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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GEORGE GURDJIEFF: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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Mark Stephen Cescato
University of South Australia
Adelaide, South Australia, 5000

Email: mark.cescato@unisa.edu.au

Abstract

This paper examines aspects of the teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff in the light of the current knowledge base of contemporary applied psychology, and in particular, that of current counselling theory and practice. It focusses on enunciating relevant aspects of Gurdjieff's teaching in the idiom of modern day psychology and counselling theory so as to draw out the parallels between some of the ideas of the major schools of thought in psychology and the coinciding resonances of those same ideas in Gurdjieff's teaching. It is argued that there are many such resonances, and given this, there is great potential for a meeting of Gurdjieff's ideas and counselling practices. It is further argued that Gurdjieff's teaching, or at least certain aspects of it, hold the potential to help extend our understanding of many matters of a psychological nature, and thus to give counsellors and psychotherapists new or different understandings of various phenomena of which we have truncated or restricted understandings. Indeed, some of the possibilities of Gurdjieff's teaching hold the potential to inform and build on not only our knowledge base in psychology, but also in applying our practices as counsellors with our clients.

Introduction & Body of Paper

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Introduction

George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff was an enigmatic individual who introduced a unique kind of teaching into the Western world.[1] It is a teaching that has been paid scant regard in academic circles, and one which defies any ready précis. For these and other reasons, it harbours elements of intrigue and mystique for many people. It is a holistic yet pragmatic teaching for inner psychological development. Further, its practical view of self-development has both a psychological and a cosmological side to it. Our interest here in this paper is in certain aspects of its psychological side and their relevance for contemporary counselling and psychotherapy.

Gurdjieff's teaching is known as *the fourth way*, or *the Gurdjieff work*, or sometimes simply as *the work*. It has also been referred to as *esoteric Christianity*, after a description Gurdjieff himself once gave of his teaching. Despite this reference to Christianity, Gurdjieff's teaching is not allied directly to, nor affiliated with, any specific Christian church, or in fact any specific religion. It traverses, and indeed, goes beyond the boundaries of all major religious doctrines and metaphysical or ontological philosophies. It can be said to contain certain elements that cannot be directly traced to any heretofore known religious, theological or philosophical tradition. In fact, true to Gurdjieff's own enigmatic individuality, it remains uncertain whether Gurdjieff originally came across his ideas as an already existing teaching, or whether he was a syncretist who pieced together his own teaching by synthesising parts of other known or secret traditions and possibly adding some of his own original ideas and insights.

Surprisingly, and despite their breadth and profundity, Gurdjieff's psychological ideas are by and large unknown in mainstream Western psychology or philosophy, and consequently there is hardly any scholarly literature relating to his teaching in any of the recognised academic disciplines.[2] This has led, albeit perhaps inadvertently, to a kind of marginalisation of Gurdjieff's ideas by academic commentators who have not considered them worthy of serious unbiased or scholarly examination. This is remarkable considering that many of the concepts

[1] The word "teaching" is used here for want of a more appropriate term to encapsulate a true conceptualisation of the integrated nature of Gurdjieff's ideas and methodology.

[2] Electronic searches of two major psychology databases reveal very little academic scholarship about Gurdjieff's teaching from psychologists. A search through the database *PsycARTICLES*, which claims a coverage of 25,000 articles from forty-two journals published under the auspices of the American Psychological Association, resulted in no articles being found. A similar search through *PsychINFO*, which claims 1.8 million citations, and summaries of journal articles, books, dissertations, and so forth related to psychology came up with a meagre six articles and one book, the book being more specifically about the enneagram (Blake, 1996). Interestingly, a search through the religious studies database compiled by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) brought up fifty-six records that make some kind of reference to Gurdjieff. The majority of these fifty-six records relate to non-academic publications, or to publications focussing on the recently popularised "personality" enneagram. Although Gurdjieff introduced the enneagram to the Western world, there is no documented evidence of his using it to derive personality characteristics.

and techniques Gurdjieff brought to the West in the early part of the twentieth century prefigured ideas which can be found in several contemporary disciplinary areas including, naturally enough, psychology, but also in diverse disciplines such as drama, chemistry, ecology and cosmology (Needleman, 1992; Moore, 1991). Ouspensky commented in 1935 that modern science, in particular physics, was moving closer to Gurdjieff's ideas (see Ouspensky, 1951, pp. 86-87), and Roszak (1975) has pointed out that many of the American eupsychian movements and their associated philosophies and therapies owe much to Gurdjieff without their acknowledging it. One might add here that Gurdjieff's ecological ideas arguably predate the entire development of modern day ecology.

The focus of this paper, though, is on some of the specific resonances between certain of the psychological ideas in Gurdjieff's teaching and their parallel conceptualisations in contemporary psychology, and further, to point out their possible relevance for counselling. In order to come to grips with such a broad-ranging set of psychological ideas as is contained in Gurdjieff's teaching, we can employ a disciplinary framework, generally agreed to by many contemporary psychotherapists and counsellors, which has been succinctly articulated by Goleman (1978, p. 120) who points out: “There are at present three broad schools in psychology: the psychoanalytic, the behaviourist, and the humanistic. Eastern psychologies feed into a fourth, called the ‘transpersonal’ school.” Now although Gurdjieff did not employ quite the same language as contemporary academic psychology (or its various subdisciplinary applications in counselling and psychotherapy), upon a discerning examination it can be seen that certain psychological ideas in Gurdjieff's teaching share remarkable resemblances to some of the notions and concepts in all four of these schools of thought. It is perhaps as astonishing as it is enigmatic that Gurdjieff had already happened upon, and indeed had been teaching, these same ideas before they were conceptualised and articulated by psychologists and their practitioner colleagues in counselling and psychotherapy.

