for the manifestation of everything in Creation. The Law of Three<sup>24</sup> states that *everything*—every phenomenon, on every level of scale, in every world—is the result of the interaction of three forces. Gurdjieff refers to them as “active,” “passive,” and “neutralizing” force or, alternatively, “Holy Affirming,” “Holy Denying,” and “Holy Reconciling.” However, he qualifies these terms by explaining that these names apply only in describing their properties *at a particular point of interaction*. In reality, each force is equally active. The essential point to be realized is that these forces are omnipres-

ent and underlie all manifestations in all worlds. And, while the first two forces are recognizable in the state of normal waking consciousness and, thus, give us the dualities that pervade modern science, the third force is not readily observed or understood. In some cases, the third force consists of the medium in which the first two forces are interacting; in others, it exists at the point of their application. However, more commonly, Gurdjieff states that, although the third force is a property of objective reality, it is not observable at all in the normal subjective state of consciousness. For this reason, he describes humans, in the state of waking sleep, as being “third force blind.”

*The Law of Seven*<sup>25</sup> describes the lawful progression of seven notes or seven “steps” in the fulfillment or realization of any process on any level of scale. The law is also known as the Law of the Octave because the completion of any pattern results in its realization on a different level which comprises the eighth note. The major musical scale, which Gurdjieff said ancient esoteric sources devised as a vehicle to preserve the Law of Seven, provides the names of the seven notes or steps—*do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si*—and the eighth note, *do*, which exists on a different level of scale. The Law of Seven embodies *the principle of the discontinuity of vibrations*: that is, the rate of development between the notes, in the progression of any octave, is not uniform but, rather, consists of accelerations and decelerations. This principle contradicts the assumption, within modern science, of *the continuity of vibrations*: whereby vibrations, in any process, are assumed to be continuous as long as the original impulse, with which they originate, is stronger than the resistance imposed by the medium in which they are progressing.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the Law of Seven stipulates that an octave will not develop or unfold in a continuous, unobstructed fashion. Instead, there are accelerations and decelerations in the process of an octave’s fulfillment. Furthermore, there are two points or “intervals” in the octave—between *mi-fa* and *si-do*—in which an external force or “shock” is necessary in order to further the process. (Within Fourth Way nomenclature, a “shock” identifies any stimulus which serves to awaken one, even momentarily. With respect to octave

progressions, shocks provide the impetus for the process to bridge the *mi-fa* and *si-do* intervals.) If the shocks are not provided, the octave ceases to develop and remains incomplete, or it is deflected and begins to proceed in a direction quite unlike that of its original course.

According to Gurdjieff, *everything* in the Universe is the manifestation of octave processes in various states of progression: either *ascending* (that is, increasing in refinement and consciousness) or *descending* (increasing in density and mechanicalness). The Earth, he says, is created and sustained as part of a descending octave, which he calls *The Ray of Creation*. From the Absolute—the supreme source, prime mover, or God—a hierarchy of world orders emanates. As the octave descends, each note or step is associated with a successive world order or plane, each of which constitutes a distinct level of increasingly dense materiality and lower consciousness, which is governed by an increasing number of categories of laws. (Our Ray of Creation involves but one of perhaps an infinite number of world orders emanating from the supreme source.) The names of the planes that comprise the Ray of Creation are: *do* (the Absolute); *si* (All Worlds); *la* (All Suns); *sol* (our Sun); *fa* (All Planets); *mi* (The Earth); *re* (The Moon); and *do* (The Absolute). In this model, the Absolute is governed by one law, All Worlds are under the rule of a trinity of forces, and each successive world is subject to an increasing number of categories or classes of laws. The Earth is said to be governed by forty-eight classes of laws; while the moon, which is the last note or step from the bottom, is under the influence of ninety-six classes of laws.

