



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

**Maurice Nicoll and the Kingdom of Heaven: a study of the  
psychological basis of 'esoteric Christianity' as described in  
Nicoll's writings**

**JOHN PATRICK WILLMETT**

*This is a thesis submitted in compliance with the regulations for the award of the Degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh*

**2017**

The University of Edinburgh

A Thesis submitted in compliance with the regulations for the award of the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh

**Abstract**

Maurice Nicoll and the Kingdom of Heaven: a study of the psychological basis of 'esoteric  
Christianity' as described in Nicoll's writings JOHN PATRICK WILLMETT

Maurice Nicoll (1884-1953) was a Harley Street doctor, an analytical psychologist trained by C. G. Jung (1875-1961), and a student of the independent 'spiritual' teachers G. I. Gurdjieff (1866-1949) and P. D. Ouspensky (1878-1947). In his later years he became a mystical philosopher, a biblical exegete, and leader of his own groups of students. Early in his life he rejected his natal Christian religion associated with his father, Sir William Robertson Nicoll (1851-1923), eminent litterateur and Free Church of Scotland minister. Vindication of this rejection came to Maurice Nicoll through a mystical experience: a 'moment of insight' which propelled him into a life-long search to discover what 'really mattered'. I will argue that although this apparently involved a journey away from his natal Christian practice, Nicoll came to understand that he was working towards a 'truer' form of it.

Nicoll's *oeuvre* as a whole – published works as well as archival sources, including a large amount of recently discovered original material – will be analysed to show the development of his thinking on what he came to call 'esoteric Christianity'. After a biographical 'portrait' the start of Nicoll's journey will be presented as a reaction against the religious stance of his father. Maurice Nicoll's early 'moment of insight' is described and analysed in the light of the ideas of William James (1842-1910) on mystical experience. Following this Nicoll's first book, *Dream Psychology* (1917), an interpretation of the views of Jung which demonstrates clearly the early formative influence of Jung on Nicoll is treated. I then turn to *Living Time* (1931), in which Nicoll integrates Ouspensky's ideas on time and higher dimensions into his own psychological system.

Following the influence of Jung and early Ouspensky, Nicoll's next work reveals the influence of the system of ideas and practices known as 'the Work' taught by Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, which Nicoll encountered at first hand in Gurdjieff's colony near Paris and subsequently at Ouspensky's classes in London. *The Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky* (1957) was compiled from notes used by Nicoll in teaching his groups his own version of 'the Work' from 1931.

However, the completion of Nicoll's quest for an understanding of 'esoteric Christianity', it will be argued, is documented in his two mature texts, *The New Man* (1950) and *The Mark* (1954). These books analyse New Testament writings in the light of influences partly absorbed from Jung, but most centrally from Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. In these books Nicoll interprets the narrative theology of the New-Testament texts in terms of a form of 'esoteric psychology', encapsulating his vision of how 'the Kingdom of Heaven' is really to be understood: not in terms of a life after death, or a millennial restoration of Christ's Kingdom, but as the psychological development and fulfilment of the individual in this life. It is argued that this 'esoteric psychology' is Nicoll's version of the psychology he saw as underlying the Gurdjieff-Ouspensky system, but given an explicitly Christian locus and interpretation.

In conclusion some reflections are made on the significance of understanding Nicoll's writings as 'esoteric Christianity' and their implications for contemporary religious thought.

The University of Edinburgh

A Thesis submitted in compliance with the regulations for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh

**Lay Summary**

Maurice Nicoll and the Kingdom of Heaven: a study of the psychological basis of 'esoteric Christianity' as described in Nicoll's writings **JOHN PATRICK WILLMETT**

Maurice Nicoll (1884-1953) was a Harley Street doctor, an analytical psychologist trained by C. G. Jung (1875-1961), and a student of the independent 'spiritual' teachers G. I. Gurdjieff (1866-1949) and P. D. Ouspensky (1878-1947). In his later years he became a mystical philosopher and leader of his own groups. Nicoll's rejection early in life of the Christian religion associated with his Free Church of Scotland Minister father, Sir William Robertson Nicoll (1851-1923) was vindicated by a mystical experience in his teens that led him to undertake a life-long search to find what 'really mattered'. This led him first away from his natal Christianity practice and then eventually back to what he came to see as a 'truer' form of it.

Nicoll's *oeuvre* – published and archival, including a large amount of recently discovered original material – will be analysed to show the development of his thinking on what he came to call 'esoteric Christianity'. *Dream Psychology* (1917), an interpretation of the views of Jung, *Living Time* (1931), the integration of Ouspensky's ideas on time and the fourth dimension into his own psychological thinking, *The Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky* (1957), a compilation of notes used by Nicoll in teaching his own version of 'the Work' to his groups, and Nicoll's two mature texts, *The New Man* (1950) and *The Mark* (1954), analysis and interpretation of New Testament writings in the light of influences absorbed from Jung, but most centrally from Gurdjieff and Ouspensky will be described and analysed.

Nicoll's view is that the narrative theology of the New-Testament texts, a form of 'esoteric psychology', encapsulates his vision of how 'the Kingdom of Heaven' is to be understood. Neither life after death, nor a millennial restoration of Christ's Kingdom, it is the psychological development and fulfilment of the individual in this life. This esoteric psychology, it is argued, is Nicoll's version of the psychology he saw as underlying the Gurdjieff-Ouspensky system, but given an explicitly Christian locus and interpretation.

In conclusion some reflections are made on the significance of understanding Nicoll's writings as 'esoteric Christianity' and their implications for contemporary religious thought.

I hereby certify that this thesis is my own unaided work. Any citation of the work of others, either directly or in paraphrase, is duly acknowledged.

John Patrick Willmet

**Maurice Nicoll and the Kingdom of Heaven: a study of the psychological basis of 'esoteric Christianity' as described in Nicoll's writings**

**Contents**

<b><i>Abstract</i></b>	<b><i>Page 2</i></b>
<b><i>Lay Summary</i></b>	<b><i>Page 3</i></b>
<b><i>Contents</i></b>	<b><i>Page 5</i></b>
<b><i>Preface: personal involvement: a reflexive introduction</i></b>	<b><i>Page 6</i></b>
<b><i>Introduction</i></b>	<b><i>Page 11</i></b>
<b><i>Chapter 1: The writings of Maurice Nicoll: context, method and sources. A biographical portrait</i></b>	<b><i>Page 17</i></b>
<b><i>Chapter 2: 'The Religion of my Father'. Nicoll's early 'mystical' experiences</i></b>	<b><i>Page 63</i></b>
<b><i>Chapter 3: Psychological training with C. G. Jung</i></b>	<b><i>Page 88</i></b>
<b><i>Chapter 4: 'Living Time': a response to P. D. Ouspensky</i></b>	<b><i>Page 135</i></b>
<b><i>Chapter 5: Nicoll's view of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky's teaching of 'the Work'</i></b>	<b><i>Page 177</i></b>
<b><i>Chapter 6: 'The New Man' and 'The Mark': Nicoll 'comes home' to Christianity</i></b>	<b><i>Page 211</i></b>
<b><i>Conclusion: On the Psychological Basis of 'esoteric Christianity': a recapitulation</i></b>	<b><i>Page 262</i></b>
<b><i>Bibliography</i></b>	<b><i>Page 275</i></b>

## **Preface: personal involvement: a reflexive introduction**<sup>1</sup>

When the present writer says he is writing a dissertation on Maurice Nicoll (1884-1953), this usually draws a blank stare. Further elucidation, that Maurice was the son of Sir William Robertson Nicoll (1851-1923) evinces recognition from those who move in literary or end-of-nineteenth-century theological (especially Scottish) circles; the names Gurdjieff and Ouspensky (whose 'disciple' Nicoll was) draw either blank looks, or limited recognition from those familiar with New-Age Religion. But sometimes there is an immediate response as, for instance when the 'I don't expect you've heard of him' line evinces the answer; 'we are members of the Gurdjieff Society and know the writings of Maurice Nicoll well'. Though this makes me feel grounded in a reality others share, it also shows Gurdjieff's world to be rather elusive and esoteric.

After a conventionally Christian upbringing I was led by an interest in the myths and legends underlying Wagner's operas to read the works of C. G. Jung. Given as a parting gift from a fifteen-year schoolboy *In Search of the Miraculous*, [Ouspensky's theoretical presentation of the ideas underlying the path of personal development Gurdjieff calls 'the Fourth Way'], reading it but not understanding its significance, I was, nevertheless, thanks to the influence of Jung, opened to one of those [synchronous] accidents that determine life. Lent *The New Man* and *The Mark*, I came to Nicoll, my sudden illumination of the meaning of the Gospels by reading these books being the 'recognis[ing of] something [I] knew to be true but had forgotten' (Pogson 1961:114). It was as though, as Beryl Pogson (1895-1967), Nicoll's first biographer, says, 'all knowledge is but remembering, as Plato taught' (Pogson 1961:114). Other people report similar experiences; an unknown visitor to Nicoll's house in Great Amwell compares her first reading of the *Commentaries* with what Keats felt 'On looking into Chapman's Homer' (Pogson 1961:251). A member of the Gurdjieff Society told me recently that reading *The New Man* was a similar 'epiphany' experience for her. A personal note from Lewis Creed, a long-time pupil of Pogson, dated August 1995, outlines

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of this preface also appears in a different form in Willmetts and Sutcliffe 2016.

how the 'way opens' for him, who, 'searching for *new meaning*' after puzzlement over 'much that I had read in the New Testament', read Nicoll's *New Man*, met Pogson, and then attended one of her Sussex Group meetings. Noting that Creed ends his note with 'life becomes your teacher; remember that your being attracts your life' (Lewis Creed, Personal Note, August 1995, Nicoll Archive at Yale University), I suggest that all these cases show that our being attracts our life. Those who come to Nicoll are in some way called or chosen through their life thus far lived.