Now in keeping with the general framework proposed by Goleman as a way of looking at present-day applied psychology, we can proceed to identify and examine one or two relevant notions or concepts from each of the four major psychological schools of thought, and to discuss their respective resonances with Gurdjieff's ideas. Let us begin in sequential order by examining some pertinent aspects of psychoanalytic psychology in the light of Gurdjieff’s teaching, and then by progressing on to examining other ideas from the behavioural, humanistic and transpersonal schools of thought in turn in order with a view to drawing out their respective resonances with relevant parallel ideas in Gurdjieff’s teaching.

Psychoanalytic psychology

Charles Tart is one of the few academic psychologists who has seen the relevance and potential of Gurdjieff's ideas to contemporary applied psychology. Tart has not confined himself to simply writing about aspects of Gurdjieff’s psychology, but he has thoughtfully applied them to the pragmatics of self-development (Tart, 1986, 1996). He has considered aspects of Gurdjieff's teaching from several differing psychological points of view, but one particularly prominent focus of Tart's has centred on the psychoanalytic notion of *defense*

mechanisms. In this psychoanalytic concept Tart has seen a relationship to Gurdjieff's idea of "buffers". Gurdjieff's explanation of buffers has been cited by Ouspensky (1987, p. 154-155):

> "We know what buffers on railway carriages are. They are the contrivances which lessen the shock when carriages or trucks strike one another. If there were no buffers the shock of one carriage against another would be very unpleasant and dangerous. Buffers soften the results of these shocks and render them unnoticeable and imperceptible.
>
> "Exactly the same appliances are to be found within man (sic). They are created, not by nature but by man himself, although involuntarily. The cause of their appearance is the existence in man of many contradictions; contradictions of opinions, feelings, sympathies, words, and actions. If a man throughout the whole of his life were to feel all the contradictions that are within him he could not live and act as calmly as he lives and acts now. He would have constant friction, constant unrest... If a man were to feel all these contradictions he would feel what he really is. He would feel that he is mad. It is not pleasant to anyone to feel that he is mad. Moreover, a thought such as this deprives a man of self-confidence, weakens his energy, deprives him of 'self-respect.' Somehow or other he must master this thought or banish it. He must either destroy contradictions or cease to see and to feel them. A man cannot destroy contradictions. But if 'buffers' are created in him he can cease to feel them and he will not feel the impact from the clash of contradictory views, contradictory emotions, contradictory words."

Tart has added to this explanation by invoking the conceptualisation of *subpersonalities,* a conceptualisation which has been the focus of attention of some prominent transpersonal psychologists (see for example, Rowan, 199O).[3] Tart (1996, p. 117) states: "Psychological buffers smooth out the sudden shock that occurs when we switch from one subpersonality to another, making the shock small enough so that we are not likely to be aware of the change... The general psychological term for these [buffers] is defense mechanisms."

Psychoanalytic theory posits that a person uses defense mechanisms when she or he has an instinctual impulse that is socially unacceptable or distasteful, and thus subconsciously feels that its expression would be prohibited or, at the very least, socially frowned upon. Furthermore it can be said that defense mechanisms serve to buffer one's conscious awareness from disappointments, anxieties and threats in life as well as from the contradictions to which Gurdjieff refers in the quotation above. In sum, defense mechanisms help to protect a person from psychological suffering. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that defense mechanisms are employed extensively, though unwittingly, and hence without "conscious" awareness, by most, if not all people. Tart (1986) notes, along with classical psychoanalytic theory, that most defenses originate in childhood, and that they can frequently

[3] The idea of "subpersonalities" is examined below under the heading of transpersonal psychology.

be created from behaviours that are somewhat effective in reducing one's anxiety and suffering.

Defense mechanisms are said to take many forms, and are seen by psychoanalytic theorists as a way of keeping in check the basic crudity or "animal" nature in human beings - that part of our human nature which harbours the baser instincts and cruder drives for pleasure and survival. In the practical social world, human beings are seemingly strongly discouraged from giving in to what are considered to be their very basic biological and psychological impulses - impulses which attempt to drive them to satisfy in simply any expeditious or hedonistic way their very basic pleasure and survival instincts. Defense mechanisms are thus psychological means of keeping such crude antisocial impulses and desires in check, and they fulfill this function by means of relegating such impulses and desires to the realm of the "subconscious" and consequently preventing them from surfacing into one's conscious awareness. Human cultures and societies would most likely become unworkable, unsafe and intolerable were people allowed free reign to indulge each and every biological or emotional impulse or drive, and were they free to simply take whatever they needed whenever they wanted it, or to kill, injure or dominate whomever happens to be in the way of their satisfying their instincts or desires. Human beings are thus seen to need social and political restrictions, and to be subservient to customs, rules, regulations and conditionings that form a large part of human enculturation. Defense mechanisms are consequently seen by psychoanalytic theorists to play a critical role in this general socialisation process.

