

## ETERNITY AND INFINITY

*'The supreme is among us and we must be aware that at every moment and in every place, we are in the presence of that divine mystery.'*

*Father Bede Griffiths*

### Time and Eternity

In classical philosophy the term "eternity" referred to what exists outside time. In modern times, standard dictionaries define eternity as an infinitely long period of time, a duration without beginning or end. Synonyms include endlessness, foreverness and perpetuity. However, in more religious terms, eternity is a referent for the timeless state into which the soul is believed to pass at death. In different cultures and historical epochs, eternity is referred to as the next world, afterlife, heaven, paradise or nirvana. And finally, in a colloquial context, eternity is used in everyday language to describe the perception of time that seems endless, with no end in sight: "I've been stuck in this traffic jam for an eternity!"

Countless philosophers, writers, poets, mystics, and even contemporary psychologists, have contemplated the enigmatic nature and enduring mystery of eternity:

- Hermes: "Eternity is the *soul* of the cosmos."
- Aristotle: "That which constitutes the enclosing limit of the whole universe, and embraces the infinite period and the infinity of all things is eternity."
- Marcus Aurelius: "What we do in life ripples in eternity."
- Jacob Boehme: "Time is found inside eternity."
- Zen master Seppo: "If you want to know what eternity means, it is no further than this moment."
- William Blake: "To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower, hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour."
- Khalil Gibran: "Trust in dreams, for in them is hidden the gate of eternity."
- A.R. Orage: "Eternity is the possibility of the actualization of every possibility in a situation *at the same time*."
- P.D. Ouspensky: "Eternity is infinity for time."

- Rodney Collin: "At death we enter timelessness or eternity. From that state of timelessness all points within time are equally accessible."
- John G. Bennett: "Eternity is the zone of experience in which things do not go on as processes, but are what they are."
- Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: "Just as every drop of the ocean carries the taste of the ocean, so does every moment carry the taste of eternity."
- Ken Wilber: "In the light of Eternity, past, present and future are simultaneously contained in this Now-moment."

Many spiritual teachings have a more nuanced understanding of eternity than conventional beliefs. For instance, John G. Bennett, a student of Gurdjieff, associated normal, successive time with *function*, while eternity had to do with *being* and the pattern of things and events. Maurice Nicoll, also a student of Gurdjieff, proposed the existence of an invisible, higher order of reality connected with eternity. This higher dimensional reality determines the form and extent of any existence in time. In *Living Time*, he writes: "Eternity does not refer to the three-dimensional world in passing-time. It refers to an order of existence belonging to *higher space*. Eternity is not time, nor is it *Time-itself*, but some overshadowing totality that comprehends *All* in itself."

In the same vein, professor of comparative religion Ravi Ravindra argues that eternity is conceptually different than passing-time and should not be envisioned as endless duration, as time that lasts forever: "This concept of eternity is a continuation in time – forever, endless, ceaseless, everlasting. It is essentially a linear motion in which time is a quantitative extension to infinity." The true meaning of eternity, in his view, is a state of *being* in time that is accompanied by wonder, inner silence, love and reflection:

In the second understanding, unlike in the first, there is a qualitative difference between *time* and *eternity*. *Eternal* is thus *timeless*, not in the sense that it occurs in zero time, instantaneously, but rather in the sense that it pertains to a dimension of being (including consciousness and perception) other than that of time. This eternity is an attribute of being, but it is not a concept, simply because the mind functions only in time. One cannot *think* about eternity or timelessness – as Kant pointed out long ago, as have many others both before and after him. Jiddu Krishnamurti (*Commentaries on Living*) has rightly said: "Thought cannot know the timeless; it is not a further acquisition, a further achievement; there is no going towards it. It is a state of being in which thought, time, is not." *Everlasting* and *timeless* are two understandings of what is *eternal*; and they lie in different spheres of existence. Everlasting is not timeless. Anything that is everlasting is still within the finite-infinite dichotomy, whereas timelessness transcends this contradiction, for the category of time does not apply to it. (1)

P.D. Ouspensky developed a three-dimensional model of time. Ordinary linear time is the first dimension. Eternity is the second dimension of time and is conceptualized as a line perpendicular to the first dimension or line of time and intersecting it. This vertical line passes through every moment of time and is the line of infinite existence of each moment. Ravi Ravindra: "Spiritual time is in a way orthogonal to scientific time. It lies in a dimension wholly independent of the domain of time, although it is able to intersect with time at any moment. It is the dimension of eternity."

In his visionary book *Tertium Organum*, Ouspensky argues that the idea of eternity as a second dimension of time challenges our notion of cause and effect:

Eternity is not an infinite extension in time, but a *line perpendicular to time*; for, if eternity exists, each moment is eternal. The line of time proceeds in the order of sequence of events according to their causal interdependence – first the cause, then the effect: *before, now, after*. The line of *eternity* proceeds in a direction perpendicular to this line. It is impossible to understand time without forming an idea of eternity, just as it is impossible to understand space without the idea of time. From the point of view of eternity *time* in no way differs from the other lines and extensions of space – length, breadth and height. This means that just as space contains things we do not see or, to put it differently, more things exist than those we can see, so in time 'events' exist before our consciousness comes into contact with them, and they still exist after our consciousness has withdrawn from them. (2)