Thinking that what Nicoll wrote is surely what Christians believe, I saw on reflection that very few Christians subscribe to, or even understand it. Though making no contact with active followers of Gurdjieff or Nicoll, I began, again thanks to the influence of Jung, to see my journey through their eyes, realising that the conventional Christianity of my upbringing was the outer shell of a teaching that, understood esoterically, taught an *ordo salutis* for the saving of the soul, described by Gurdjieff and Nicoll in differing terms. But I also saw that though the conventional church was an invaluable transmitter of religious lore, Nicoll was correct in seeing that most Christians did not understand the true nature of their religion. This was the moment of *metanoia*. I have since tried to apply 'the Work', as Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and Nicoll term it, to living life as it should be lived, making 'saving the soul' its chief aim.

Many years reading Nicoll and Ouspensky formed the groundwork for writing this thesis. Research first conducted purely from printed sources was later augmented by consulting the Archives of William Robertson Nicoll at Aberdeen University, and those of Nicoll and Ouspensky, both at Yale University. Contacts with the Nicoll family brought little new material, but many anecdotal family memories. I talked separately with William Robertson Nicoll's two eighty-seven-year-old twin granddaughters, Maurice Nicoll's half-nieces, who each proudly showed me a pile of Nicoll's books, the psychological 'family silver'. Both said that they had not read any of them, except for (and was not this an honour?) in each case one only, in expectation of my visits. Though they are 'not followers of Maurice', the daughter of one of them is interested in what her great-uncle achieved.

But though memory of Nicoll was alive, even for his family this is now distant, and gives little idea of what working with him in one of his groups had been like.

It seems that after Nicoll's death many members of his groups joined the Gurdjieff Society. But those few groups that, as far as I knew, had remained apart from the Gurdjieff Society, continuing under the leadership of Beryl Pogson, and then Ronald Oldham (1888-1980), seemed on Oldham's death to have more or less completely disappeared. As Rawlinson says: 'I do not have an address for any independent Nicollian groups; they do not make such things public' (Rawlinson 1997:301).

'Fieldwork' did not initially lead to much. From two sources, a Nicoll family member who initially asked to know what I was researching, and a known practitioner, an active publisher of Pogson's writings and former 'Nicollian group' member (who donated all the material on Nicoll he had inherited from the successor groups to Yale University in 1994-5), I obtained no real response to my approaches. It would seem that, as Rawlinson found, 'They [the factions that arose within Nicoll's groups after his death] have kept themselves to themselves, and I have no details' (Rawlinson 1997:301). A noted Gurdjieffian has remained equally unresponsive.

If this seemed to bear out what Webb, in writing *The Harmonious Circle* (1980), an account of Gurdjieff's life and teaching, found, that 'a biographer in search of the authentic Gurdjieff begins by suspecting a campaign of mystification, internecine political machinations and an almost insane desire for anonymity' (Webb 1980:11, 13), events took a dramatic turn when, after earlier ignored e-mails I made contact with the International Gurdjieff Society's Scottish branch when some members attended a seminar I gave on Nicoll in Edinburgh University. I was told that the Society, though not anxious to invite the interest of those engaged purely in research, was, contrary to my suppositions, perfectly open to those showing an appropriate personal interest. These people put me in touch with the daughter of Sam Copley, a biographer of Nicoll (*Portrait of a Vertical Man*: 1989) and a member of his groups. She had a large amount of unpublished material which she was uncertain what to do with. Invited to visit her I was most hospitably received and assisted. My hopes of finding

material that I believed to exist were in great part fulfilled. This material, 'inherited' from the husband of a former member of one of Nicoll's groups contains many significant items hitherto not widely known.<sup>2</sup> Also revealed through this contact was a line of teachers separate from Pogson's, based in London and now subsumed into the International Gurdjieff Society. This group, formed under the leadership of Sam Copley, was the result of a split in the large (six hundred members) group left when Nicoll died, into a number of factions, of which it was the largest. It 'join[ed] the "Society of London" ' (Petsche 2013:67). Though Pogson supposed herself, and was supposed to be Nicoll's designated successor, she, it was felt, had very definitely followed her own ideas. She nevertheless retained a considerable following that produced much fruitful work, as her literary heritage demonstrates. The seceding factions, however, it would seem, felt that they remained truer to Nicoll's own teaching. While almost everybody who had anything to do directly with Nicoll must by now be dead, the author's hosts personally remembered him; there may be memories that can be tapped. The Gurdjieff Society attendees at my seminar invited me to lunch during a 'Work' weekend, where I observed activities, discussed my personal position with the group leader, and over lunch with the assembled group held a lengthy discourse on 'Work' matters, my interest in and researches about Nicoll, and a planned open meeting to generate interest in the Gurdjieff Society.

Though thinking initially that, as with many esoteric movements, the policy was to keep the 'secrets' from the 'vulgar' gaze, reserving them for the 'initiated', I find little evidence for Webb's 'wall of silence' on the part of the current practitioners of 'the Work'. Indeed, the Gurdjieff 'movement' has become something of an industry, the Dutch publishing house of Eureka Editions becoming its 'house' publishing firm. Hardly any of the published writings of the 'Work trinity' of Gurdjieff, Ouspensky or Nicoll are unavailable, and a stream of new publications about the 'Gurdjieff Legacy' (title of the entries in Rawlinson1997) by present or one-time aficionados of the movement like Bob Hunter, Joseph Azize and Sophia Wellbeloved issues from Eureka Editions. Though certain aged practitioners seem to have withdrawn from interaction with outsiders, whether they have likewise

---

<sup>2</sup> This material is now housed in a very substantial archive at Edinburgh University.

withdrawn interest from the concerns of the 'movement', either through infirmity or because of rejection by the Society, is not for me to say. But hospitality and helpfulness in London, and meeting members of the Scottish branch of the Gurdjieff Society show that current practitioners, interested in what I am writing, are anxious to help me.<sup>3</sup>

I feel myself particularly fitted to investigate this topic, by inclination, by the accidents of life, and by access to appropriate material. The thesis will bear witness not only to the development of Nicoll's understanding of Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's teaching, but also to the development of my own understanding of Nicoll's insight.

---

<sup>3</sup> For an account and an assessment of the fieldwork involved see Willmetts and Sutcliffe 2016.

# **Maurice Nicoll and the Kingdom of Heaven: a study of the psychological basis of 'esoteric Christianity' as described in Nicoll's writing.**

## **Introduction**

### **Aims and objectives of this proposed research.**

Maurice Nicoll (1884-1953), whose work is the object of this research, was a son of the manse: a Harley Street doctor and analytical psychologist trained by C. G. Jung (1875-1961), he was a student and follower of the 'western gurus'<sup>4</sup> G. I. Gurdjieff (1866-1949) and P. D. Ouspensky (1878-1947). In his later years Nicoll, acting as philosopher and biblical exegete, gave guidance to members of groups that sought enlightenment under his leadership. He left voluminous writings, many of which have been published.

I analyse Nicoll's writings to explore three main questions. First:

**What did the term 'psychology' mean to Nicoll, both in relation to the modern, professional, scientific discipline of psychology in which he was trained, and to that 'esoteric psychology'<sup>5</sup> which he claims is what the word 'psychology', based on its Greek root *psyche*/soul or life properly describes?**

In understanding this question it is necessary to posit the idea that Nicoll, psychologist as medical healer become psychologist as spiritual healer, came to see his professional skill as the adjunct to his quest for the meaning of life, which he calls elsewhere knowledge of 'what really mattered' (Nicoll 1957:9), or 'ultimate things' (Nicoll 1917a:181). For, as he wrote in *The Mark*:

---

<sup>4</sup> Term used in Rawlinson 1997. Sutcliffe writes: [this term] 'can provide a fruitful concept with which to relocate Gurdjieff in social and cultural history if nudged out of its *sui generis* religious fixation' (Sutcliffe 2014:14).

<sup>5</sup> Nicoll 1954:52

man as he is by birth and natural growth is not full man, evolved man, [though] having all the requisite physiological, and also the *psychic* functions (of thought, feeling insight, consciousness, etc.) that can bring about his own unfolding into evolved man or full man. All real psychology – all true science of the soul – is about the evolution, [the] development [of] *man himself*, a movement towards something *above*, towards what is more internal, to what is deeper experience, to greater integrity and purity of vision (Nicoll 1954:50).<sup>6</sup>

The first task of the thesis is to affirm the religious (or ‘eschatological’, as Nicoll phrases it in *Dream Psychology*) nature of the psychology that Nicoll learned from Jung and came to understand to be at the root of ‘the Work’.

Second:

**Is Nicoll’s presentation of ‘the Work’ as a psychological system of ‘esoteric Christianity’, a ‘reformation’ and a different understanding of the natal Christianity he early rejected and then re-embraced? Or is it a mere Christian patina on the esoteric or perennialist teachings which Gurdjieff and Ouspensky claimed ‘the Work’ to be, these having in themselves no necessary Christian inflection?**

I argue that Nicoll saw himself as a teacher in a school of wisdom, charged with inducting his pupils into a vision of ‘truth’ hidden (esoterically) in the writings of that school (the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, ‘the Work’). Nicoll saw this task, I will also argue, as equivalent to that of the Gospel writers, whom Nicoll claims taught in a school of wisdom, their writings presenting a system of ‘esoteric psychology’ (Nicoll 1950:14). But whereas there is no record of the oral teaching the Gospel writers derived from their writings, Nicoll, in his *Psychological Commentaries on the Teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky*, records his oral teaching of esoteric ‘truth’. The second task of the thesis is to show that the psychology that Nicoll understood to underlie ‘the Work’ and practiced and taught to his groups was Christian in nature, even if the nature of that Christianity would have been considered by most people far from orthodox.

---

<sup>6</sup> By ‘man’ I take Nicoll to mean either the generic human being, or an individual of either sex; the term is used similarly in the Bible. In quoting Nicoll I shall adhere to his terminology; in paraphrasing him and in discussion I shall use gender-neutral terms.