Tart (1986, 1996) has discussed the parallel relationships between Gurdjieff's idea of buffers and the psychoanalytic notion of defense mechanisms in some detail, so we need not reiterate his carefully considered exposition of these connections here. However, Tart does go on to call a spade a spade as it were, and adds the further significant point that "all buffers and defense mechanisms are forms of lying" (1996, p. 119). They are means by which the truth is misrepresented, distorted or denied, both to the person making use of them as well as to others. Since according to psychoanalytic theory, humans are continually making use of these mechanisms, albeit unwittingly or unconsciously, in Tart's assertion here we can see a reflection of a prominent notion in Gurdjieff's teaching, namely that human beings lie nearly all of the time. For instance, human beings lie to others by presenting false or misleading images of themselves, but perhaps even more significantly, they deceive themselves by the very fact of not knowing themselves.

Perhaps one defense mechanism of particular note in regards to Gurdjieff's teaching is that of *projection*. Freud suggested that projection is one of the major defense mechanisms employed by human beings to cope with psychological discomfort or anxiety. Jung, like Freud, argued that we unconsciously *project* onto other people those things within us that we deny or reject because we dislike them, or because we are unable to acknowledge them or accept them, and we then accordingly see these things as "faults" that we dislike or that irritate us in others. This particular defense is discussed at several points by Nicoll (1996), who was a pupil of Jung's, as well as of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Nicoll comments that the very things we dislike in others are the same kinds of things that we also have within ourselves, although we do not see or acknowledge them as being traits we ourselves possess - hence they are said to reside in the unobserved or dark side of ourselves, what Jung calls the *shadow*. Like Jung and

Freud before him, Nicoll points to the fact that as human beings, we can be quick to criticise others or to see faults in them, yet if we were to objectively look at our own behaviour and observe ourselves impartially, we would recognise that the very faults for which we are criticising others are present in ourselves too!

This is often difficult for us to observe and to admit to ourselves, since it occurs at an "unconscious" level, but it is precisely the defense mechanism of projection at work. In seeing faults in others, we defend ourselves against the anxiety of having to acknowledge our own dark side. To paraphrase Gurdjieff here, we would go mad if we were to become aware of all our contradictions, so we keep ourselves in the dark about them via mechanisms such as buffers. According to Gurdjieff: "It is a common characteristic of human nature that a man sees the faults of others more easily than he sees his own. At the same time on the path of self-study he learns that he himself possesses all the faults that he finds in others. But there are many things that he does not see in himself, whereas in other people he begins to see them" (Ouspensky, 1987, p. 223). Gurdjieff's statement here clearly resonates with the psychoanalytic notion of projection and Jung's subsequent ideas regarding its relationship with the *shadow*.

For the practice of counselling and psychotherapy, a major implication of this is of course that clients need to get to know themselves better. Through tasks such as "self-study", they can learn more about themselves, and ultimately come to a deeper understanding of themselves and their true nature. Through exploration in counselling - and through the exploration inherent in self-study - clients can generate the potential to become more aware of the situations and the ways in which they use "buffers" or defense mechanisms such as projection. We might call this "buffer work", or "buffer therapy".[4] This kind of work can in turn lead clients to a better understanding of some of the more hidden aspects of themselves, and to thus become more self-aware. They may, for instance, become more aware of some of the subpersonalities of which they have heretofore been unaware, or indeed more aware of aspects of the darker side of their personal nature. Needless to say, this can provide significant insights which can lead to better personal or psychological functioning.

Behavioural psychology

Despite these and other resonances with psychoanalytic ideas, Gurdjieff's views on the formation and development of personality are in the main more closely akin to those of behavioural psychology. The behaviourist view argues that personality develops by processes like imitation and conditioning, along with their various components such as shaping and reinforcement. A young child observes and imitates the behaviours of older children and adults, and is reinforced by them or by others for attempts at performing those behaviours that are seen to be desirable, or culturally or socially appropriate. Indeed, it has been noted by behaviourists that even socially inappropriate behaviours can be inadvertently shaped and reinforced by other human beings or by factors which happen to be present in a child's environment. Such behaviours, whether appropriate or otherwise, become habitual and eventually become the outward manifestations of a child's personality.

[4] For this term, I am indebted to Bishop (2005)

In Gurdjieff's teaching, imitation of others, and the shaping and reinforcement of particular behaviours, beliefs, attitudes and so on, are some of the key factors that contribute to the makeup of personality. He asserts that most of us live unnaturally through imitation and wrong education: we breathe unnaturally, and especially in cities we breathe in spoiled air, we eat wrong foods, we adopt wrong postures, we are educated wrongly, we think crookedly, we engage in mindless pursuits, we exercise, if at all, in unbalanced ways, and so on. Children are consistently exposed to people engaging in these kinds of "unnatural" behaviours and are thus influenced to act in similar ways. Gurdjieff asserts that defense mechanisms are learned in this manner: "'Buffers' are created slowly and gradually. Very many 'buffers' are created artificially through 'education'. Others are created under the hypnotic influence of all surrounding life. A man is surrounded by people who live, speak, think, and feel by means of 'buffers'. Imitating them in their opinions, actions, and words, a man involuntarily creates similar 'buffers' in himself. 'Buffers' make a man's life more easy. It is very hard to live without 'buffers'" (Ouspensky, 1987,p. 155). Gurdjieff is suggesting that defenses ("buffers") are learned or become part of our psychological modus operandi by means of imitation of others' opinions, actions and words. He sees the process of learning through imitation as one of the more prominent methods by which human beings come to learn various things, both good and bad. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that behaviourally-oriented academic psychologists began the serious study of learning through imitation, and subsequently offered theoretical explanations of this kind of learning (Bandura and Walters, 1959; Bandura, Ross and Ross, 1963; Bandura, 1971; Bandura, 1973). And of course behavioural and cognitive-behavioural counsellors make use of the processes inherent in imitation through such techniques as role playing and behaviour rehearsal.