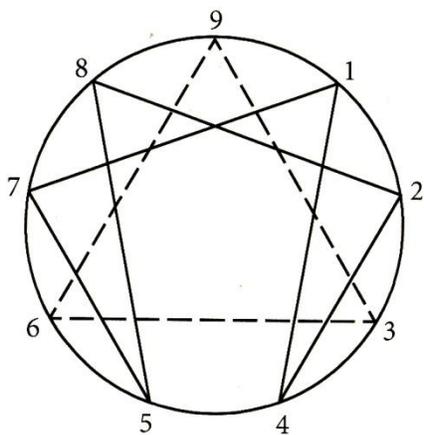
According to Maurice Nicoll, every moment of time is influenced not only by the horizontal line of past events, but also by influences emanating from the vertical dimension of eternity. The concept of level and scale suggests that everything is contained in something greater which gives origin and meaning to what is lesser. In terms of the dimensions of time, the higher vertical dimension of time (eternity) meets the horizontal line of past, present and future. Nicoll: "Where this vertical and horizontal line meet, in the point of *now*, stands man: and into this *now* of man enters causes and effects from the line of passing-time, from past and future; and influences from the vertical dimension, from what ranks above the order of time. The 'cause' of our existence does not only lie in the past. Along the vertical line is cause coming from another direction – from *eternity* – and entering every moment into the present."

### Time, Eternity and the Enneagram

Gurdjieff introduced the enneagram to the West and considered this universal symbol to be central to his teaching: "The enneagram is the fundamental hieroglyph of a universal language which has as many different meanings as there are levels of human beings."

The symbol of the enneagram expresses the law of seven in its union with the law of three (the two central principles in Gurdjieff's cosmological system). The law of seven governs *processes* while the law of three determines the nature of *interactions*.

The enneagram includes both time and consciousness in its shape or structure. The three parts of the enneagram (outer circle, triangle and 142857 figure) represent three dimensions of time. "In current physics, there is only one dimension of time, and the necessary consequence is that there must be a progressive overall increase in entropy, or disorder, in the universe. Gurdjieff thought that the consciousness of the universe is maintained, and this is possible by virtue of there being two other dimensions of time. Each of the dimensions of time corresponds to a particular brain of three-brained beings, or one could say that each brain is tuned to a different dimension of time, and this gives us our unique possibilities."



According to Gurdjieff, the triangle represents 'unity in multiplicity,' a principle central to his cosmological teaching: "The multiple meanings of the triangle, as representing the life of a thing or process, the higher unity in multiplicity, and also the dependence of processes on interactions with the world outside, indicate that the horizontal relationships between entities or processes and the vertical relationship of entities with the higher or God are two aspects of the same thing . . . One could even say that God is not separate from the universe, but *is*, in some aspect at least, the conscious universe, which in turn is sustained by the mutual awareness of individual consciousnesses."

One of the most central of the ideas of objective knowledge is the idea of the unity of everything, of unity in diversity. From ancient time people who have understood the content and the meaning of this idea, and have seen in it the basis of objective knowledge, have endeavored to find a way of transmitting this idea in a form comprehensible to others . . . But objective knowledge, the idea of unity included, belongs to objective consciousness. The forms which express this knowledge when perceived by subjective consciousness are inevitably distorted and, instead of truth, they create more and more delusions.

With objective consciousness it is possible to see and feel the unity of everything. But for subjective consciousness the world is split up into millions of separate and unconnected phenomena. Attempts to connect these phenomena into some sort of system in a scientific or philosophical way lead to nothing because man cannot reconstruct the idea of the whole starting from separate facts and they cannot divine the principles of the division of the whole without knowing the laws upon which this division is based . . . Realizing the imperfection and weakness of ordinary language the people who have possessed objective knowledge have tried to express the idea of unity in 'myths,' in 'symbols,' and in particular 'verbal formulas' which, having been transmitted without alteration, have carried on the idea from one school to another, often from one epoch to another. The higher psychic centers work in man's higher states of consciousness: the 'higher emotional' and the 'higher mental.' The aim of 'myths' and 'symbols' was to reach man's higher centers, to transmit to him ideas inaccessible to the intellect and to transmit them in such forms as would exclude the possibility of false interpretations. 'Myths' were destined for the higher emotional center; 'symbols' for the higher thinking center. (3)

The six-sided figure (hexagram) is created by dividing 1 by 7:  $1/7 = 0.142857142857 \dots$ , repeating forever. The equilateral triangle connects points 3, 6 and 9 on the outer circle, and is completely independent from the six points of the hexagram (1-4-2-8-5-7). The circle moves clockwise through equal intervals from 1 to 9. Gurdjieff described the significance of these three components of the enneagram in *In Search of the Miraculous*:

The isolated existence of a thing or phenomenon under examination is the closed circle of an eternally returning and uninterruptedly flowing process. The circle symbolizes this process. The separate points in the division of the circumference symbolizes the steps of the process. The symbol as a whole is *do*, that is, something with an orderly and complete existence. It is a circle – a completed process. It is the *zero* of our decimal system; in its inscription it represents a closed cycle. It contains within itself everything necessary for its own existence. (4)

In *The Enneagram of G.I. Gurdjieff*, Christian Wertenbaker describes how these three figures symbolically correspond to the three dimensions of time:

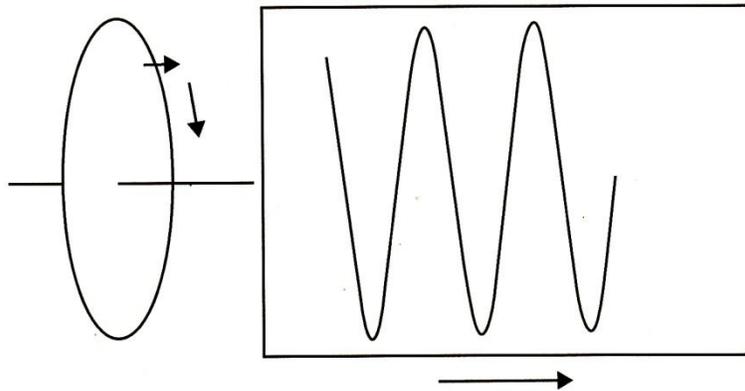
The enneagram has three parts, each of which can be related to one of the dimensions of time. The movement around the circle from re to do or from 1 to 9 represents movement and progression in ordinary time. The 142857 figure represents the looking forward and back, over multiple time scales, that the mind is capable of, and the triangle represents eternity . . . Movement around the circle according to the notes of the scale is a step-by-step process of transformation, which also has a cyclical, or more correctly, spiral aspect. The body's transformations proceed in ordinary time, in a step-by-step progression. On the

other hand, the mind can jump back and forth in time and possibility without going through intermediate steps. This corresponds to the group of integers under multiplication formed by the numbers 142857, multiplication being a 'faster' process than addition, on a different level, in a sense . . . Intelligence, by remembering and anticipating, planning, arranging and collecting is the ultimate antidote to entropy. J.G. Bennett, a student of Gurdjieff, called the action of intelligence the "overcoming of hazard." He describes a variety of processes which are made possible by looking forward and backward according to the 142857 hexagram. For instance, in the process of preparing a meal, the cook has to look forward to what the raw ingredients will be in order to lay out the necessary kitchen tools, and, slightly further along, he has to anticipate the people who will eat the meal and the layout of the table where the meal will be eaten in order to cook the right things and amounts. The way Bennett describes the interactions between the progressive process of making a meal and the intelligent movements forward and backward in time and possibility of the cook's awareness seems sensible and non-arbitrary. Anthony Blake, one of Bennett's students, has a particularly nice expression of the significance of the hexagram: "The lines weave their cohesion of memories and anticipations, eternally present, expanding the range and depth of the 'here and now'." In any case, the general principle is indisputable: physical processes cannot move along in time except stepwise, while intelligence has no such limits, which is how it can overcome entropy. Whether it can overcome entropy only locally, or whether, as Gurdjieff claims, the universe was created in such a way as to be truly self-sustaining, a real 'perpetual motion machine' is a more difficult question . . . Perpetual motion is only possible if consciousness is part of the picture – in part because consciousness can use friction productively – and requires more than one dimension of time. The inexorable increase in entropy in the universe claimed by classical physics could be seen as a result of two related deficiencies in its worldview: the virtual exclusion of consciousness and an incomplete understanding of time. (5)

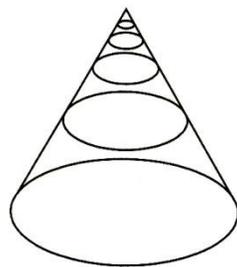
The dimensions of time can also be expressed pictorially through the transformation of fundamental geometric shapes such as the line, circle, triangle and cone. For instance, the movement in ordinary time along the outer circle of the enneagram becomes cyclical as it completes one octave and begins another. When this movement along a circle is projected onto a perpendicular moving plane it creates a sine wave – the basic pattern of vibration:

Ouspensky postulated three dimensions of time: linear time, as we usually think of it, moving steadily from past to future at "one second per second"; the "line of eternity" or the perpetual existence of each moment; and the "line of the actualization of other possibilities which were contained in the proceeding moment but were not actualized in time." The second dimension, "eternity," is more subtle than the first and third of these dimensions. In a sense it is a necessary backdrop for the other two, for without the perpetual

existence of each moment, in some form, neither change nor possibility would have any meaning. Put another way, the measurement of time requires a standard for comparison, which is necessarily cyclical. So, there is a connection between the idea of eternity and cyclical phenomena. The projection in linear time of a cyclical phenomenon is a wave: the familiar sine wave can be constructed by projecting a point moving uniformly around a circle onto a moving plane, perpendicular to the plane of the circle. (6)



If time is truly three-dimensional, then those dimensions must, in some sense, be perpendicular to each other, just like the three spatial dimensions. The enneagram symbolizes the perpendicular structure of the three dimensions of time. In the enneagram the circle represents the first dimension of ordinary time, while the triangle symbolizes eternity, the second dimension. As shown below, the triangle and the circle are two perpendicular views of a cone.



Christian Wertenbaker relates the triangle and circle aspects of the enneagram to the dimensions of time, the human brain, and the vibratory nature of reality:

A number of interesting transformations are observable, corresponding to the way that the different aspects of time can change into each other. The triangle, seen as a cone, contains a progressively larger series of circles emanating from its apex, corresponding to the progressive increase in wavelength and decrease in frequency of the vibrations emanating from the creator. The triangle, repre-

senting the dimension of eternity, thus is intimately connected with vibration and with cyclic phenomena. The emotional brain is intimately related to the energies of the body, to its "life." The autonomic nervous system, which Gurdjieff equates with the emotional brain, regulates all the energies of the body. But movement in ordinary time, along the outer circle of the enneagram, becomes cyclical once the octave is complete, thus also corresponding to a vibration. (7)

## Consciousness and Eternity

In our normal state of consciousness, we are prisoners of passing-time, and are unable to enter into higher states of consciousness where time is transcended and the timeless experience of eternity is realized. In his teaching, Gurdjieff emphasized that there are degrees and levels of consciousness: "By observing in yourself the appearance and the 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. You will then see that you can think, feel, act, speak, work, *without being conscious of it.*"

Self-remembering is conscious awareness in which one is acutely aware of *being*, of *I Am*. Ouspensky connected self-remembering with vivid memories of past experiences: "I saw that I really only remembered those moments in the past in which *I remembered myself*. Of the others *I know only that they took place*. I am not able wholly to revive them, to experience them again. But the moments when I had remembered myself were alive and were in no way different from the present."