Third:

**Is that ‘esoteric psychology’ that Nicoll argues is presented by the Gospels fundamentally the same psychology that he claims is presented in ‘the Work’?**

Nicoll’s claim that the ‘esoteric psychology’ taught by ‘the Work’ is the same as that of the Gospels is, I suggest, only implicit in *The New Man* and *The Mark*, in that neither of these texts mentions ‘the Work’, and only in *The Mark* is Ouspensky briefly referred to. The final task of the thesis is therefore to show that Nicoll’s psychological interpretation of the Gospel texts is congruent with and parallel to his psychological interpretation of ‘the Work’, even though his ‘reformed’ view of Christianity, which he claims (as do most ‘reformers’) goes back to original Christianity, is radically different from most versions of Christianity as now customarily understood.

### **The nature of this research**

This thesis is an analysis of Nicoll’s texts to elucidate, in the light of my three research questions, the key stages in Nicoll’s quest for an understanding of ‘esoteric Christianity’, and a description of the psychological anatomy or anthropology that this understanding implies. Nevertheless, a detailed reconstruction of Nicoll’s ‘external life’ (Pogson 1961: xiii) is initially undertaken to form the context for the textual analysis of primary sources which will make up the bulk of this thesis. But while merely to set down what Nicoll thought would be too narrow and uncritical, to validate independently everything Nicoll wrote would spring the bounds of the thesis. The methodology therefore is to treat in each chapter one of Nicoll’s texts by first analysing the text(s) or ideas that influenced it. For Nicoll’s originality, I argue, is not primarily his apperception of and expression in psychological terms of what influenced him, culminating in the major impact on him of Gurdjieff’s teaching. Rather it is when Nicoll suggests that this teaching, and indeed much else that he presents in his writings, is also the teaching of the Gospels, and that therefore their truth validates his own ideas and Gurdjieff’s teaching (rather than the other way about), that his originality, I argue, becomes clear.

My intention in this thesis is to present Nicoll's thinking in as objective a way as possible. This thinking is not in any way a formal confessional statement. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Nicoll's biblical psychology can be commended as a basis for biblical interpretation and as a way of making 'esoteric Christianity' a viable system of faith for Christian practitioners, and that my comment will make clear that this is so. In setting forth my own point of view and how that impinges on the task I have set myself I state here that although studying Nicoll's ideas on biblical interpretation has led me personally to endorse a position which for want of a better expression can be called 'esoteric Christianity' it is my intention that this shall in no way interfere with my analysis of Nicoll's thought. I intend to present what Nicoll thinks, and to comment on it in as dispassionate and scholarly a way as possible.

### **Outline of the thesis**

Chapter 1, 'The writings of Maurice Nicoll: context, method and sources. A biographical portrait' presents: a discussion of the hermeneutical methodologies Nicoll employed; a survey of primary sources (largely Nicoll's writings) and secondary sources (commentary on these sources); and a 'portrait' drawing on a range of primary and secondary sources to show Nicoll's character and to give an initial assessment of the reception of his ideas as described in the secondary sources. In Chapter 2, '“The Religion of my Father”: Nicoll's early “mystical” experiences', a critique of the religious ideas of Nicoll's father, William Robertson Nicoll (hereafter WRN), which embody the Christianity 'as taught to me' which Maurice rejected forms the background and jumping-off point for an evaluation of the 'Jamesian'<sup>7</sup> noetic mystical experience that Maurice reported. This experience both vindicated his rejection of his natal Christianity and triggered his quest to find what 'really mattered'. Sources for this chapter will be WRN's own publications, *The Return to the Cross* (1897) and *A Garden of Nuts* (1905) and William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).

---

<sup>7</sup> Referring to William James (1842-1910), noted American philosopher and psychologist.

In Chapter 3, 'Psychological training with C. G. Jung', Nicoll's recasting in *Dream Psychology* (1917a) of Jung's current theory and practice is discussed. A presentation of Jung's thought as mediated by the three works of Jung listed in the bibliography of *Dream Psychology* (*Theory of Psychoanalysis*, *Analytical Psychology* and *Psychology of the Unconscious*) will precede an analysis of Nicoll's book, which will show that Nicoll's vision of psychological treatment transcends the merely therapeutic. In Chapter 4, '*Living Time*: a response to P. D. Ouspensky', an analysis of the ideas in *Living Time* is preceded by a comment on those of Ouspensky's ideas in *A New Model of the Universe* that influenced this book. In *Living Time* Nicoll recasts Ouspensky's 'pre-Gurdjieff' ideas on esoteric knowledge and the parallel 'underground' tradition that carries it, and presents his own views on the Fourth Dimension, Time and Eternal Recurrence in a religious, psychological and cosmological fashion, emphasising particularly their relevance for personal psychology.

In Chapter 5, 'Nicoll's view of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky's "Work" ' the *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky* in which Nicoll presents his psychological view of 'the Work' is analysed. Commenting on Nicoll's point of view I show that the text is the psychological presentation of religious ideas, anticipating the specifically New-Testament interpretation of Nicoll's final works.

Chapter 6, '*The New Man* and *The Mark*: Nicoll "comes home" to Christianity' is a treatment of Nicoll's final exegetical works that pulls together all the strands or arguments in the thesis. I argue that the inner meaning of the Christianity that Nicoll re-embraced, seen by him as true religion, is presented in these books through an analysis of some Gospel parables and miracles, these seen as the symbolic representation of that individual psychological development espoused by the Gospels as a whole and by 'the Work'.

'Conclusion: On the psychological basis of "esoteric Christianity": a recapitulation' offers first a summary of the argument of the thesis. Then the nature of 'biblical psychology' and Nicoll's place in

it are discussed. In conclusion some reflections are made on the significance of understanding Nicoll's writings as 'esoteric Christianity' and their implications for contemporary religious thought.

## **Chapter 1: The writings of Maurice Nicoll: context, method and sources. A biographical portrait**

The context of this study of Maurice Nicoll's life and work is his embracing Gurdjieff's 'Work' and, utilising the skills and insights of a fully medically-trained working therapeutic psychologist, a pupil of Jung, to make the understanding and teaching of this 'Work' the main purpose of his life. First, in 'Context', a brief description of the basic ideas of 'the Work' will be presented along with a brief history of Gurdjieff's creation of 'the Work' movement. Next, 'Method' deals with the methodology of how the texts that are analysed are to be read. Thirdly, 'Sources', an examination of the primary and secondary sources, will focus again on primary literature concerning Nicoll's ideas, and the secondary literature viewing Nicoll's life from the perspective of his position in the wider 'movement' by both practitioners and scholars (sometimes one and the same). The chapter will finish with a 'portrait' of Nicoll.

### **CONTEXT**

#### **'The Work'**

Nicoll writes:

Never sigh about the Work; never say "Oh! It is so difficult".  
Of course it is difficult. It is difficult for you and it is difficult for me.  
Damn you! That is why it is called 'Work'. (Pogson 1994:76)

It is a nice conceit to see the designation 'the Work' as being an allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid*:

Easy is the descent into the lower world.  
Night and day the door of gloomy Dis stands open;  
But to recall Thy steps and pass out to the upper air,  
This is the task, this is the Work.

Lewis Creed quotes this verse at the beginning of two books about 'the Work' that he compiled (Pogson 1994: iv). And indeed, though the idea of 'the Work' is completely congruent with this derivation, since 'the Work' is saving the soul from 'gloomy Dis', the actual origin of the term is more prosaic.

[The] Term [was] first applied by Gurdjieff's early [1913] Russian pupils to his 'ideas'. Gurdjieff's ideas, both theoretical and practical were released piecemeal, in a manner deliberately self-contradictory or misleading, and had to be fitted together by his pupils and even completed by the pupils' investigations. Step by step the pupils approached 'the abyss which can never be bridged by ordinary human reason' (Webb 1980:139).

Gurdjieff believed that most people were 'asleep', living by means of their 'ordinary' personality which was false, a mask assumed to cope with living in the world in a purely reactive way, driven by circumstances and in ignorance of their own truer selves. He thought that people needed to 'wake up', to curb this ordinary personality, or ego, so that an essential, inner personality, what Gurdjieff called 'real I',<sup>8</sup> could grow in them. If this happened they would achieve a higher degree of consciousness, and, exerting real will, would be able to act in an authentic fashion, bringing their own deeper self to full flowering. This psychological unfolding of the real person was also viewed as building in themselves a new mind, or training the mind to think psychologically so as to be capable of apprehending the esoteric contents of a higher part of the mind that had previously remained dormant. This process had its transcendental aspects. Gurdjieff saw it as the equivalent of building a second or psychological body, and making a soul. Since, as Gurdjieff said, behind 'real I' lies God, the realisation of the real person was in a manner of speaking to unite oneself with God, or the Absolute, as 'the Work' would say. Gurdjieff believed that in doing this a person could become a real Christian, able to love both God and his neighbour as he should (Gurdjieff 1973:152).

'The Work' was the method or system that showed how to do the necessary psychological work on oneself to bring about the realisation of the real person. In terms of terminology, the *System*, which

might be taken as referring to the vast combination of cosmological and psychological geography which Ouspensky had assembled from Gurdjieff's teaching

is perhaps a better term for Gurdjieff's philosophy in general, while *method*,

the methodical sequence of instruction – the 'System' of teaching which he [Ouspensky] followed with his own pupils and had codified from the experience of time with Gurdjieff (Webb1980:543)

is better used to distinguish the practical psychological work on oneself. When Webb describes 'the Work' as what 'members of a group under a teacher [who] must "work on themselves" [did], this "work" [at that time] consisting of several basic exercises', he is really talking about the method. Of

---

<sup>8</sup> All 'Work' terms when used in this thesis as 'Work' terms will be underlined, placed in inverted commas and written in italics, unless they are part of a quotation in which they do not appear in this format; the exception to this is 'the Work', which will appear so. Many of these terms have an ordinary meaning and have that meaning when appearing in normal type. Thus essence and 'essence' mean different things.

the 'psychological' exercises to which Webb refers it can be said that they were 'to observe oneself', 'to remember oneself' and to stop 'considering' (Webb 1980:140). This suggests that whatever the rationale, philosophy or indeed, it could be argued, theology that lies behind 'the Work' might be, the crucial element was psychological work on oneself, fostering 'internal development to think psychologically' (Nicoll 1954:3).