Perhaps it is pertinent at this point, however, to note that Gurdjieff's teaching, insofar as it conceptualises human nature, takes psychology beyond anything offered by modern psychoanalysis or behaviourism. The emphases of these schools of thought in their explanations of human nature are on genetics, biology, early childhood experiences, and so forth on the one hand, and on learning via environmental contingencies, on the other hand. Orage (1985) has stated that Gurdjieff's teaching begins where behaviourism ends. Gurdjieff argues that human beings are machines, a view which is resonant with radical behaviourism, but his teaching asserts that this ought not be our normal state. Gurdjieff's teaching offers the possibility of becoming "normal", of developing ourselves beyond the state of being a mere machine. It offers means by which one may achieve what is truly possible, albeit perhaps not easily acquired: it offers a way to "the farther reaches of human behaviour", to quote the title Maslow (1972) gave to one of his last publications. In this respect, it goes way beyond the possibilities envisaged by behaviourism. One might argue that it takes applied psychology into transpersonal realms.

Be that as it may, let us for the moment move a somewhat shorter distance beyond radical behaviourism and imitative learning to examine one or two connections with neo-behavioural thinking. We can begin here with Ouspensky (1987, p. 92) who gives a fascinating quotation from Gurdjieff, uttered in the year 1915 or thereabouts: "The mind must learn to control the

emotions. The emotions always pull the body after them. This is the order in which work on oneself must proceed." In this utterance we can discern significant resonances with neo-behaviourial thinking, specifically in the form of contemporary cognitive-behavioural ideas. For Gurdjieff's underlying meaning precisely - and pre-emptively - encapsulates the major principle underlying the theory and practice of modern cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT theory argues that our thoughts and beliefs influence our emotions, moods and behaviour. Indeed, cognitive-behavioural counsellors and researchers have emphasised the critical importance of focussing on the processes and contents of the thinking and beliefs of clients who are seeking help for their psychological problems.[5] They have emphasised the fact that clients' "automatic thoughts" or beliefs about certain situations can affect their feelings and mood states, and hence their behaviour. Furthermore, they have devised methods whereby clients can be assisted to identify and examine, and then to challenge and revise unhelpful automatic thinking or beliefs. Clients can then be brought to a position whereby they can access strategies which will help them to feel better, and thus to cope better, not only with their identified problem situations, but potentially with all kinds of adverse circumstances with which they might be confronted. Indeed it has been found that clients frequently report that when they make appropriate changes to their thinking or beliefs, they experience less negative emotion in situations which they find difficult, and hence they are

[5] More specifically, the focus is on clients' thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, evaluations, attitudes, perceptions, schemas, and so forth. Several "versions" of cognitive-behavioural therapy, having many theoretical and practical components in common, have been developed by those working in the fields of clinical psychology and psychiatry, for example: *Cognitive Therapy* (CT) by Aaron Beck (1976, 1991); *Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy* (REBT) by Albert Ellis (1962); and *Cognitive Behaviour Modification* (CBM) by Donald Meichenbaum (1977) - to name three of the more well known of these. They can all be seen as variants of neobehavioural thought, and thus as part of the behavioural school of thought in psychology. (A review published by Dobson in 1988 listed 17 such psychotherapies, and a more up-to-date audit would reveal several more that could now be added to this older list, such as *Cognitive-analytical therapy* and *Dialectical behaviour therapy*, both of which have been devised since the time of Dobson's initial review.) Such therapies have been shown to be efficacious in the treatment of various problems and psychological disorders including depression, anxiety, panic disorder, relationship problems, eating disorders, and addictive behaviours. One of the newer developments of CBT is known as "mindfulness-based cognitive-behavioural therapy" (Teasdale, 1999), and this has much affinity with Gurdjieff's ideas of self-observation and self-remembering. Research on its efficacy seems to indicate it shows promise in preventing relapses of certain conditions such as depression.

able to function more adequately and feel more in control emotionally and behaviourally in such situations. This process encapsulates precisely the mind controlling the emotions, as Gurdjieff puts it. This then leads to greater control of the body, including of course, one's actions and behaviour.

One of Gurdjieff's important conceptualisations was his view of the functioning of the human organism as basically "three-centred". Gurdjieff held that human psychology is based on the three functions of thinking, feeling and acting. In Gurdjieff's scheme the intellectual centre holds the thinking functions: logic, literal interpretation, and so forth; the emotional centre controls the feeling functions: likes, dislikes, attraction, repulsion, basic desires and so on; and the moving centre is the repository of learned physical actions and behaviours. The latter is sometimes spoken of in combination with what is referred to as the instinctive centre, which has to do with the inner functions of the human organism (the beating of the heart, breathing, the circulation of blood, digestive processes, and so on), and the innate reflexes. According to Ouspensky (1987), one of the chief properties of this moving/instinctive centre is its ability to imitate or to learn by observing others. We have already noted the significance Gurdjieff attached to imitation as a way in which human beings come to learn various behaviours.