In addition to this involutory current, by which worlds are created from Above (or the state of perfect unity), there also exists an evolutionary current. At lower levels of Creation, matter-energies can begin, by chance or a combination of favourable circumstances, to evolve and become more refined, intelligent, and unified. However, such evolutionary transformations can only proceed so far without what Gurdjieff calls “Help from Above.” According to J.G. Bennett, Gurdjieff taught that a “high level of energy is generated at an uncon-

ditioned level of being, as a corrective to the process of entropy, and this energy makes evolution possible.”<sup>27</sup> However, in terms of individual human beings, Gurdjieff emphasized that evolution is restricted to the evolution of consciousness, adding that consciousness cannot evolve mechanically, but only as a consequence of willful effort. And because of the power of the forces opposing that transformation of consciousness, he told Ouspensky that, in a sense, this work—the awakening of human consciousness—is “against nature and against God.”

Gurdjieff claims that human beings should be considered to be miniature Universes or, more correctly, unfinished worlds. Because the higher dimensions are composed of more refined matter and penetrate the lower, coarser worlds, Gurdjieff explained that it is possible to know the Universe by knowing oneself. In a statement which has profound implications for comprehending the integral relation between psychology and cosmology, he claimed that:

All the matter of the world that surrounds us, the food that we eat, the water that we drink, the air that we breathe, the stones that our houses are built of, our own bodies—everything is permeated by all the matters that exist in the universe. There is no need to study or investigate the sun in order to discover the matter of the solar world: this matter exists in ourselves and is the result of the division of our atoms. In the same way we have in us the matter of all other worlds. Man is, in the full sense of the term, a “miniature universe”; in him are all the matters of which the universe consists; the same forces, the same laws that govern the life of the universe, operate in him; therefore in studying man we can study the whole world, just as in studying the world we can study man.”<sup>28</sup>

To his extraordinary claims that man is a “miniature universe” and that, therefore, it was possible to study the world in man and vice versa, Gurdjieff added one essential qualification:

... a complete parallel between man and the world can only be drawn if we take “man” in the full sense of the word, that is, one

whose inherent powers are developed. An undeveloped man, a man who has not completed the course of his evolution, cannot be taken as a complete picture or plan of the universe—he is an unfinished world.”<sup>29</sup>

Although the Fourth Way describes the existence of higher being-bodies—the astral, mental, and causal—Gurdjieff asserted that there is nothing permanent about these subtle bodies and that they are entirely unnecessary for one who lives in a state of waking sleep. Nevertheless, he maintained that the acquisition of higher states of consciousness depended upon the accumulation of the more refined energies that compose the subtle bodies. By “coating” the subtle bodies through the process of awakening and acquiring consciousness, it is possible to realize the realities of the more subtle planes than the material world which we apprehend in our normal waking sleep. Thus, by being in the astral body, one exists at the level of the Ray of Creation above that of the Earth in the planetary world. In the same way, the crystallization of the mental body involves the materiality of the level of the sun, and that of the causal body is composed of the same substances of the solar system or All Suns. To possess these higher being-bodies would be to complete oneself, to have developed all of one’s inherent powers, and to know oneself as a miniature Universe or “a microcosm of the macrocosm.” In essence, Gurdjieff said, one must transform the materiality of one’s being in order *to be* and *to matter* at these higher levels of consciousness and reality.

Thus, the esoteric maxim—that “man is a microcosm of the macrocosm”—means that, within each human being, there exists a “cosmos” or “inner Universe,” which mirrors the essential principles and structure of the external cosmos. The key to understanding the meaning of this seemingly absurd claim depends upon the study and direct realization of the hidden dimensions of our inner being. That aim is consistent with the original meaning of the term “esotericism”: that is, “*further in*,” from the Greek, *esotero*. By developing higher states of consciousness and being, an individual’s apprehension and understanding of the inner cosmos progresses “further in” and, by

deepening his self-knowledge knows himself as a multidimensional being. Furthermore, esoteric teachings assert that, in doing so, he will know his higher spiritual nature and essential Self, by existing in and apprehending the higher dimensions of Creation. To be conscious of oneself in higher states is to “know oneself” by penetrating the illusions of normal waking consciousness, to apprehend that one is a “microcosm of the macrocosm,” and to be at one with the Universe.