### **Gurdjieff and 'the Work'**

The creator of the 'Work' movement, the Greek-Armenian spiritual teacher G. I. Gurdjieff (?1866-1949), was born in Alexandropol and educated in Kars, both then in Russian Armenia. After a considerable period in which he claimed he wandered in Transcaucasia and the Middle East in search of 'the knowledge that so obsessed him', Gurdjieff taught in Moscow and St. Petersburg from 1913 to 1917 an early version of 'the Work' (Webb 1980:40). Knowledge of his journey comes from Gurdjieff's vague and fantastical *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, first published only in 1963, though begun in 1927 (note, Gurdjieff 1963: vi]). Gurdjieff claims that on his journey he met members of 'the World Brotherhood', describing them as

former Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Lamaists, and even one Shamanist, all [of whom] were united by God the Truth [who] lived together in such amity that, in spite of being representatives of the different religions we could not tell to which religion [they] had formerly belonged (Gurdjieff 1963:239).

This picture could be, even if exaggerated, a description of the 'historical' group of fellow travellers calling themselves 'Seekers for Truth' with whom Gurdjieff claimed he travelled through Asia seeking esoteric, religious and philosophical knowledge by visiting geographically remote religious centres untouched by modern life. Or it could be a metaphor for the culling of truth from many different traditions, this truth giving no indication of its origin in one specific religion or another. An authoritative interpretation is offered by Webb, who says of 'the sources of the system' that

most of the materials for Gurdjieff's cosmology can be found in the teachings of the late-nineteenth-century occult revival. Everyone in these small circles knew, or knew of each other; and every new contribution was eagerly assessed to see how it could be fitted into the huge synthesis which most

occultists were constructing. A couple of years of occult reading would certainly have equipped Gurdjieff with all the material he was likely to need (Webb 1980:531).<sup>9</sup>

Anna Butkovsky-Hewitt's *With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg* (1978), in which she writes of her time with Ouspensky, and then with Gurdjieff, in St. Petersburg in 1916 gives a flavour of the thinking in the rarefied circle of the Russian intelligentsia from which Gurdjieff's followers were then drawn.

Butkovsky talks of reading and discussing with Ouspensky the philosophies of the East, Vivekananda's *Raja-Yoga*, the legends of the Holy Grail, the music of Wagner, Yoga and eastern philosophies generally (Butkovsky-Hewitt 1978:23). Also studied were such books as C. H. Hinton's *The Fourth Dimension* and Richard Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (Butkovsky-Hewitt 1978:28).

Ouspensky, who had joined the group in 1915, had already published an ambitious philosophical work, *Tertium Organum*. Gurdjieff admired Ouspensky's ideas, but considered his understanding deficient, saying that

if you [Ouspensky] understood everything you have written in your book. I should come and bow down to you and beg you to teach me. But you do not understand even what the word understand means (Ouspensky 1950:20).

Nevertheless Ouspensky was welcomed warmly into the group. From his book *In Search of the Miraculous*, cited here, we get a clear idea, most commentators agree, of what Gurdjieff taught at this time. Webb, however, acknowledging that it gives a clear indication of 'the Russian phase of his [Gurdjieff's] activity', argues that Ouspensky's 'personal preoccupations naturally influenced the questions he asked Gurdjieff' (Webb 1980:139). Butkovsky, influenced by Ouspensky's ideas, joined the small group of people (eventually six) around Gurdjieff, called then, like Gurdjieff's companions on his earlier journey to Transcaucasia, 'seekers of hidden truth' (Webb 1980:35).

This group, to which Ouspensky's wife also belonged, were taught "the system" (Webb 1980:139). What Gurdjieff claimed to teach was, according to his perhaps slightly apocryphal representation in *Glimpses of Truth* (1914), both 'Truth [as it] speaks for itself in whatever form it is manifested', and also more modern scientific and psychological thought (Webb 1980:90).

---

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Sutcliffe 2014:16

In the wake of the 1917 revolution Gurdjieff moved from Moscow to the Caucasus with a nucleus group including figures later important in the wider movement. Besides Ouspensky, the group included the Russian/Ukrainian musician Thomas de Hartmann and his opera-singer wife Olga, the Georgian artist Alexander de Salzman and wife Jeanne, a pianist and Dalcroze teacher, and the Finnish psychologist Leonid Stoerneval and his wife Elizaveta. The description of how this group, with members of Gurdjieff's family, spent the years 1917-1920 in the Caucasus amid the fluctuating turmoil of the post-revolution civil war, Gurdjieff nevertheless continuing to practise 'the Work', is described in Thomas and Olga de Hartmann's *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (1964). Ouspensky left the group during this period, apparently over disagreement with Gurdjieff on essential elements of 'the Work' (Webb 1980:159). After a series of adventures that have become embedded in the Gurdjieff myth (though they are far more factually corroborated than his earlier fantastic journey) Gurdjieff managed to leave Russia, first for Constantinople, and then for Germany.

Gurdjieff tried next to enter Britain, where Ouspensky had settled. Ouspensky had already (1913) met A. R. Orage, editor of the literary magazine *The New Age*, who would later propagate the 'Work' movement in the United States. Arriving in Britain in 1921 through the patronage of Lady Rothermere, Ouspensky attracted the attention of a number of maverick professional people who were in the inter-war period 'searchers' or 'seekers' (Sutcliffe 2007:466). Of these, James Young and Maurice Nicoll, both psychiatrists, and Kenneth Walker (1882-1966), an eminent surgeon (later President of the Royal College of Surgeons), became particularly significant figures. But Gurdjieff, who, again according to the myth, may (or may not) have been a member of the Tsarist Secret Service during his *Wanderjahren*, was considered by the British Government of India as an undesirable. Despite representations in high places by Nicoll and Walker, he was unable to obtain a residence visa (Webb 1980: 44, 225).

Gurdjieff eventually settled in 1921 in Fontainebleau-Avon, at the *Prieuré des Basses Loges* (Pogson 1961:73). Here, with the financial help of British and American well-wishers (including Nicoll), and business *savoir-faire* that, according to several accounts, more than bordered on the dishonest and the unscrupulous (Moore 1991:175; Beekman Taylor 2012:79 *passim*), Gurdjieff set up his 'Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man'. A flying visit to England brought interest in Ouspensky's teacher, the source of the system, to such a pitch that many, including Nicoll, were persuaded to visit Fontainebleau. But in 1924, all sources seem to agree, Gurdjieff and Ouspensky fell out completely, and the devotees of 'the Work' had to choose which teacher they would follow. At this decisive juncture Nicoll, remaining loyal to Ouspensky, became his chief assistant, later becoming a leader of groups in his own right.

Gurdjieff continued to run the institute intermittently in Fontainebleau until 1932, besides mounting expeditions to America, which brought Americans to Fontainebleau. Several subsequently became important in 'the Work', including: Jessie Dwight (wife of Orage [by then Gurdjieff's representative and the most established teacher of 'the Work' in America]); the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who married Gurdjieff's devotee, the Montenegrin dancer Olgivanna Hinzenburg; the novelist Jean Toomer; and the editors of the *Little Review*, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap (Webb 1980:276). When in 1949 Gurdjieff died, Jeanne de Salzmänn assumed leadership of the movement.

The Ouspenskys flourished in England in the 1930s, teaching 'the Work' both in London and eventually chiefly at Lyne Place in Virginia Water in Surrey, but fear of the turbulence caused by the war drove them, both ill, to America. In 1946 Ouspensky returned to England, dying shortly thereafter. His wife,<sup>10</sup> known in the primary sources as 'Madame' Ouspensky, still in America, then exhorted Ouspensky's pupils to transfer their allegiance to Gurdjieff in Paris. Nicoll, however, continued to teach as if nothing had happened, admired by the Gurdjieffians, particularly Jeanne de Salzmänn. He died in 1953 (Rawlinson 1997:300).

---

<sup>10</sup> It seems doubtful whether Ouspensky and Sophia Grigorievna were ever legally married (Webb 1980:136).

On Nicoll's death many of his pupils joined the Gurdjieff Society. Those who did not divided into two. Nicoll's immediate 'Work' groups were taken over by his secretary Beryl Pogson, and after her death in 1967, by a retired admiral, Ronald Oldham. As already noted, a second line of descent was formed by a series of groups based in London under the auspices of, among others, Sam Copley, Peter Gloster, Laurie Goodman and Stella Kent. Though it appears that both branches of this Nicollian lineage have now faded away, Oldham's groups dispersing, and Copley's being absorbed into the Gurdjieff Society, interest in Nicoll's work remains alive on the evidence of the recent Eureka publishing enterprise in the Netherlands and also the establishment in the Yale University archive of Nicoll's primary sources. The Gurdjieff movement continues to exist in the shape of the many branches of the International Gurdjieff Society.

## **METHOD**

### **The Methodology of reading texts**

The five primary texts by Nicoll to be studied are: *Dream Psychology; Living Time; Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky; The New Man; and The Mark*. Closely related to these texts are those texts that 'inspired' them – Jung's *Theory of Psycho-Analysis, Analytical Psychology and Psychology of the Unconscious*; Ouspensky's *A New Model of the Universe*; and the New Testament, particularly the Gospels. The five works of Nicoll, with Jung's and Ouspensky's books, form an interdisciplinary literary corpus covering medical practice, philosophy, psychology, and religion considered from a scientific viewpoint. Nicoll writes using his scientific training to analyse from the rational point of view of the emerging modern psychologist writings that treat a complex mix of psychological, philosophical and religious phenomena. Though these books are to be read literally in a logical scientific spirit, they discuss the necessity of reading certain types of literature figuratively. Nicoll's study with Jung had opened him to the idea that dreams and neurotic symptoms contained a disguised meaning. Jung soon came to see that this mechanism of symbolic representation applied to myths and legends. It must have been an epiphany moment

when Nicoll saw that the Gospels and Scripture generally were books that only yielded their meaning when read figuratively. Their apparently logical surface (which, when read closely and without prejudice, is full of irrationality) is actually a disguise, a veil drawn over the underlying sense that lies behind the letter. To understand them the text, 'abounding in figures and enigmas', needed to be read 'prophetically', to find the 'inner, divine sense' (Origen in Nicoll 1952:196). Nicoll makes this type of interpretation the basis for his exegesis of the Gospels in his two final works.