Now Gurdjieff's view of human nature here has directly applicable implications for counselling. In this regard, an interesting extension of cognitive-behavioural counselling theory and practice has been developed by Hutchins and Cole-Vaught (1997) which can be used to illustrate a contemporary means of the applicability of Gurdjieff's idea of the three-centred nature of human beings. Hutchins and Cole-Vaught propose a thinking-feeling-acting (TFA) paradigm by which counsellors can firstly examine, and then assist clients from the respective point of view of each of these three areas of their psychological functioning. Sometimes clients may need to work on their behavioural functioning, at another time, their thinking may be the focus of attention, or their feelings. Sometimes, too, two or even all three of these areas may need to be worked on collectively. The TFA paradigm essentially provides a more "concretised" model of CBT, and it has a remarkable resonance with, and indeed can be seen as a kind of unwitting re-articulation of this very practical aspect of Gurdjieff's teaching,

Another allied aspect of Gurdjieff's teaching has some relevance here in its resonance with the modus operandi of the cognitive-behavioural therapies and of applied behavioural psychology in general. This is Gurdjieff's directive that a person who wants to change or develop must firstly engage in a process of self-observation. He pointed to the ancient demand, generally ascribed to Socrates, although believed by some to be far more ancient: “Know thyself”. For Gurdjieff, it is only once one has conducted systematic and thorough-going observations of oneself that one is able to successfully implement specific strategies that can assist one to bring about some change in one’s own functioning. In a similar vein, self-observation is frequently employed in the therapeutic practices of behavioural and cognitive-behavioural psychologists, who generally insist on observation and data collection prior to implementing any strategies for changing either behaviours or situational contingencies.

Humanistic psychology

It is often asserted that humanistic psychology arose as a reaction to the seemingly inexorable and somewhat grim determinism of psychoanalysis on the one hand, and behaviourism on the other. In contrast to the theory behind the classical versions of psychoanalytic and behavioural psychology, one of the basic tenets of humanistic psychology is that human beings are *free* agents who are so much more than the mere playthings of early childhood experiences or of random internal or external environmental stimuli. Humanistic counselling theories and practices tend to.focus on the feelings and emotions of clients. Themes such as self, values and needs are seen as major theoretical and therapeutic concerns in humanistic counselling.

Two of the most prominent theorists of the humanistic school of thought in psychology are Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Rogers, whose interests lay very much in espousing the core ingredients of the theoretical and practical underpinnings of counselling, has argued that counsellors need to regard their clients positively as persons in their own right. Further to this, he strongly believed that if clients are given an atmosphere of respect, empathy and genuineness, they will feel a greater sense of freedom to express their innermost feelings and emotions without fear of judgement or personal assessment by their counsellors. This will thence lead them to a deeper sense of self-awareness, and ultimately to a fuller acceptance of their deeper or truer nature, or in other words, of their innermost selfhood. From this ability to see and accept themselves as they really are, they will find themselves better placed to begin, if needed, any process of change in themselves or their lives. Needless to say, studies conducted by Rogers and others have gone some way to attestingbbb to the validity of Rogers' ideas as applied in his *person-centred* counselling practices.

In discussing the qualities of effective counselling and psychotherapy, Rogers (1961) asserts that these three attributes of genuineness, respect and empathy, and the degree to which they evinced by the counsellor within the therapeutic relationship, are of paramount, indeed critical, importance. Genuineness is akin to existential psychology's conceptualisation of *authenticity*. It has to do with being real, being oneself in one's relations with others and with the world. This existential and humanistic exhortation to be real, to be genuine, has implications that resonate with Gurdjieffian psychological principles in several ways. Two of the most fundamental of these are firstly, the principle of self-knowledge and, secondly, that of being "conscious" or aware enough of how one is feeling and manifesting oneself in any given situation so that one is ensured of being truly or authentically oneself. These are two of the major things which Gurdjieff has said are necessary for any kind of personal self-development: knowing oneself through self-study and self-observation, and striving, making efforts, struggling even, to become more conscious, more aware, more attentive to ourselves and our environment in all that we do. Again we can quote from Ouspensky (1987, p. 104) who cites Gurdjieff:

> "The first reason for man's [sic] inner slavery is his ignorance, and above all, his ignorance of himself. Without self-knowledge ... man cannot be free, he cannot govern himself and he will always remain a slave, and the plaything of the forces acting upon him.

> "This is why in all ancient teachings the first demand at the beginning of the way to liberation was: 'Know thyself'".

Respect has also been referred to by Rogers as "unconditional positive regard", or "acceptance". It can be described as a "caring" for, or "prizing", of others *simply because they are fellow human beings*, and therefore equally worthy of respect. In any therapeutic encounter, without this unconditional respect and acceptance of the client, Rogers would argue that the opportunities for developing a worthwhile therapist-client relationship are somewhat diminished, and thus the chances of successful therapeutic interactions and outcomes are much reduced. Further, Rogers suggests this principle, together with genuineness and empathy, ought to apply in all human relationships: parents should love and respect their children unconditionally, spouses and friends should do likewise with each other, and the same ought to apply for teachers with respect to the children in their care. At the heart of this principle of respect are the basic existential philosophical notions of the essential *goodness* and *equality* of all human beings.