## Concluding Remarks

Clearly, the psychology of consciousness which Gurdjieff proffers is radically different from that which modern science puts forth. Rather than viewing consciousness as being the end product of the brain’s neurological processes and, thus, as being nothing but a term to describe our psychological functions, Gurdjieff regards it as a substantive, universal property which manifests differentially through both a hierarchy of world orders and through a human being’s seven brains. In keeping with the collapse of the Great Nest of Being into the flatland of materialism, modern scientists do not recognize the involutory current, nor do they recognize the existence of higher dimensions of consciousness and being. And although they do recognize the evolutionary current—they do so only insofar as it is understood as a blind process which manifests through changes in the material realm. Consequently, contemporary science is limited to evolutionary explanations in which complexity must be accounted for as emerging from lower, more elementary and mechanical levels of matter. Of course, this process is represented as being entirely random and purposeless. In that limited perspective, there is no consideration of the existence of higher dimensions as causal sources which inform and illuminate manifestations in the material realm through involutory processes. By contrast, within the Fourth Way and all esoteric teachings, recognizing the existence of an involutory current and trying to understand its dynamics constitutes the beginning of conceptualizing and apprehending radically different psychological and cosmological systems. Moreover, by conceptualizing the evolution of consciousness as

being a matter of intentional and willful effort, as Gurdjieff does, virtually all and everything is cast in an entirely new light.

In an ensuing article, the Fourth Way teaching will be elaborated by examining several additional critical psychological concepts. A more detailed examination of the fundamental cosmic laws will also be undertaken in order to explicate the integral relationship between Gurdjieff’s cosmology and psychology.

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- <sup>1</sup> Befitting a man of mystery, the year of Gurdjieff’s birth is uncertain and his biographers have adduced evidence for various dates ranging from 1866 to 1877. In a recent work, Paul Beekman Taylor examines the evidence for the various dates in great detail. He concludes that: “... I find it difficult to ignore Gurdjieff’s consistent indication of 1866 as his birth year.” [*Gurdjieff: A New Life*, (London: Eureka Editions, 2008), 17-18]. On the other hand, in *Struggle of the Magicians: Exploring the Teacher-Student Relationship*, (Fairfax, CA: Arete Communications, 1996), William Patrick Patterson agrees with J.G. Bennett’s conclusion (in *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*, [London: Turnstone Books, 1973]) that Gurdjieff was born in 1872.
  - <sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it is the author’s opinion that addressing questions regarding Gurdjieff’s status as a master is of the utmost importance in considering and elucidating fundamental questions regarding the origins and nature of human consciousness. In the next article in this series, the issue of the relationship between knowledge and being will be examined in terms of the Fourth Way. That discussion will involve an assessment of Gurdjieff’s status as ‘a master’; an issue which has significant implications when contrasting the esoteric and modern scientific perspectives on the nature of human consciousness.
  - <sup>3</sup> There are numerous informative and insightful books written by those who knew and studied directly with Gurdjieff. P.D. Ouspensky’s seminal work, *In Search of the Miraculous*, consists of his brilliant reporting of various talks that Gurdjieff gave to his Russian pupils from 1915 to 1917, as well as his own insightful commentaries on the teaching and his recounting of his intriguing relationship with Gurdjieff. *Views from The Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff as Recollected by his Pupils*

(New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1973) is an outstanding collection of lectures that Gurdjieff gave, from 1918 to 1924, in various locations. A more recent collection, drawn from the papers of Janet Flanner and Solita Solano—which was translated from French to English by Joseph Azize — is *Transcripts of Gurdjieff's Meetings 1941-1946*, (London: Book Studio, 2009).

There are three major biographies, in English, of Gurdjieff: James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle: An exploration of the lives and work of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky and others*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1980); James Moore, *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth*, (Rockport, MA: Element Inc., 1991); and the aforementioned *G.I. Gurdjieff: A New Life* by Paul Beekman Taylor.