Such 'figurative' or 'metaphorical' interpretation, however, especially when applied to the Bible has always been and remains deeply unfashionable. Louis Bowyer describes hermeneutics as one aspect of

the early Christian understanding of "the mystical", the hermeneutic dimensions [that has] in the modern era been largely forgotten (King 2010:324, 326).

Even Nicoll's father saw the necessity of this way of understanding Scripture. Writing of the authority of Scripture, WRN says to those who doubt such figurative interpretations which, they say, were not what the authors of such literature intended:

Even supposing the author's intentions were discoverable, would not still the original intention in the mind of the author signify very little? Because it is given to a man to write a thing, it does not follow that he understands a thing. The intention of the inspiring Spirit may be revealed only by time (Darlow 1925:398).

But, even in the case of someone writing prosaically, can we really know what the author 'meant'?

Reading is in itself an act of interpretation. As Bart Ehrman says in *Misquoting Jesus*: 'I saw that reading a text necessarily involves interpreting a text' (Ehrman 2005:216). Reading is the imputation of the reader's own interpretation to the text. Ehrman also says that reading a text means putting the text 'in other words' which involves

explaining texts in light of [the readers'] other knowledge. The only way to make sense of a text is to read it, and the only way to read it is by putting it in other words, and the only way to put it into other words is to have other words to put it into, and the only way you have other words is to have a life, and the only way to have a life is to be filled with desires, longings, needs, wants, beliefs, perspectives, world views, opinions, like, dislikes – and all the other things that make human beings human (Ehrman 2005:217).

Though Ehrman is talking about the Bible when he writes this, it applies to all texts. So, for example, when Jeanne de Salzman, then leader of the Gurdjieff Society following Gurdjieff's death, says that

Nicoll has 'given out [the Teachings] with the exact formulation without any distortion', this cannot be so. By putting the Teachings into his own words Nicoll has interpreted it, even before consciously commenting on it. Similarly when I offer a précis of Nicoll's or Ouspensky's texts, I am putting what I interpret as their thoughts into my own words. Therefore, however much I might say 'Nicoll says', intending to transmit Nicoll's thoughts, I inevitably pass on my interpretation.

But understanding that reading is an act of interpretation is even more important when studying esoteric texts such as Nicoll takes the Scriptures to be:

We all change scripture every time we read it; we are trying to understand what the authors wrote while also trying to see how the words of the texts might have [had] significance for them, and how they might [have helped] them to make sense of their own situation and their own lives (Ehrman 2005:218).

In this kind of literature a deeper, 'symbolic' meaning usually has to be found beneath the overt, 'logical' meaning, which may well be nonsense. Ouspensky writes:

every phrase, every word, contains hidden ideas, and it is only when one begins to bring these hidden ideas to light, that the power of the New Testament and its influence on people, which has lasted for two thousand years, becomes clear (Ouspensky 1931:150).

I defend the validity of a hermeneutical reading of these texts for their 'allegorical, spiritual or hidden meaning' by engaging with the counter-arguments. As presented by Ingvild Gilhus, one of the commonest arguments against the allegorical interpretation of Scripture is that it is a

deconstructive approach that may strike at the very heart of texts, giving them a new interpretation and destroying their traditional authority. [There is the danger, so this argument runs, that] texts can [be made to] mean anything that an interpretative community wants to find in them (Gilhus 2011:282).

I contend however that the whole point of hermeneutics is to find meaning 'hidden' in some sense that will only come to light through interpretation. Because a text is a living thing that responds to each new reader, a new interpretation is bound to find new meaning. Such an interpretation is bound to be deconstructive. If not there is no point in it. It is not a question of reading things into a text, but of reading something out of it. To invoke 'traditional authority', or 'acceptable readings' as necessary determinants in hermeneutics ossifies a tradition, which must always be creative. Did not these texts when initially written destroy traditional authority?

It is often further argued that making a text 'say what the interpreter wants it to say' is not what hermeneutists are supposed to do, since this method is utilised at the expense of interpretations

that say something about the users of a text and of textual communities at a certain point in history (Gilhus 2011:282).

Instead, it is argued, religious texts should be interpreted in a scientific manner taking account of

acceptable readings [which do not] exceed the bounds of interpretation that are dependent on the text's cultural and social context (Gilhus 2011:282).

To this I riposte that the bounds of interpretation are not, and never have been dependent on the text's cultural and social contexts. Although texts may 'say something about the users of the text and of textual communities at a certain point in history', at this level what they say is, I would argue, superficial, even if necessary for a thorough understanding of the text. But that we continue to read Scripture implies that we imagine it to have been written for all time, and that what it has to say most profoundly addresses us at a level that transcends cultural or social context.

In my view biblical interpreters must now acknowledge that the 'allegorical, spiritual or hidden [interpretation] of scripture' gives it meaning. This meaning is mythical, not factual, historical or scientific. Amid the welter of theories of what the 'origin, function and subject matter' of *myth* might be (Segal 2010:372), and of what it means, I take as a beacon both Jung's symbolical interpretation of myth, and Rudolf Bultmann's demythologising of the New Testament. Bultmann,

despite [using] the misleading term 'demythologisation', strives [as does Jung] not to eliminate myth but to reinterpret [it] symbolically to make it acceptable to moderns. [Both thinkers] argue that the true meaning of the New Testament has always been symbolic, though for Bultmann, myth read symbolically describes the human condition rather than, as for Jung, the human mind (Segal 2010:381).

I contend that Nicoll similarly understood the Bible to be the setting down of non-rational knowledge in symbolical or mythical form. In this view the real meaning of the text is hardly ever 'plain sense'. The purpose of hermeneutics is the elucidation of the esoterically hidden meaning of the myth the text encapsulates. This myth Nicoll sees (using Segal's nomenclature) as exclusively anthropological or existential. In terms of Gurdjieff's thought this might be rendered psychological

or cosmological. I shall amplify these introductory comments on hermeneutics when analysing Nicoll's hermeneutical strategies.

### **A note on 'religion' and 'psychology'**

William James remarks that definitions of 'religion' 'are so many and so different from one another that the word "religion" cannot stand for any principle or essence' (James 1902:23). When used in ordinary speech the term, I suggest, is an umbrella term, a taxonomical label, meaning something connected in some way in the perception of practitioners with what they consider religious. Religion used in this broad sense means belief in or the sensing of some superhuman controlling power or powers entitled to obedience, reverence and worship, or in a system defining a code of living, especially as a means to achieve spiritual or material improvement, especially but not exclusively as represented by an organised Church as a standard of spiritual and practical life. For many this is most strikingly encapsulated in a code of morals, worship or good works. When the word is used in this thesis, either in quotations or comment, it is most usually used in this non-specific sense. But care is needed not to see religion merely from the sociological point of view. Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), for instance, sees religion as a social phenomenon that brings the individual into relationship with society. Society is an example of what Durkheim calls a 'collective representation' [the social power of ideas stemming from their development through the interaction of many minds – Crystal 1994:293] that has a reality 'existing outside individual consciousness' (Durkheim in Lyon 1995:223). In this view the reality of the individual is one pole in the sociological antinomy society-individual. Durkheim sees religion viewed in this way as a social phenomenon, which he says ought to be treated as a thing:

we must consider social phenomena in themselves as distinct from the consciously formed representations of them in the mind; we must study them objectively as external things. [In order to do this] *all preconceptions must be eradicated*. [The researcher] must emancipate himself from the fallacious ideas that dominate the mind of the layman; he must throw off the yoke of these empirical categories which from long continued habit have become tyrannical (Durkheim 1938: 27, 28, 32: his emphasis).

The danger of this approach is that any other plane than the sociological is ignored. But 'religious beliefs and our moral standards carry with them an emotional tone' (Durkheim 1938:32). It is just

this 'emotional tone', the 'empirical categories' and the 'consciously formed representations [of religion] in the mind' that Durkheim abjures that give religion its meaning, and it is the significance of these things that is the object of my research. Much of the argument of the thesis suggests the use of the term religion in a narrower definition appertaining to some kind of inner activity to bring the soul as an individual reality into relationship with the transcendent reality. This inner activity, which is sometimes encouraged and pursued by religious organisations, may and often does take place also through organisations that are not religious in the broad sense (philosophy, particularly, ['the Work']), and may also take place without connection with any organisation at all (such a figure as Walt Whitman comes to mind). In the view of thinkers like Ouspensky this type of religion is the impelling source of all the outward phenomena that make up religion in the broad sense. It is in this way that Nicoll sees religion. In Nicoll's eyes religion merely as a social phenomenon was that of a person 'who was simply a deist – a man of good feeling, taking religion as external observance and a reasonable charity' (Pogson 1961:181) and had very little connection with what he regarded as the essence of religion, which was articulated only by the type of religion to which the term 'esoteric Christianity' could be applied.

Psychology is the science of the soul. The term, invented by Luther's colleague Philip Melancton (1497-1560), whom Wayne Rollins calls 'the virtual father of the term *psychology*' and whose lectures and publications according to Rollins 'exemplified post-reformation biblical psychology' (Rollins 1999:23) was extant long before modern 'scientific' psychology appeared. It is one of the basic arguments of this thesis that the dynamics of modern 'scientific' psychology are germane to the older science of the soul, science in the earlier meaning of that term, as knowledge about something. Even so, it is probably a misnomer to call 'scientific' psychology a science in the sense of the natural sciences; it has, even in its most arid materialistic versions, a connection with the transcendental. If my use of psychology may seem to confuse these categories, that is because there is in my view no real distinction between them. It is all a question of emphasis and nuance. It might even be said that in a certain sense psychology and religion are the same thing.