Incredibly, this is a principle which resonates to a considerable degree with Gurdjieff's ideas about empathy. For example, if we were to agree with Gurdjieff (which, incidentally, an orthodox humanist would not) that we, along with others, are all essentially "machines",[6] whenever we find ourselves slighted, annoyed or irritated by another person we would do well to remember that that other person is also a machine. We are all equal in this regard, and if we can remain conscious of our own and the other's mechanicalness, we can respect the other as being our equal, or as it were, as a *fellow machine*. J. G. Bennett (quoted in Earl, 1984, p. 164) referred to this practical Gurdjieffian way of relating to others in the warm, caring and respectful language that a humanistic counsellor might very well use:

> "When I am in front of you I am in front of a person. I am a person and you are a person and a person means a being who has an inner life... But if we can contrive to meet them [that is, other people] directly as people... then it is no longer going out from our solitude to meet somebody else from their solitude; it is a meeting in a company where we are not alone. We are only alone when as a person we are unable to meet other people as persons..."

These sentiments are echoed by humanists such as Rogers when they talk of "encountering" another in the mode of "person-to-person" or in an "I-Thou" relationship. As alluded to above, the whole notion of respect is of course in practice very much related to and intertwined with the other two facets of any real relationship: genuineness and empathy. For how can one meet another on a "person-to-person" basis, how can two people really communicate, if one is not being *personally* oneself, if one is not genuine, or if there is no empathy with or feeling for the other person?

[6] It should be pointed out, as has been alluded to above, that humanistic psychologists would argue that human beings are far more than mere machines.

Empathy has been defined by Rogers as the ability to see the world as if through the eyes of another, but without losing the "as if" quality (Prochaska, 1984; Prochaska & Norcross, 2003). This principle is derived from phenomenological psychology which was concerned, among other things, with people's perceptions of events. Rogers believed that in relating to the world, we do not relate to some "real" or "objective" reality, but rather to reality *as we experience it.* Reality for us *is* our experienced or *phenomenal* world. Huxley (1963, pp. 12-13) has stated that it is philosophically impossible to get inside the psychological world of another person and to actually experience the world as the other does: "Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies – all these are private and, except through symbols and second hand, incommunicable". Yet he does believe that empathy is possible and that it is important to both see ourselves as others see us and to see others as they see themselves: "Most island universes are sufficiently like one another to permit of inferential understanding or even empathy…" Egan (1982, p. 87) argues that empathy is an attempt to penetrate the "metaphysical aloneness of the other".

Empathy can be seen as resonant with Gurdjieff's idea of "external considering". External considering refers to the ability to take cognisance of, and consequently to adjust one's behaviour in order to take into account, the feelings or needs of others. Gurdjieff suggests that this is necessary for self-development, and he highlights this in upper case in his tale of the "Holy Planet Purgatory" where Beelzebub explains that "his Endlessness" has had placed over the chief entrance to the planet the words: "ONLY HE MAY ENTER HERE WHO PUTS HIMSELF IN THE POSITION OF THE OTHER RESULTS OF MY LABORS" (Gurdjieff, 1992, p. 1065). Bennett (1993) states that this means that it is necessary to have complete compassion. A more literal meaning is that one must put oneself in the place of the other and see and understand the world from her or his position and circumstances. This is precisely the process of empathy as espoused by humanistically-oriented counsellors.

The "as if" quality about empathy referred to above enters into Gurdjieff's notion of external considering and becomes evident when one recognises that whilst putting oneself in the position of the other, one should also be striving all the while to be conscious of one's own presence or being, including all the thoughts, feelings and sensations going on within oneself at the time. This in turn relates to the "visceral experiencing" of which humanistically oriented counsellors and educators speak (see, for example, Boy and Pine, 1990). Again we see the interrelatedness of empathy with genuineness and respect: we are conscious of being our true self as well as being respectful to the other by putting our "self" in her or his position and attempting to see things from her or his perspective.

Abraham Maslow was one of the first Western psychologists to articulate the idea that human beings have within them, among other needs, an ultimate motivation to fulfill themselves, to realise their full potential. He called this motive the need for "self-actualisation".[7] Rogers regards actualisation as an underlying motivational tendency inherent in all human beings. He

[7] This is a notion apparently borrowed from Kurt Goldstein, and it is also one which has affinities with Jung's notion of *individuation.* It is also sometimes referred to as "self-fulfillment" or "self-realisation".

argues that this actualising tendency is “the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all of its capacities in ways which serve to maintain or enhance the organism” (Rogers, 1959, p. 196). This includes not only striving to fulfill physiological and social needs, but also the propensity to enhance ourselves through psychological growth and development (Prochaska & Norcross, 2003). Here, Rogers and Maslow's ideas have obvious resonances with Gurdjieff's teaching regarding development of *individuality* and growth of *being*.