Ouspensky's observation led him to an important insight: In everyday life "*we do not remember ourselves; we live and act and reason in deep sleep, not metaphorically but in absolute reality. And, at the same time, we can remember ourselves if we make sufficient efforts, we can awaken.*" The recognition of the absence of consciousness in our daily life and the possibility of the conscious creation of an awakened consciousness was, for Ouspensky, the key to spiritual transformation. The ability to stabilize consciousness in a state of self-remembering or self-awareness opens the possibility of obtaining a higher state of objective consciousness which transcends time as we know it. "The present moment is the point of escape from our three-dimensional prison of space and time. For *in this present moment*, remembering oneself, one can put oneself in contact with a place outside time, and with the help of eternity, where all possibilities in their fullness are already waiting."

Maurice Nicoll places this idea in the context of our inner psychology, our qualitative experience of life. Our usual notion of eternity, Nicoll points out, is bound up with our 'time-psychology,' which can only conceive of time in terms of quantity, i.e. a vast stretch of time going on and on, without limit, in a straight line. However, time and eternity belong to totally different levels or dimensions of reality. Eternity is connected with the world of *being*; time with the world of *becoming*. In *Living Time*, he writes: "Eternity enters into *now* and it is with eternity that we must connect all other real possibilities. We have no idea of an already-

existing *ALL*. To escape out of time, out of the flow of becoming, we begin to see other orders and possibilities of existence."

We cannot hold on to any thing or person in time, because what it or he or she really *is*, is not there, *in time*. All things are changing in time, some slowly, as the contours of mountains, some more quickly, as our bodies, some very quickly, as a house on fire. Time is change – on all sorts of different scales; and the phenomenal world is made up of this continual changing, at different rates, of everything, like an enormous clock full of wheels. Outside, there is this stream of becoming; and within, a stream of ever-changing thoughts and feelings, a succession of different *I*'s, of fragmentary bits of oneself – an inner world of becoming in which nothing *is*, in which we possess nothing and do not possess ourselves. But we know that what is stable was always put beyond time. In man, it was said, there is something behind his 'time-psychology,' some definite possibility of *being*, called 'eternity' or eternal life . . . The real distinction, therefore, between time and eternity is *qualitative* and so must lie in the realm of psychological experience. Considered abstractly, no *quantity* of time can produce eternity, just as no matter how far we extend a line we cannot produce a square or a cube. Considered psychologically, no quantity of temporal experience can constitute a moment of eternal experience. (8)

Most people are unaware of the possibility of experiencing the timeless dimension of eternity due to the limitations of our normal state of consciousness which is unable to perceive higher dimensions of reality. This situation is depicted metaphorically in an imaginary world of two dimensions such as a sheet of paper ("Flatland") (9), where the inhabitants are unable to perceive three-dimensional objects such as a pencil.

In the analogy, a whole pencil passing through the sheet represents eternity, which is invisible to the paper-dwelling inhabitants who can only perceive a cross-section of the pencil at any one time. "Following only what their senses depict, they derive from their sensory surroundings a life in passing-time, which seems confined to each moment only. In this successively single-moment life into which they fall, there is no sense of their life as *eternity*. They feel their existence only in a time-sense."

Another way of understanding eternity is to conceive it as the 'infinite repetition' or 'eternal recurrence' of the first dimension of time. The circle of time, as expressed by the enneagram, becomes a spiral of time as a further dimension of time is added. Ouspensky alludes to this idea in *A New Model of the Universe*: "The closed curve of the circle of time (first dimension) is the life or existence of every object, of every separate system, which is examined in time. But the circle of time does not break up or disappear. It continues to exist, and joining other, previously formed circles, it passes into eternity. Eternity is the infinite repetition of the completed circle of life, an infinite repetition of *existence*."

Ouspensky's student Rodney Collin expanded on this model by including a third dimension of time. Events in one's life such as accidental occurrences or those produced by cause and effect are said to belong to the first dimension of time. However, there are other classes of events that belong to higher dimensions of time. *Fate* lies in the second dimension of time (eternity) as recurrence or repetition – an infinite reliving of the first dimension of time. And, *miracles* originate in the third dimension of time (the existence of all possibilities and impossibilities).

The two higher dimensions of time can only be understood and experienced in higher states of consciousness. In *The Theory of Celestial Influence*, Collin explores this conception: "The greater the consciousness, the further along the line of time will memory penetrate. But when consciousness rises beyond a certain intensity a quite new possibility enters. There is a faculty in us which knows our fate, i.e. which preserves memory from previous recurrences." Collin implies that in higher states of consciousness it is possible to contact not only the past and future of linear time, but also pass into the past and future of eternity:

Now if one life is a recurrence of that which went before, what we thought of as the circle of human life is in fact a spiral. The destiny or totality of a human being now appears not as a circle existing in time, the long body of a man, but as a spiral existing in eternity . . . This is the eternal recurrence which Ouspensky penetrated, and of which Nietzsche wrote: "Desire to live again, for that will be your lot in any case." The circle of one's life lies parallel to the circle of that before and the circle of that after, forming as it were a repeated image of it in every detail. The day of a man's birth in this life lies next to the day of his birth in the last life and in the next; the day of his marriage lies next to those other days of his marriage then; the day of his death is paralleled by the days of all his other deaths. And every sight, sound and motion that filled those days before must fill them again, and again. When a man first hears this idea, he asks: "How can I know? Why cannot I remember?" In the ordinary way he cannot know, and cannot remember. He cannot remember other lives for the same reason that he cannot remember most of his present one – *because he is not conscious of his existence in it* . . . In any case, we may say that increase of consciousness in man's present life must mean increase in consciousness in all directions, that is, not only into the past and future of time, but also into the past and future of eternity. (10)

### Past-Present-Future

When time is conceived as multi-dimensional, our understanding of past, present and future undergoes a dramatic transformation. Both past and future are seen as fully existent in every moment of time. In mathematical terms, time is no longer viewed as a one-dimensional line but as a three-dimensional cube which includes both actualizations and possibilities or potentialities. P.D. Ouspensky speaks to this revolutionary concept in *Tertium Organum*: "In the past, in what is behind us, lies not only what was, but also *what could have been*. In the same way, in the future lies not only what will be *but also all that may be*. The past and future

are equally undetermined; the past and the future equally exist in all their possibilities, and equally exist simultaneously with the present."

Premonitions of future events which eventually become true suggest that, in some sense, the future (or possible futures) already exists in another dimension of time. John G. Bennett reports such an experience in a vivid dream he had which foretold an actual event in his life:

While I was living in Turkey in 1919, I had a very vivid dream: I was standing with my back to a wall watching a fire. I saw a great crowd of people, and furniture was being thrown out of a window to be caught by the firemen. Then, some kind of wardrobe came out of the window and the firemen, who obviously thought they could not catch it, got out of the way. It crashed on the ground and I saw it collapse. Five days after the dream occurred, I heard the shout of a fire warning. By then I had quite forgotten about the dream and went out of curiosity to see where the fire was. I found myself standing just as I had in my dream and saw the same things happen. But the moment I remember most was when I began to think, "Now, will that wardrobe come out of the window or not?" It made an extraordinary impression on me when it actually came out and I saw it crash. I said to myself: "All our understanding about time is wrong. In some way the future exists, or I couldn't have seen that fire five days before it happened . . . It was this that first put me on the track of different worlds, including worlds beyond prediction. The events that really matter to us are the ones belonging to the higher worlds. These events are not mechanical and do not belong to the predictable future. (11)

Bennett theorizes that precognitive experiences imply the reality of higher 'worlds' which interpenetrate and influence events at denser, more material levels of everyday phenomenal existence. He argues that the constraints of past and future do not exist in higher worlds or levels of reality. The rules of time and space do not apply as they do in lower, denser worlds: "The more 'spiritual' a mode of existence is, the more it can change and transform. In the higher worlds, there is less and less of a mode of existence in which everything is just a combination of already existing materials. The substance of the higher worlds is 'ever-new,' able to create its own forms and not have to derive them from external sources."

One of the great mysteries of time is the continual disappearance of the present moment as it flows from past to future. P.D. Ouspensky: "The past and future cannot be *non-existent*, for, if they do not exist, the present does not exist either. They must exist together *somewhere*, only we do not see them."

We must admit that the past, the present and the future do not differ from one another in any way, that the *only* thing that exists is *the present – the Eternal Now*. But we do not see it, because at every given moment we are only aware of a small fragment of this present; this fragment we regard as actually

existing, and deny real existence to everything else. Once we accept this, our view concerning everything that surrounds us must undergo a great change.  
(12)

One of the implications of an expanded understanding of time, which includes multiple dimensions, is the relationship between past, present and future, and the direction of the flow of time. It allows for the possibility that the future can affect the present, just as the past influences the present through memory. As well, the present can affect the past – a concept that Gurdjieff described as “repairing the past through remorse of conscience and forgiveness of past actions.”

In *Living Time*, Maurice Nicoll describes a greater ‘Space-Time’ continuum which encompasses past, present and future in one unified whole, allowing instantaneous connections between all possible times: “The interconnection of the world as a whole in higher dimensions suggests such a possibility. Higher space-time dimensions signify possibilities, connections, and inter-relations undreamt of in the narrower space and time familiar to us. In the words of German mathematician Hermann Weyl: ‘It is possible to experience events now that would in part be an effect of my future resolves and actions’.”

Since the life is extended in *Time* itself, the effect of the *present* upon the *past* has also to be considered as a possibility. The effects of what we do now, from this standpoint, are to be thought of as spreading in two definitely existing ‘directions’ not apprehended by our sensuous contact with the ‘world.’ We call these directions ‘past’ and ‘future.’ From this point of view our past life, our present life, and our future life are always in *functional* relationship. There are three elements, or three influences, at work. The past is no dead thing nor the future a blank. The consequences of acts lying ahead of us and the consequences of acts lying in the past mingle with the consequences of acts lying in the present, and the determining point is *now*. (13)

In *Time and the Soul*, Jacob Needleman offers a practical exercise to understand the spiritual sense of time: “Its sole purpose is to provide the mind with a quieter space within which we may find a first approach to the search for the Self. I have found this modest exercise of help in verifying, actually witnessing, how the habit of worrying about the future wastes the attention and therefore the time needed for finding one’s inner life.”