## **SOURCES**

### **How Nicoll and his ideas have been experienced: an assessment of primary and secondary sources**

#### **Maurice Nicoll's literary heritage. Primary sources in the literature of Nicoll's circle.**

In this section I outline the nature and extent of the primary and secondary sources. The Nicoll Archive at Yale University [Yale University Manuscripts and Papers: Maurice Nicoll Papers, MS 1348] contains copies of a number of Nicoll's published books. Though none is annotated (some of them were only published after Nicoll's death), some show evidence of earlier ownership. The copies of the *Commentaries* in the archive, for instance, volumes one to three from the early private-subscription edition, and volumes four and five from Vincent Stuart's publication, belonged to Nicoll's secretary Beryl Pogson. Volume one has a superscription in Nicoll's hand, which reads ΜΝ Δος και Τισω [pass on to someone]. Besides this there are a number of letters, documents (legal and otherwise), photographs, typed essays and articles, press clippings of notable events in Nicoll's life, and personal postcards (not all of them addressed to Nicoll). Most of this interesting material has been published in two compilations made by Lewis Creed, *Unforgotten Fragments* and *Centenary Fragments*. All this material came from Pogson to Ronald Oldham and then to Lewis Creed. Muriel Oldham (Oldham's wife) donated some items to Yale in 1982, and Lewis Creed the remainder in 1994-5. The Ouspensky Archive, also at Yale, contains material left in America with his wife when Ouspensky returned to England after the Second World War. This material was deposited in Yale after Ouspensky's wife's death in America, and this is doubtless the reason why Creed felt the Nicoll material should also go to Yale. The Ouspensky archive contains typescripts of some of Ouspensky's books, most notably the one not published in his lifetime, *In Search of the Miraculous*, and a copy of the first edition of *New Model* annotated for the preparation of the second edition. The Archive of William Robertson Nicoll is housed at Aberdeen University [Library Special Collections], which also holds a large proportion of the books that Nicoll's grandfather Harry Nicoll gathered in the Auld Manse in Lumsden, Aberdeenshire. But supplementing, indeed, almost overwhelming these official archives is the large collection of material until recently in the custody of Sam Copley's daughter

Camilla. A large number of hard-covered exercise books containing transcripts of Nicoll's group meetings from 1930-1953, diaries [which are more often records of reveries and dreams] from 1913-1921, 1940-1953, and fair copies of the text of many of Nicoll's publications, are supplemented by a large number of loose-leaf typescripts, letters, rough drafts, notes and galley proofs. This primary-source collection passed to Diana Pettaval, and from her husband John to Camilla Copley. This material has recently been transferred to Edinburgh University Library Special Collections, where it is in the process of being catalogued.

Nicoll's own books [that is, the published versions of them], all of which have already been mentioned, are the main primary sources utilised in the discussion. In addition I utilise *Notes taken at Meetings, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1934 to April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1934*, and *Informal Work Talks and Teachings 1940-1950*, later compilations issued under Nicoll's authorship, and *Selections from Meetings in 1953 at Great Amwell House*. This last, though put together in 1997 [with a small contribution by Beryl Pogson, and possibly also by the publisher Vincent Stuart, himself a Nicollian] is considered part of Nicoll's published *oeuvre*.

I do not follow Rawlinson in seeing Pogson's somewhat 'hagiographic' biography, *Maurice Nicoll: A Portrait* (Pogson1961) as a secondary source, considering it [with Copley's *Portrait of an Upright Man* (Copley1990)], because of the large amount of direct quotations from Nicoll, as a primary source. Pogson, so close to Nicoll, wrote so thoroughly under his aegis that her work cannot furnish a dispassionate view of him. The status of Pogson's books on 'the Work' fall somewhere between that of primary and secondary source. *Work Talks at the Dicker*, *More Work Talks*, and *The Work Life*, as the subtitle of the last says, 'based on the Teachings of Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and Nicoll', are all her own work in her own words. Although 'what Nicoll said' might be alluded to, there is next to no direct quotation of him (though there is from other people). *Brighton Work Talks*, similar in nature, is a posthumous compilation by Bob Hunter. It gives more extensive direct quotation from Nicoll than Pogson's own books.

Diana Pettavel's *A Few Recollections of Doctor Nicoll and of Amwell 1949-1953* is primary material. Though containing no substantial quotations of Nicoll, he is described in it by this participant in his later groups, and there are some pithy quotations, which give a flavour of Nicoll's verbal response in group work.

### **Primary Sources in the literature of the wider Gurdjieff circle**

Here I survey primarily books written by members of the Gurdjieff circle that give pertinent contemporary information about Nicoll. I also cite the literary *oeuvre* of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff as a primary source for the understanding of the milieu of the movement of which Nicoll became an important if semi-detached part.

J. H. Reyner, a particular friend of Ouspensky, was a long-time pupil of Nicoll. In the chapter on Nicoll in his *Ouspensky: the Unsung Hero* (1981), Reyner gives a sympathetic and insightful assessment of Nicoll, talking of the 'particularly happy relationship' between Ouspensky and Nicoll and emphasising the closeness between Ouspensky, Nicoll and Orage (Reyner 1981: 83, 107).

Kenneth Walker (1882-1966), a great friend of Nicoll, prominent in his own right, wrote a number of books about 'the Work'. In two of these, *Venture with Ideas* (1952) and *The Making of Man* (1963) Maurice, appearing as M, is depicted with great warmth and admiration.

C. S. Nott (1887-1978) was a long-time member of the International Gurdjieff Society. His *Teachings of Gurdjieff: A Pupil's Journal* (1961) and *Journey through this World: The Second Journal of a Pupil* (1969) make very *en passant* mention of Nicoll's passage through Fontainebleau the year before Nott himself attended. Nott remained acquainted with Nicoll throughout the rest of Nicoll's life. In his second book we get a glimpse of Nicoll and his groups at Great Amwell House, along with an unusual and rather 'polemical' view of the 'confrontation' between Nicoll and Gurdjieff in the wake of Ouspensky's severance from Gurdjieff, and a somewhat condescending assessment of the quality

of Nicoll's teaching and of the members of his groups *vis-à-vis* Gurdjieff's and 'Ouspensky's people' (Nott 1969:109).

Ouspensky's books: *Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World* (1912), an early work of philosophical thought that achieved a wide readership; *A New Model of the Universe: Principles of the Psychological Method in its Application to Problems of Science, Religion, and Art* (1931), another philosophical work describing Ouspensky's exploration of certain ideas, particularly time, the 'manuscript' of which was worked over by a group of which Nicoll was a member; and *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments from an Unknown Teaching* (1950), Ouspensky's description of Gurdjieff's teaching set within the frame of a 'memoir' of the meeting of the two men and 'an accurate picture of what Gurdjieff taught in Russia in 1915-18' (Webb 1980:138) all reflect Ouspensky's intellectual world that so influenced Nicoll.

*Gurdjieff's Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963), *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson: An objectively impartial criticism of the life of man: Third Book* (1950), and *Life is Real only Then, When 'I am'* (1975) are the three books in which Gurdjieff belatedly and rebarbatively sought to set down in writing his philosophy; the second and third of these books are couched in dense allegory. *Herald of Coming Good* (1933) was designed to raise funds to save the *Prieuré*. Even Gurdjieff's devoted followers felt that this puzzling 'work', a cross between pamphlet, prospectus for Gurdjieff's 'Institute', invitation to subscribe to *Beelzebub's Tales*, garbled and probably spurious 'biographical' history, revelation of 'trade secrets' (Webb 1980:430), and advertisement for the end of time did Gurdjieff no favours and tried to dissuade him from publishing it. Webb says of it that 'there is no doubt that [its publication] was one of the factors which substantially reduced [Gurdjieff's] prospective readership [and] coincided with the biggest exodus of his American pupils' (Webb 1980:427). Even the devoted Orage refused to edit it (Beekman Taylor 2012:68). Indeed, Gurdjieff later took steps to recall unsold copies, and 'all copies in England were rounded up and destroyed' (Webb 1980:429). *Gurdjieff's Early Talks 1914-1931* [earlier version entitled *Views from the Real*

World] is a collection of early talks examining various aspects of ‘the system’<sup>11</sup> at the head of which stands a text referred to as *Glimpses of Truth* or *Reflexes of Truth*, a significant text which will be described in due course.<sup>12</sup>

### **Secondary sources**

James Webb’s *The Harmonious Circle* (1980); James Moore’s *Gurdjieff: A Biography: The Anatomy of a Myth* (1991); Paul Beekman Taylor’s *G. I. Gurdjieff: A New Life* (2008); and Bob Hunter’s *P. D.*

*Ouspensky: Pioneer of the Fourth Way* (2000 – also published as *Don’t Forget*) are all biographies and studies of Gurdjieff or Ouspensky. Nicoll is mentioned in them only as a shadow flitting through other stories. Even in Webb’s book, *The Harmonious Circle*, in which many quite detailed character sketches are given, and which covers Nicoll more thoroughly than the others, Nicoll does not receive the treatment that Ouspensky and Orage, or even a ‘Work’ outsider like the writer Katherine Mansfield do. There is neither a section giving a rounded view of him, nor even basic biographical details, even though we learn from Webb that Nicoll, with Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and Orage is, as it were, one of the ‘saints’ of the Gurdjieff movement (Webb 1980:14).

Webb depicts Nicoll as involved in that maelstrom of ‘seekership’ into matters Theosophical, occult and psychoanalytical that occurred after World War I (Sutcliffe 2004:466-90 *passim*). He also shows him, despite his literary connections with renowned but ‘anti-establishment’ figures such as Edwin Muir [not to mention Jung],<sup>13</sup> as thoroughly respectable, part of the British establishment, connected in high places, a Harley-Street specialist earning money and holding a real position in the world, who dabbled in these not quite respectable areas (Webb 1980: 200, 217, 224). Webb mentions J. B. Priestley’s call in his *Man and Time* (1964) for ‘an assessment [of Gurdjieff] by an independent writer’ (Webb 1980:11), an appeal that Webb felt impelled to respond to, and of which his book is the result. Priestley has a chapter in his book, ‘Esoteric School’, which is a pithy

---

<sup>11</sup> These talks are reconstructions of talks ‘compared and regrouped by Olga de Hartmann’, who was present, and ‘could guarantee their authenticity’ (Gurdjieff 1973: viii).

