

ALL POSSIBILITIES

Bennett had some experiences that set him on the road not only towards Gurdjieff but also towards his own destiny to make sense of the world. He was a young lad at the turn of the century and his early years were dominated by the First World War. There was a massive shock through his society at the loss of life, particularly of young men. With it came a questioning of received values and authorities.

He recounts how he was wounded and experienced himself out of his body. This gave him the sense of being able to move in another dimension. He had an unshakeable intuition that the lives of the millions of young men with all their potential continued to be real, just as if they had lived. This persuaded him that 'what might have been' was as real as what actually happened. Later, in Istanbul, walking in the street, he saw something happen that he had dreamt the night before so came to believe that the future, in some sense, already exists.

At the same time, he was grounded in the physical sciences and mathematics. He could not give up their rigour and insight. Certain things were just *impossible*. Even God cannot create a world and then violate its laws. For him, the clash between science and religion was strong and hard. But a temptation was there at that time, with the popularity of the idea of added dimensions. Abbot's *Flatland* came out in 1884. Charles Hinton (1853-1907) wrote science fiction novels and books on visualising the fourth dimension. The great Argentinean writer Borges wrote this about Hinton, a passage very suggestive of Bennett's line of enquiry:

The *Vindication of Eternity* he judged to be perhaps less deficient; the first volume recounts the diverse eternities that men have devised, from the motionless Parmenidean One to Hinton's modifiable past; the second denied (with Francis Bradley) that all the deeds of the universe integrate a temporal series.

This was just the sort of material that Ouspensky was absorbing at the turn of the century. Bennett of course was a very young man when Relativity Theory burst on the scene and an expedition during the First World War confirmed one of its predictions.

The prospect of other dimensions gave the possibility of *storing* potential lives for example but it was harder to see how they could develop or actualise or change. In simple terms, we start with the facts of temporal actualisation – in which the past is gone and the future not yet – and add on some registry or storehouse because we feel – and there is some evidence for this, at least of elementary states – that they still 'remain' or subsist. This registry can be reduced to our memories or psychological factors, like the philosophical idea of the 'ghost in the machine', but Bennett clearly took it far more seriously. But then he went further to reason that it was not enough that the alternatives remained as potentials but should be capable of a *kind of change*. The significance of this further step was with him for most of his

life. He would for example argue that 'schools of being' centred on the practice of meditation were aligned with eternity while 'schools of action' were centred in life and aligned with hyperaxis.

In the Dramatic Universe for the sake of consistency he named three states of the prime stuff *hyle*: actual (time) virtual (eternity) sensitive (hyperaxis). What could all three have in common? It was that they were all *possible* and distinguished from the *impossible*.

In the Ray of Creation Gurdjieff's *All Worlds* is probably the same as *All Possibilities*. This is what Bennett came to identify with Existence and to say that our universe is just one small part of it.

Now, strangely enough, this brings us close to the recent idea proposed by physicists of *many worlds* or, sometimes, the *multiverse*. The idea came out of the problems of interpreting quantum mechanics and supposes that at every 'choice' (i.e. where things could have gone otherwise) the alternatives not chosen split off into their own version of the universe. This produces at a guess 2^{800} universes. Which is a lot. One of the many issues is then around whether these universes communicate with each other? Another is whether some of them annihilate themselves.

The Anthropic question 'Why are we in a universe precisely designed to make our existence possible?' is easily answered if we allow an infinity of alternative universes.

We can see there are crucial events – 'choices' – that mark the intersection of alternative worlds. The word suggests hyperaxis, if that counts. In thinking about such things we are caught in the enigma of *who we are*. Are there other versions of me in other universes? Are some of them saints and others sinners? Have I realised God in some of them or become a beetle in others? The question of who I am is hyperarchic. I do not go on in time. I do not rest in eternity.

To remember oneself is to awaken to the mystery of existence. As just now I remembered (in an ordinary sense) replying to a Don's wife at an induction session at Bristol University who asked me what I wanted to do with the answer, "Write about existence".

So now I begin to visualise a network of handshakes across many worlds