The exercise is simply this: during the day, as you enter into one or another situation of your life, try to look upon it in advance as having already happened. Look upon every detail as predetermined. Try sometime to treat your life like a script that has already been written, as a play in which you are only an actor rehearsing a part. Try to regard the immediate future as already existing. You are like a tiny insect crawling up a tree. The tree exists already, the roots, trunk, branches and leaves are already there. What you call time is only your movement from the roots to the branches that are already there. The insect imagines

that the branches and the leaves are appearing out of nonexistence, but it is not so. The branches and the leaves are there waiting. Try to look at your life in this way – for a day, for an hour, even for a minute. Forget about whether or not it is actually true that the future already exists. This is an exercise, nothing more, something to do with your thought, your attitude, your attention . . . In this stage of the exercise, there is an element of play and amusement, but along with the amusement one very soon feels something of quite another quality. Note that something is being liberated in a subtle and gentle way – a sense of welcoming, a welcoming that is calm and tinted with a sense of gladness. (14)

### A Six-Dimensional Model of Space-Time

P.D. Ouspensky and other theorists have postulated a six-dimensional model of the universe. This is sometimes symbolized by two interpenetrating triangles ('Seal of Solomon'). One triangle represents the three visible dimensions of space and the other the three invisible dimensions of time. Within this six-pointed star is the representation of space-time as a unity "where everything is everywhere and always."

The objects we perceive in three-dimensional space also extend into the three dimensions of time, creating a solid 'time-body' which includes the actualization of all possibilities (the third dimension of time). But in our normal state of consciousness, the two higher dimensions of time are beyond our perceptual capacities. Ouspensky: "Six-dimensional reality, the world as it really is, we perceive only through the slit of our senses, touch and vision, and define a three-dimensional space, ascribing to it Euclidian properties. Every six-dimensional body becomes for us a three-dimensional body, *existing in time*, and the properties of the fifth and sixth dimensions remain for us imperceptible."

The three dimensions of time enter into every moment. If we picture a straight line along which past, present and future lie, this is the line of the fourth dimension. At right angles to this line is the fifth dimension and the perpetual existence of every moment is established by this dimension. The life regarded only as a circle lies, as it were, on the *surface* formed by these two dimensions. But entering this surface, and at right angles to it, is the third dimension of 'time.' The circle of life can now be turned into a spiral. The fifth dimension is movement of the circle, repetition, recurrence. The sixth dimension is the way out of the circle. If we imagine that one end of the curve rises from the surface, we visualize the third dimension of time, or the sixth dimension of space. The line of time becomes a spiral. The figure of the spiral is only a very feeble approximation of the spiral of time. It is merely its possible geometric representation. The actual spiral of time is not analogous to any of the lines we know, for it branches off at every point. And as there can be many possibilities in every moment, so there can be many branches at every point. A figure of three-dimensional time will appear to us in the form of a complicated structure consisting of radii diverging from every moment of time. All these radii, taken together, form the three-dimensional

continuum of time. This represents *every possibility*. If we could experience, follow, be conscious in every one of these radii, we would realize 'every possibility.' But we can only realize one possibility at a time and the line in time that our lives make is 'the line of the fulfillment of one possibility.' We live and think and exist on one of the lines of time. But the second and third dimensions of time, that is, the surface on which this line lies and the solid in which this surface is included, enter every moment into our life and into our consciousness. (15)

As human beings, our physical existence occurs in the three dimensions of space. The body undergoes progressive change and transformation as we grow and develop and eventually die. But we also have an emotional and mental existence in time. In *Man in the Cosmos*, Christian Wertebaker relates Ouspensky's three dimensions of time to the three functions or 'brains' of human beings: intellectual, emotional and moving-instinctive. He proposes that time must have multiple dimensions to accommodate the full range of subjective experience.

To make sense of the world, the time dimensions of change and possibility (the first and third dimensions in Ouspensky's schema of time) need to be recognized: "Along with the perception of change, a unique capacity of mind is the perception of possibility. Our thoughts constantly roam over different possibilities, both in the past and the future. Change and possibility are two different dimensions. Possibility refers to different possible changes."

And, emotions and feelings are associated with the second dimension of time – eternity. Wertebaker stresses that only when these three functions are harmonized and balanced is it possible to achieve higher states of consciousness:

The body clearly is stuck in the present of linear time, moving steadily from past to future, from birth to death. The mind, on the other hand, knows no such boundaries: it moves freely into the past and speculates about the possibilities of the future – even about the possibilities of the past. It lives in the realm of possibilities. And feeling, though more elusive, has a quality of eternity: how I feel now seems that it will be forever; I will always feel this good, or this depressed – suicide attests to this illusion. Only thought, if it is independent enough to not be completely driven by the emotions, can conceive of another possibility, or remember that not so long ago I felt quite differently. Ordinary associative thought, when divorced from a sense of the body in the present and from the perception of feeling, is one-dimensional, presenting a partial, and therefore distorted, view. The projection of three-dimensional objects into lesser dimensional spaces result in a completely different perception of their nature, as illustrated in Abbott's classic *Flatland* (for instance, a spherical ball moving through a plane appears to a "plane-being" as a point, becoming a growing, then shrinking circle, and finally a point again before disappearing). When the three perceptual modalities come together, when I feel myself present in the world, perceiving it without distraction, a sense of another dimensionality can appear; everything acquires a new vividness, depth, and meaning. In such

a state the mind can appear empty of words and internal images, a “perfect mirror,” as the Zen masters would say . . . In this ultimate state of open availability, the mind instantaneously grasps everything. Most of us have small partial glimpses of this state, but its existence is attested to by every spiritual tradition. (16)