<sup>12</sup> Author unknown, cited as ‘a Moscow pupil’ in Gurdjieff 1973: viii.

<sup>13</sup> Nicoll psychoanalysed Edwin Muir (Webb 1980:401).

introduction to Gurdjieff and 'the Work', saying that 'a good deal has been written about [the Work] from the inside, but nothing of importance from the outside' (Priestley 1964:264). Priestley then analyses, not without criticism, Ouspensky's views of time. Nicoll he describes as an early student of Gurdjieff, 'a pupil of Jung and then a distinguished Harley Street specialist', and of *Living Time* Priestley is particularly laudatory (Priestley 1964: 264, 138).

Since Nicoll was not only a disciple but a real friend of Ouspensky, he is mentioned often in Bob Hunter's book on Ouspensky, *Don't Forget*. Nicoll's assessments of Ouspensky, often through anecdote, are used in the book to reinforce Hunter's views. Hunter shows the importance of Nicoll's relationship with Ouspensky by saying that

Ouspensky's lectures [in 1922] opened a new way of life to Nicoll. Nicoll and Orage immediately saw much of the significance of the system of ideas propounded by Ouspensky (Hunter 2006: 133, 121).

Hunter suggests that Nicoll, understanding 'from his training from Carl Jung that "what we call love is simply the projection of ourselves into someone else" ' was alone among those at Ouspensky's 1924 London lectures who understood Ouspensky's 'distinctions between mechanical, self-, physical, emotional and conscious love' (Hunter 2006:133). Hunter assesses Nicoll's contribution to the Gurdjieff movement by evaluating his writings, especially the *Commentaries*, as 'down-to-earth ways of explaining Work ideas' (Hunter 2006: 206-7).

Though Nicoll is mentioned in Moore's and Beekman Taylor's books, the references are exiguous. There is very little in either of these books that gives a picture of Nicoll or shows the part he played in Gurdjieff's movement; most comment given in them is to be found already in Webb.

### **Academic and specialised reception of Maurice Nicoll's work.**

No academic monograph has been written on Nicoll. He features but little in academic discussions, either of the Gurdjieff movement as a whole, or in the history of psychology and psychiatry. The primary sources, his published writings and archives, remain unexamined.

Rawlinson's encyclopaedic *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (1997) has a major entry on Gurdjieff, and, under the heading 'The Gurdjieff Legacy', lengthy articles on the 'movement's' chief 'disciples': the Ouspenskys, Rodney Collin, Robert de Ropp, A. R. Orage, Jeanne de Salzmänn, Jane Heap. There is a separate entry on J. G. Bennett, another Gurdjieffian who 'joined Ouspensky's circle on his return to England' (Webb 1980: 226, 383), and attended Fontainebleau, even if only as a weekend visitor, when Nicoll was there (Webb 1980:234). He was very closely associated with Walker in 'Work' matters (Webb 1980:441). Nicoll, though mentioned infrequently in these entries, has a full and accurate entry to himself. Rawlinson champions Nicoll's insights, citing Jeanne de Salzmänn's (whom Rawlinson calls 'the upholder of Gurdjieffian orthodoxy') accolade of his *Commentaries* (Rawlinson 1997:300). Rawlinson calls Nicoll 'an orthodox Ouspenskian' whose interests and experiences were 'in the psychological side of the teachings and [who] has little to say about cosmology'. However, that Nicoll was concerned with the psychological to the exclusion of the cosmological does not, I argue, hold water. Nicoll,

a fairly typical member of the British upper-middle class, certainly unusual but perhaps more complex than his façade of plain Englishness [Nicoll was actually a Scot] would have us believe, never saw any discrepancy between Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, being the only prominent person in the work who just carried on after the deaths of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff as if nothing had happened (Rawlinson 1997:300).

The bibliography to the article on Nicoll in Rawlinson's book is indicative of the lack of coverage of him by sources of any kind. Rawlinson lists under Secondary Sources only Pogson's biography.

In a recent article by Johanna Petsche, 'A Gurdjieff Genealogy: Tracing the Manifold Ways the Gurdjieff Teaching has Travelled',<sup>14</sup> a section dedicated to Nicoll, emphasising his allegiance to and similarity to Ouspensky, situates him in the nexus of the transmission of 'the Work'. In the section entitled 'Independent Groups' there is a succinct but very informative analysis of the history of Nicoll's groups after his death.

---

<sup>14</sup> Petsche 2013

A blog *Behind Real I Lies God* by Sophia Wellbeloved,<sup>15</sup> though dedicated to Nicoll alone, is hardly extensive. Wellbeloved, one-time member of the Gurdjieff-Ouspensky movement, suggests that Nicoll, though talking a lot about ‘the Work’, never really explains what it is:

Nicoll has an awful habit of writing about ‘the Work’ as if we all knew what it was and that it spoke in a clear and strident voice (Wellbeloved 2013).

But saying that Nicoll ‘took too much care to express his meaning’ in his ‘“polished” work’, and that therefore ‘his best and most unique (*sic*) insights’ came from elsewhere in his *oeuvre*, while at the same time accusing him of failing to make his views clear, seems a little inconsistent. Wellbeloved also criticises Nicoll for being ‘prolix and didactic’, in the *Commentaries* particularly. I suggest that the teaching needed to impart this difficult and strenuous life-changing practice cannot be transmitted by well-ordered academic discourse. I do not accept either that reading Nicoll’s work leads to ‘having the sense of being reprimanded by a schoolmaster’, or that ‘the many references to the Gospels’ import ‘a sense of preachy self-righteousness’ to Nicoll’s teaching.<sup>16</sup> But reviewing Nicoll’s and Pogson’s books, Wellbeloved concedes that ‘Nicoll is something of an outsider in certain Gurdjieff circles’ and regrets his ‘distance from the centre’, suggesting that since what he has to say is worth much more in purely Gurdjieffian terms than much written in ‘Foundation-sponsored works’ by those ‘nearer the centre’, putting ‘together a single volume of about 200 pages called “*Nicoll’s Approach to Mystical Philosophy*”, systematically synthesising Nicoll’s teaching rather than cutting and pasting from various sources, would be a public service’ (Wellbeloved 2013).

### **Maurice Nicoll. A Portrait from the written sources. How he was seen and saw himself.**

In this section a critical biographical portrait of Nicoll is presented, synthesised initially from a survey of the most relevant sources: the substantial biography of Nicoll, Beryl Pogson’s *Maurice Nicoll: A Portrait* (1961); a short pamphlet, *A Few Recollections of Dr Nicoll and of Amwell*, (no author given

---

<sup>15</sup> *Behind Real I Lies God*, <http://www.gurdjieffbooks.wordpress.com/tag/lewis-creed/24/09/1>, last accessed 10. 10 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Carole Cusack writes in a personal note to the author: ‘It is Nicoll’s deep immersion in the Christian scriptures that renders him difficult to many in and out of the work’ (2017).

but signed D. P., 1983) by Diana Pettaval, a pupil of Nicoll (1999); *Selections from Meetings in 1953 At Great Amwell House* (1997); and *Portrait of a Vertical Man: Maurice Nicoll – an Appreciation* by Sam Copley (1989).

After the four sources to be used for the 'portrait' have been evaluated, a detailed exposition of the development of Nicoll's character and ideas will be presented, followed by a consideration of the motives for what I argue is the 'pilgrimage' or 'quest' that defined Nicoll's life.

### **The four sources**

Beryl Pogson, author of *Maurice Nicoll: A Portrait* (1961), was Nicoll's pupil, later secretary, and a leading light in the tradition that Nicoll created among adherents taught by him, latterly at Great Amwell House near Ware in Hertfordshire. Pogson was, Creed tells us, 'before [Nicoll's] death in 1953 authorised to teach "the Work" ' (Pogson 1994: xi). Until her own death in 1967 Pogson, seeing herself as the most authentic exponent of Nicoll's teaching, assumed the role of the leading personality in the movement (Pogson 1995:6; Pogson 1994: xi-xii). She wrote extensively on the routines and methods for psychological advancement which Nicoll had learned from Gurdjieff at first hand at the Institute at Fontainebleau and adapted in the course of his own exposition (Pogson 1961: 72-110 *passim*).

In Pogson's biography a quotation by Samuel Johnson stands as an epigraph: 'Every man's life may be best written by himself'. Pogson, doffing her cap to this, 'tried to write against the background of his life as he himself remembered it' (Pogson 1961: xiii). But Nicoll says:

One's real life is not outer events, but inner states. Inner, individual authentic perception [is] the only source of real knowledge. No one knows what I am thinking (Nicoll 1957:8).

If we take this view, the more substantial insight we have into Nicoll's life is through his writings, in which his life 'is best written by himself' through a description of his inner struggle. Nevertheless a portrait might be drawn by those around him in 'the Work' as he 'shared some of his own inner life' in that 'real teaching [which] is always oral and secret' (Pogson 1961: xiii). This is what Pogson does.

Pogson says that rather than being an 'orthodox biography', hers is 'about his *external daily life*', (Pogson 1961: xiii – Pogson's terms, emphasis added). In describing Nicoll's life Pogson uses anecdotally her own reminiscences, but there are quotations also from: Frances Ney, Nicoll's literary secretary before Pogson, well read in mysticism and psychology (Pogson 1961:116); Selene Moxon, long-term group member (Pogson 1961:118); and Fulford Bush, business man become psychoanalytical patient, then pupil, instrumental in Nicoll's endeavours to set up houses to teach the 'Work', and to publish his writings (Pogson 1961:105ff). There are many shorter anonymous quotations from group members or those engaged with Nicoll in the ordinary course of his life (like landlords of the local pubs where he drank). There are many quotations from letters between Nicoll and family members, extensive quotations from *In Mesopotamia* (Nicoll 1917b – war-time reminiscences), and from letters and diaries, particularly from the periods of Nicoll's friendship with Ouspensky, and the time, spent mostly at Birdlip, a small Gloucestershire village, whence Nicoll moved to escape the wartime bombing of London.