Yet this kind of self-development inevitably includes an examination of values, and as noted above, the themes of the self and values are issues of major concern to humanistic psychology. Thus another aspect of Maslow's humanistic approach is that each of us has an essential inner nature which is “instinctoid”, intrinsic, given. When one is in contact with this essential inner nature, and when one finds out “what one is *really* like inside, deep down, as a member of the human species and as a particular individual”, then this offers “a scientific ethics, a natural value system, a court of ultimate appeal for the determination of good and bad, of right and wrong” (Maslow, 1968, p. 85). Maslow’s notion of an intrinsic inner essential self and its “natural” system of ethics and values resonates conceptually with Gurdjieff’s two sets of ideas of firstly, *essence* and *personality*, and secondly, *objective morality* and *conscience*.

The first of these sets of ideas of Gurdjieff's is one which has very obvious implications for counselling, and it involves the notion that there are two aspects to our humanness: essence and personality. Essence is what we are born with: it is the basis of what is *real* in us. As Maslow has put it, it is our “inner essential nature”: it is our “intrinsic” self. Personality, however, is *acquired* as we grow up in the surrounding conditions in which we have our existence. Personality, on the other hand, is shaped by culture and society: influences from our parents, caregivers, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, education, mass media, and other cultural, political or social institutions. For this reason, for many of us, our personality may have little or nothing in common with our essence. Unlike essence, and because it is acquired, it is not our *true* self. Taken in this way, our true self resides in essence. Thus we have this true self, this essence, with which we are rarely in touch, since for the majority of us "personality" has grown at the expense of essence, gradually surrounding it, and ultimately smothering its growth and enshrouding it from our inner purview. Personality has, in effect, taken us over.

Yet if we can make contact with our true self, we are in a position to awaken to our *conscience*, which is a natural (although perhaps buried) part of us. For Gurdjieff, one's conscience is a key to *objective morality*. Although Gurdjieff's terminology differs from Maslow's, a reading of his ideas about how one may come to connect with one's *conscience*, and thus with *objective morality*, indicates that they are quite in tune with Maslow's notion of a "natural" and ultimate system of morality being instinctive to, and hence inherent within, one's inner essential self or *essence*.[8]

[8] In order to contextualise this discussion here it should be pointed out that Gurdjieff regards human beings’ usual notions of morality as socially constructed, and as generally consisting of very subjective ethical and value systems, systems that are all too frequently based on subjective likes or dislikes, or on what is expedient and profitable. Ordinary "morality" alters

Transpersonal psychology

Transpersonal psychology is a school of thought which has extended itself beyond the margins of humanistic psychology. Frances Vaughan (1984), a prominent transpersonal psychologist, suggests that the transpersonal perspective is a "meta-perspective". Indeed it tends to be transdisciplinary, incorporating knowledge from Eastern psychological and spiritual traditions, as well as from traditional Western academic disciplines such as philosophy, theology and even the physical and life sciences. Given this, one could reasonably expect that there might be intersections between Gurdjieff's teaching and transpersonal psychology.

A major feature of transpersonal psychology is its emphasis on holism. Transpersonal psychotherapists and counsellors, for instance, attempt to treat their clients "holistically": their major aim is to "treat the whole person" (Vaughan, 1995). Vaughan outlines five "levels" which she argues counsellors ought to consider in order to work with the "whole person". These are the physical, the emotional, the mental (or cognitive), the existential, and the spiritual. At the very least, in transpersonal counselling as espoused by Vaughan, there ought to be an examination of clients' functioning on all these levels, and if it is seen to be necessary, counsellors will work with clients on all five levels.[9]

Gurdjieff's belief that for balanced spiritual development one must work on all sides of her or his being, in particular on the three "centres" of human functioning mentioned above - the moving/instinctive, emotional and intellectual centres - is echoed by the transpersonal emphasis on holism. These three centres are directly equivalent to Vaughan's first three "levels" – the physical, the emotional and the mental or cognitive. Further, Gurdjieff would suggest that each of the three "centres" needs to not only function as well as it should, but that the three also need to be able to work together harmoniously - *as a whole*. In tune with Vaughan, for him the three are natural and legitimately differing modes of functioning, each of which has its appropriate place. Indeed, Gurdjieff might further argue that work on these sides of our being is a necessary precursor to coming to terms with our existential and spiritual issues as human beings, the next two levels in Vaughan's schema.

Yet another important conceptualisation of Gurdjieff's which has remarkable parallels with one of the more recent developments in the field of transpersonal psychology is his articulation of his idea of the inner disunity of individual human beings - the idea that psychologically the human individual is a collection of small "I"s, a din of disparate, competing selves, with any one "I" having the upper hand at any given moment, dependent on the circumstances. Rowan's (1990) conceptualisation of *subpersonalities* owes some credit to

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from place to place and time to time. Hence Gurdjieff refers to it as "subjective morality", and distinguishes it from true morality, or "objective morality".