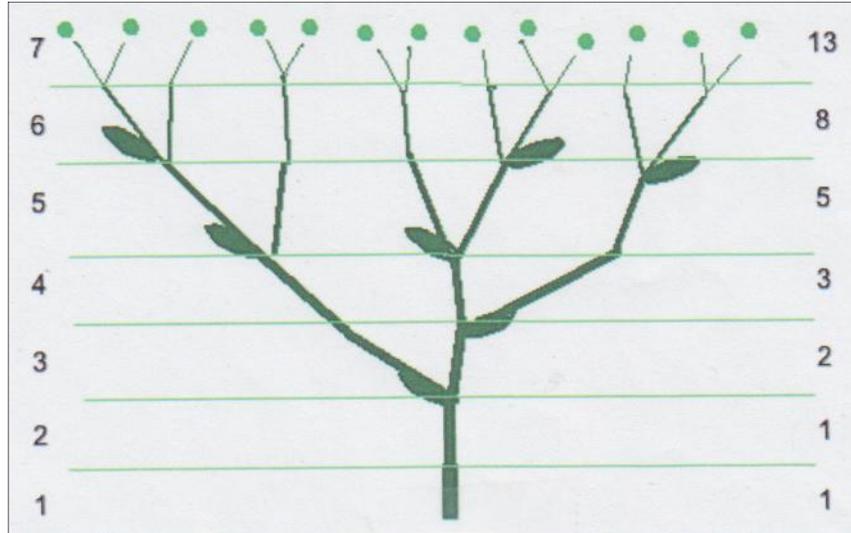
The third dimension of time (“all possibilities”) has been likened to the growth of many plants. The development of the branch structure has a mathematical basis as it follows the Fibonacci sequence of numbers (which is related to the spiral and the Golden Mean).

The Fibonacci series begins with 0 and 1 and then adds two adjacent numbers to produce the next number in the series: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, and so on. The series is significant because the ratio of adjacent numbers converges to the Golden Mean  $\phi$  ( $\phi = 1.618$ ). For example,  $13/8 = 1.625$ ,  $21/13 = 1.615$ . “The golden section or mean has been a source of fascination since ancient times (notably in the pentagonal star or pentagram), in art, and in nature in a variety of places.”

The Fibonacci numbers are found throughout nature as, for instance, in the spiral patterns of sunflowers, the growth patterns of certain plants, and even the genealogy of drone bees:

Fibonacci numbers and the golden ratio are also intimately related to another area of mathematics, fractals. Fractals are structures that are self-similar on multiple scales. Many natural phenomena such as coastlines, mountains, and clouds show self-similarity, which means that they look much the same and have the same patterns of irregularities, up to a point, when seen from different distances, on different scales. The same is true of some aspects of living organisms: the branching of trees repeats itself on multiple scales in a self-similar fashion. Since the golden ratio is also a mechanism for growth without change of shape, it makes sense that these two areas are related. The vascular and nervous systems have a tree-like structure, and are self-similar on different scales. It is required that they penetrate everywhere in the body to fulfill their function. It turns out that the ideal ratio of the lengths of a mother branch to a daughter branch, so that a tree will fill space, is  $\phi = 1.618$ . (17)

The diagram below shows the growth and expansion of a plant as it follows the Fibonacci series in which more and more possibilities are actualized. Since the Fibonacci series is potentially infinite, possibilities are also infinite.



In *Man in the Cosmos*, Christian Wertenbaker provides many examples of how the tree structure symbolically represents the dimension of possibilities:

The elaboration of possibilities resembles a tree. The tree is a ubiquitous shape in both concrete and abstract phenomena, suggesting that it has a fundamental place in the description of the world. There are plant-trees, bronchial trees, arterial trees, family trees, decision trees. Many of the neurons of our brains resemble trees. Road systems and rivers are tree-like. A tree represents an elaboration of possibilities in time. A family tree is a clear example. A decision tree is more abstract. A plant-tree or a bronchial tree, existing all at once in space, is also the imprint of a branching growth pattern in time, and, for a particle of sap or air, it is also a sequence of "choices" in time, just like a road system is for us as we travel along it . . . A plant-tree distributes chlorophyll and other metabolic machinery over the large area of its leaves so that sunlight can affect the synthesis of oxygen. A tree is a prime example of a fractal growth pattern, a way of generating a large surface area in a small volume. Our bodies are packed with trees – vascular trees, neural trees – every cell needs to be close to the vascular system and the nervous system, and that is how it is done. An organ – a lung, a kidney, a liver – is in effect a set of intertwined trees, in which substances distributed over a large interface interact with other substances, and the transformed results are re-collected into main pipelines for further distribution elsewhere in the body. So what is, on one scale, a pattern of possible choices, is on another a system for the transformation of substances. (18)

### All and Everything

The movement or flow of time limits our experience to *one* thing at a time and does not contain *all* possibilities. From our human perspective, chronological time seems to be a one-

dimensional line. But the possibility exists that there are further dimensions beyond our immediate perception.

The reality of higher dimensions of time can only be understood and experienced *within* each human being in states of consciousness which transcend our normal waking consciousness. "Our own insufficiency is that we live in a fraction of ourselves, in a narrow vision, *in time*, in a belief that the material universe of the moment is *all*. But time – life – is only one track through the fullness of things."

In higher dimensions of time, the actualization of all possibilities becomes a reality and is realized in the wholeness of our being. "What we know as history is only one track in eternity, a single line through *all possibilities*. From this point of view, all manner of forms of the world are already realized and are always being realized."