Writings by Gurdjieff's pupils include: Margaret Anderson, *The Unknowable Gurdjieff*, (New York: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1970); J.G. Bennett, *Gurdjieff: Making A New World* (London: Turnstone Books, 1973) and *Witness: The Autobiography of John Bennett*, (London: Turnstone Books, 1975); Thomas and Olga de Hartmann, *Our Life With Mr. Gurdjieff* [Definitive Edition] (Sandpoint, ID: Morning Light Press, 2011); C.S. Nott, *Teachings Of Gurdjieff*, (New York: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1961) and *Journey Through This World: Meetings with Gurdjieff Orage and Ouspensky*, (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1969); Fritz Peters, *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1961) and *Gurdjieff Remembered*, (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1974); Kenneth Walker, *Venture With Ideas*, (Oxford: The Alden Press, 1951).

4 The issue of Gurdjieff's "mission" will be discussed in the next article in this series—as it is integrally related to the questions regarding the nature of his being and the level of his knowledge.

5 *Struggle of the Magicians: Exploring the Teacher-Student Relationship*, xxii-xxiii.

6 *In Search of the Miraculous*, 286.

7 *Ibid.*, 21.

8 *Ibid.*, 59.

9 *Ibid.*, 116.

10 *Ibid.*, 116-117.

11 *Ibid.*, 104-105.

12 *Ibid.*, 117-118.

13 *Ibid.*, 118.

14 *Ibid.*, 117.

15 P.D. Ouspensky, *The Fourth Way* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 120.

16 P.D. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), xiv. Although Ouspensky had argued this position regarding consciousness prior to meeting Gurdjieff, it is entirely congruent with Gurdjieff's conceptualization of consciousness.

17 *In Search Of the Miraculous*, 146.

18 *Ibid.*, 145.

19 While the parallels between Gurdjieff's concept of the seven centers and the chakras are readily apparent, it is neither useful nor appropriate to assume that the centers are simply Gurdjieff's term for the chakras. As the discussion of the centers and their wrong work is elaborated in this article and a subsequent submission devoted to the Fourth Way, it should become clear that the psychological, phenomenological, and epistemological emphasis in Gurdjieff's discussion of the centers is quite distinct from more traditional descriptions and explications of the chakras and their functions.

20 *In Search of the Miraculous*, 107-108.

21 *Ibid.*, 151.

22 *Ibid.*, 151.

23 I am indebted to my friend and colleague, Christopher Holmes, for his insightful analysis of the extent to which modern psychology is pervaded by dualistic conceptions. For an excellent discussion of "The Dualities of Formatory Mind and Formatory Psychology," see Holmes' *Psychological Illusions: Explorations of the G.I. Gurdjieff Fourth Way Teaching*, (Kemptville, ON: Zeropoint Point Publications, 2010), 70-73. Amongst the many Fourth Way books, *Psychological Illusions* is an outstanding work; providing perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of both Gurdjieff's psychological and cosmological ideas since Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*.

24 In his magnum opus, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, Gurdjieff refers to the Law of Three as "the sacred law of *Triamazikamno*." [G.I. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything: Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1964)].

25 In *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, Gurdjieff calls the Law of Seven: "the *Sacred Haptaparaparshinokh*."

26 Basarab Nicolescu, a Romanian physicist and writer, notes that Gurdjieff's presentation of

the idea of the ‘discontinuity of vibrations’ to his Russian pupils, in 1915, contains allusions to the concurrent revolutionary breakthroughs in physics that were creating quantum mechanics and, thus, the abandonment of the idea of ‘the continuity of vibrations.’ Clearly, the Fourth Way teaching contained the idea of the quantum nature of reality long before modern Physicists discovered it and began to formalize its mathematical properties. For a fascinating and deeply insightful appreciation of

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“Gurdjieff’s Philosophy of Nature,” see Nicolescu’s contribution to Jacob Needleman and George Baker, editors, *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching*, (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1996), 37-69.

<sup>27</sup> *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*, 191.

<sup>28</sup> *In Search of the Miraculous*, 88.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.