[9] Interestingly, these five levels can be seen to mirror somewhat the "Five Strivings of Objective Morality" mentioned by Gurdjieff. (See Gurdjieff, 1950, 1992).

this particular idea, and indeed Rowan (1990) does specifically acknowledge Gurdjieff, along with others, as one of the influences on the development of his conceptual thinking here. Gurdjieff (1984, p. 75) puts it succinctly: “Man (sic) is a plural being”. And for Gurdjieff, this plurality is to be taken quite literally, for he sees no consistent or unchangeable "I" in human beings as they currently are. He argues: “Man (sic) such as we know him…cannot have a permanent and single I. His I changes as quickly as his thoughts, feelings, and moods, and he makes a profound mistake in considering himself always one and the same person; in reality he is *always a different person*, not the one he was a moment ago… Man has no individual I. But there are, instead, hundreds and thousands of separate small I’s… Man is a plurality. Man’s name is legion” (Ouspensky, 1987, p. 59).

Not only does Rowan’s concept of subpersonalities echo Gurdjieff’s teaching about small “I”s, but he also follows Gurdjieff in proceeding to recommend that the way to begin to manage these subpersonalities is to examine each one as it arises and get to know it. In doing so, we then enable ourselves to become familiar with at least some of the “I”s which from time to time and from situation to situation temporarily control our thoughts, attitudes, feelings, moods, actions, and so forth. Once familiar with them we should then be able to recognise whether they are either a hindrance to, or useful to our personal development. Further to this , we should also be in a position where we can get to know the kinds of circumstances and conditions which frequently give cause for the arising of some of the various subpersonalities within us. If and when we become aware of a certain unhelpful I arising or present within us at any given time, then we may be able to call up an alternative subpersonality that can be more useful to us at that moment. With repeated efforts in this vein we may be able to minimise the kind of control that this unhelpful I may have over us, or even get ourselves to a position where we can perhaps eliminate it entirely from our larger internal personality system. Of course this kind of work can be dovetailed with cognitive, emotional and behavioral work, as according to Gurdjieff, our "I"s can be observed to reside in one or another of these centres of functioning.

Gurdjieff offers a further conceptualisation of note here, and it happens to be one which relates to a theoretical perspective offered by social psychologists and which is commonly known as "role theory". Role theory refers to the ways in which we habitually take on different *roles* throughout our lives. For instance, within us we contain various *personae* for our differential roles at work, at home, at social gatherings and most likely in all the other situations and circumstances of our lives (Gerner, 1980). Unless we are confronted with a situation which is totally unfamiliar to us, or which puts us out of our usual "comfort zone", we do not notice how readily we slip from one role into another: we normally adapt or adjust to each change of role quite subconsciously. Ouspensky (1957, p. 33) asserts that “in reality the change is always controlled by circumstances…” The various roles or different personae can also be seen as subpersonalities or groups of I’s that arise in response to particular conditions or circumstances. Ouspensky goes on to mention that these “I”s are divided into certain groups of “I”s which manifest themselves as “roles” that a person plays or as “masks” that one uses in the various circumstances of her or his life. He further states: “Everybody has a certain number of roles: one corresponds to one set of conditions, another to another and so on… For instance, he [ie, a person] has one role for his work, another for his home, yet

another among friends, another if he is interested in sport, and so on" (Ouspensky, 1957, p. 33).

These roles are sometimes discernible in other people, as Ouspensky points out, especially when they behave markedly differently in different sets of circumstances. However, there is great difficulty in observing them in ourselves. In truth, there are sometimes contradictions between one role and another, and because we are not normally conscious of our acting in these roles, we do not even notice the antithetical nature of our behaviour: "In one role one says one thing, has certain definite views and convictions; then one passes into another role and has absolutely different convictions and says absolutely different things, without noticing it… People can live with different personalities without them clashing" (Ouspensky, 1987, p. 34). Gurdjieff adds that very often these I's are "entirely unknown to one another, never coming into contact, or, on the contrary, hostile to each other, mutually exclusive and incompatible" (Ouspensky, 1987, p. 59).

In terms of the wider context here, it should be noted that Gurdjieff's ideas in connection with roles and subpersonalities go even further to assert that there are very definite causes that prevent people from seeing the contradictions inherent in the differences between one subpersonality and another. According to Gurdjieff, the causes centre on the artifically created contrivances mentioned earlier in this paper, which as we have seen, he refers to as "buffers". It is here that we come full-circle with one of the resonances between Gurdjieff's teaching and psychoanalytic psychology: We noted above how Tart (1996) has equated Gurdjieff's idea of buffers with the psychoanalytic notion of psychological *defense mechanisms*. We have also alluded to how with the help of buffers, we can unconsciously separate one contradictory feeling or opinion from another, and we need never feel the discomfort of their often extreme incompatibility or the absurdity of their side-by-side co-existence within us.

Conclusion

In this paper we have seen how several of the conceptualisations in Gurdjieff's teaching resonate with developments in contemporary psychology and counselling, and how they have the potential for taking things to further pragmatic levels beyond contemporary psychological theory and counselling practices. There remain of course many other facets to Gurdjieff's teaching which are worthy of scholarly examination, and from the point of view of the current author's study of them, it would appear that they show great potential for informing us of various pragmatic possibilities beyond current conceptualistions and practices. At the very least, they harbour pragmatic suggestions for alternative and innovative approaches to counselling theory and practice, and in this sense have great potential for further extending our knowledge about various issues of relevance to contemporary counsellors and psychotherapists. Given this context, this author, along with writers like Moore (1991) and Seamon (1990), would strongly encourage further study of Gurdjieff's ideas in the hope that counsellors can gain the benefits that may accrue from engaging in such an objective and open-minded scrutiny.

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