What we know as 'time' is merely *one* track through this higher space, and different in every person, i.e. no individual's time-line, or track, is the same as another individual's. Everyone meets his own obstacles, his own experiences; everyone follows, or even forms, his own time-track, sometimes close beside another person's, sometimes widely divergent. *This track in higher space is the life*. It may be comparable to a zig-zag line drawn through known space, like a lightning flash. Actually, however, we are conceiving it as drawn through 'higher space.' Now we have to imagine that this higher space contains everything – all possibilities, all possible events, all possible experiences, the sum-total of reality known and unknown. It contains the infinite expression of all things. Consider one thought, one act of your own. Imagine this thought or act developed into the fullest ramification, like a tree – into every possible result and every conceivable form. This full development would be the infinite expression, the infinite form of this thought or act. But, of course, it cannot exist in time. For in time we only know one form, one expression, one result. Now imagine the world realized *in all its possibilities*. (19)

According to Rodney Collin, the third dimension of time emerges from the second dimension of 'eternal recurrence' or repetition. In the third dimension, all possibilities are potentially realized through a merging with the Absolute or Source of all that exists. In *The Theory of Celestial Influence*, he writes:

The idea of an eternal recurrence of this life, an infinite repetition of the same historical duration, introduces us to the second dimension of time. Theoretically, such a dimension implies an absolutely exact and inexorable re-enactment of life in every detail, like the image of a face reflected backwards and forwards between two mirrors. For if we suppose that *anything* – even the smallest word or gesture – could be different in a repeated life, then we immediately posit still another dimension, as the smallest deviation in a straight line immediately implies a plane, or as even a minute change of expression in one of the reflected

images would mean a miracle. If we suppose that in another life a man could hear something he did not hear before, meet someone he did not meet before, or visit someplace he did not know before, then we have to admit the possibility of movement – however slight – in a third dimension of time, in which all possibilities are realized. And if even *one* new possibility is realized that was not realized before, this already means the beginning of movement in the third dimension . . . Nothing can remain the same forever, and exactly by sheer weight of repetition things must eventually change. The very principle of repetition itself implies that things must become better or worse, that is, they eventually move in the third dimension of time. (20)

Gurdjieff distinguished between possible and impossible events existing in the universe, and how only some possibilities can be actualized in time. This idea was articulated in talks with his students recorded in *In Search of the Miraculous*:

Every moment of time contains a certain number of possibilities, at times a small number, at others a great number, but never an infinite number. It is necessary to realize that there are possibilities and there are impossibilities. I can take from this table and throw on the floor a piece of paper, a pencil or an ash-tray, but I cannot take from the table and throw on the floor an orange which is not on the table. This clearly defines the difference between possibility and impossibility . . . A pencil is thrown on the floor. This is the actualization of one of the possibilities. Then a new moment comes. This moment also has a certain number of possibilities in a certain definite sense. And the moment after it will again be a moment of the actualization of one of the possibilities. The consecutiveness of these moments of actualization of one possibility constitutes the line of time. But each moment of time has an infinite existence in eternity. The possibilities which have been actualized continue to be endlessly actualized in eternity, while the non-actualized possibilities continue to remain non-actualized and non-actualizable. (21)

Gurdjieff proposed that a complete description of time must include the two higher dimensions. Whereas the second dimension is the eternal existence of actualized possibilities (eternity), the third dimension is the actualization of all possibilities:

All the possibilities that have been created or have originated in the world must be actualized. The actualization of all the possibilities created or originated constitutes the world's being. At the same time there is no place for actualization of these possibilities within the limits of eternity. In eternity everything that has been actualized continues to be actualized and everything non-actualized continues to remain non-actualized. Eternity, however, is only a plane crossed by the line of time. At every point of this line there remains a certain number of non-actualized possibilities. If we imagine the line of the actualization of these possibilities, they will proceed along radii issuing from one point at different angles to

the line of time and the line of eternity. These lines will proceed outside eternity, outside the five-dimensional space, in 'higher eternity' or in six-dimensional space, in the sixth dimension. The sixth dimension is the line of the actualization of all possibilities. The fifth dimension is the line of the eternal existence or repetition of the actualized possibilities. The fourth dimension is the sequence of the moments of the actualization of one possibility. (22)

The *real world* is a world of infinite possibilities. Although all possibilities exist, our individual lives only follow one line or trace through this sea of infinite possibilities. Due to the limitations of our sensory apparatus and normal state of consciousness, the world of infinite possibilities is invisible to us. Ouspensky discusses this seminal idea in *A New Model of the Universe*:

Our mind follows the development of possibilities always in one direction only. But in fact every moment contains a very large number of possibilities. *And all of them are actualized*, only we do not see it and do not know it. We always see only one of the actualizations, and in this lies the poverty and limitation of the human mind. But if we try to imagine the actualization of all the possibilities of the present moment, then of the next moment, and so on, we shall feel the world growing infinitely, incessantly multiplying by itself and becoming immeasurably rich and utterly unlike the flat and limited world we have pictured to ourselves up to this moment. Having imagined this infinite variety we shall feel a "taste" of infinity for a moment and shall understand how inadequate and impossible it is to approach the problem of time with earthly measures. We shall understand what an infinite richness of time going in all directions is necessary for the actualization of all the possibilities that arise each moment. We shall feel that the world is so boundlessly large that a thought of the existence of any limits in it, a thought of there being anything whatever which is not contained within it, will appear to us ridiculous. (23)

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