Though Pogson was well educated<sup>17</sup> and widely read in the religious, philosophical and esoteric literature germane to an understanding of Nicoll's work (Pogson 1961:116), and although she, as Nicoll's closest 'professional' confidante, was well positioned to show an unparalleled grasp of Nicoll's method, her book fails to show the significance of 'the Work' in Nicoll's life, as Wellbeloved points out in *Behind Real I lies God*: 'Pogson could have made some attempt to bring together important ideas' (Wellbeloved 2012). Admittedly Nicoll himself does convey a sure insight into the nitty-gritty of everyday life. For instance, he relates the thinking of the majority about the war, the often thoughtless wartime patriotism, and the '*collective disease*' that he sees war is with the universal psychological makeup of the individual, by, for instance, offering controversial views of Chamberlain and Hitler (Pogson 1961: 174, 217). But, as Copley says,

Maurice Nicoll wrote from the experience of the day with a kind of alchemy that could transmute the base metal of humdrum experience into the gold of a different quality of experience without

---

<sup>17</sup> Pogson held a first-class honours degree in English Literature from Royal Holloway College, London, gained in 1916; it appears that she was also knowledgeable about dramatics (Pogson 1995: 4-6).

necessarily changing external circumstances; a change of inner attitude (Copley 1989:51, quoting from a magazine article for "*Light*").

Nicoll sees that the inner, secret and invisible part of a person, his 'essence' is where the real in the person lies, not in his 'Personality'. This personality is the polar opposite of 'essence', 'external', conditioned by the hard fact of external events, contingent, and transient. Copley thinks that by expressing in his writings 'the transmutation [of] the base metal of humdrum experience' through understanding it from the inner person, Nicoll, by a form of 'alchemy', was attempting to realise his 'essence' (Copley 1989: 51, 55). Perhaps what Wellbeloved means is that Pogson, though richly and as far as we can tell accurately illustrating Nicoll's external daily life, failed to convey this 'alchemy' in her book.

*A Few Recollections of Dr Nicoll and of Amwell 1949-53* [1999], by Diana Pettaval, is a series of anecdotes, either elucidating specific topics such as 'what eternal life means', *metanoia*, and 'the soul', as covered by Nicoll in question-and-answer sessions, or giving a vivid picture of verbal interchanges that arose in everyday life. In contrast to Pogson's portrait, Nicoll is shown, in a manner often utilised by 'Work' teachers, of disconcerting his questioners by answering in a rude and personal manner, exposing and criticising their ignorance or stupidity, or giving aphorisms and one-liners that were as obscure as the questions asked and expecting his auditors to grasp the point. 'Can you *catch*?' was a frequent rejoinder to the puzzlement evoked by his answers (Nicoll 1999:11; Copley 1989: 79-80). Asked: 'What is false personality?' Nicoll replied: 'Where it hurts, dear'. Or, when Diana is trying to show the 'need for directed attention', a core 'Work' premise, while undertaking the trivial task of dusting the banisters Nicoll comes by and says: 'Why are you doing this cleaning? Is it necessary? Obviously not! It doesn't seem to be doing you any good either' (DP 1999: 22, 5). Pettaval gives a vivid picture of Nicoll as someone whom the author is initially very unsure how to take, since he knows things of which she is completely ignorant, and, as Nicol was to say of his prep-school Head Master *vis-à-vis* himself, probably saw 'into [her] young, dark and secret soul' (Pogson 1961:3).

*Selections from Meetings in 1953 At Great Amwell House* [1997] is described in its introduction as being almost 'a second appendix'<sup>18</sup> to the *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky* [1957 – hereinafter *Commentaries*]. In the book we see Nicoll's working method. 'Responses to group members' questions about sections of the readings or explanations they had not understood' (Nicoll 1997:1) are delivered in Nicoll's off-the-cuff style in question-and-answer sessions triggered by the reading of one of the papers from the *Commentaries*. 'Potent ideas, Nicoll's thoughts and ideas on the work at the culmination of his life and his teaching' come through clearly (Nicoll 1997:1). The book finishes with the record of Nicoll's last meeting, prefaced by Pogson, who, with Vincent Stuart, had on that occasion read the paper from the *Commentaries* 'Observation of Attitude to the Work' (Pogson 1961:279).

### **Nicoll's life**

Maurice Nicoll was born in Kelso in Scotland, but moved to London aged four when his father, prevented by illness from continuing his ministry in the Scottish Free Church took up a position as a journalist with Hodder and Stoughton. Nicoll's father, WRN, must always have been, as Pogson says, 'too dominating, too overpowering, too famous' a man (Pogson 1961:19)<sup>19</sup> who 'seems to have been a dominating character for whom his son had admiration and respect, but also a measure of awe amounting to fear on occasions in his younger days' (Copley 1989:1). After Nicoll's mother's death in 1894 this father became the commanding figure in the boy's life until the lost mother was replaced by a stepmother. Maurice, brought up 'more in fear of the devil than in the Love of God' (Copley 1989:1), developed a stammer (*Commentaries*: 8). Even so, as Darlow, WRN's biographer, says, despite his dominating presence in his children's lives they played little part in his. The reading WRN did necessarily for his journalistic work, 'prodigious in quantity', meant that even at home he was reading most of the time. It is true that WRN did have a specific day on which he would remain at home doing no work. He usually had tea 'when the children would have arrived home from school'.

---

<sup>18</sup> This phrase comes from the introduction, obviously not by Nicoll, presumably written by Pogson.

<sup>19</sup> WRN was himself aware that he himself had been 'defrauded of his youth' by an overly moralistic upbringing (Copley 1989:1)

Also on Sundays WRN compelled a Sabbath observance on his children in person (though they hardly ever heard him preach),

all the family driving to St. John's Wood Presbyterian Church. The drive there and back took a long time, the service was tedious and altogether these Sunday mornings seem to have been for a small boy an ordeal which had the effect of making him look back on Sunday as a dreary day (Nicoll in Pogson 1961:4).

Nevertheless, WRN's unremitting workload, he even truncating his Scottish holidays, leaving the family there by themselves, left limited time for intimate contact with his children. The remote, godlike Victorian *paterfamilias*, though in control of every aspect of the child's life, was not much with him or her.

### *Nicoll's reaction against the Christian Religion*

Pogson writes that 'he [Nicoll] felt his father thought little of his ability, and felt it impossible to have a reasonable or intimate conversation with him' (Pogson 1961:26). From this distance perhaps stems the father's complete underassessment of Maurice's worth, he seeing this talented boy as 'stupid, and slow at his lessons, but a dear boy, and so honourable' (Pogson 1961:5). Nevertheless, on recommendation of his stepmother's father, Joseph Pollard, Nicoll attended Aldenham School, a Public School in Hertfordshire, from 1898 till 1903. Although a son of the Free Church manse, Nicoll had early in life been alienated from the Christian religion that meant so much to his father, 'never [understanding] anything else in regard of religion as a boy other than the feeling of being a sinner, either afraid or worried or [hating] the whole thing' (Nicoll 1957:8). Put off by 'particularly wearing sermons' (he 'avoided the hearing of sermons for ever afterwards' [Pogson1961:4]), rebarbative Old-Testament stories, and a morality that was 'only sexual', 'religion was [for Nicoll] a very gloomy business, and personally I loathed it' (Copley 1989:2, citing *Commentaries*: 8). It was while he was at Aldenham that Nicoll had what I interpret as a 'mystical' experience through which he felt vindicated in this rejection of his natal Christian religion. On one occasion when his clergyman-schoolmaster (the Head Master of Aldenham School)<sup>20</sup> was expounding parables to a class, Nicoll suddenly

---

<sup>20</sup> The eminent and extraordinarily accomplished and gifted Alfred Hands Cooke (HM 1900-20), Old Etonian, late Scholar of King's College, Cambridge, prize winner and medallist, priest, Doctor of Science, one-time

understood that this man ‘knew nothing – nothing, that is, of anything that really mattered’, but also that ‘no one knew anything’ (Copley 1989:2). This was a shock to him, and he came later to understand this as his first episode of what he would call ‘*self-remembering*’.<sup>21</sup> At this moment, ‘my first inner liberation from the power of external life. I knew for certain, by inner authentic perception, the only real source of knowledge, that all my loathing of religion as it was taught to me was right’ (Nicoll 1952:9).

### *Training as scientist, doctor and psychologist. Contact with Jung*

Nicoll went up to Caius College, Cambridge (1903-1906) on a Scholarship. But it was only ‘through his stepmother’s influence that [Maurice] had gone up to Cambridge’ (Pogson 1961:26). He read Natural Sciences, for which WRN ‘had no taste, nor ever attempted to gain any knowledge’ of (Pogson 1961:29). Indeed, this is indicative of the father-son conflict. Maurice was even as a small boy very mechanically minded, whereas WRN scorned even to know how his pocket watch worked. Further, Maurice loved and played music, for which WRN, despite his essentially poetical disposition, had no taste at all (Darlow 1925:408; Pogson 1961:26). Maybe it was Maurice’s perception that WRN ‘despised these subjects [the sciences] and held them of little account’, that caused him, even if mistakenly, to entertain the belief that his father thought little of him. But Pogson says that even though Nicoll thought he was ‘the antithesis of his father they seem to have a great deal in common’ (Pogson 1979:20). Nicoll thought that WRN felt under restraint at home because of his ‘longing for independence and the opportunities to follow a line quite different from that of politics or journalism’ (Pogson 1961:26).

WRN asked Kenneth Walker, later Maurice’s best friend, to look after the younger Maurice at Cambridge. But Maurice was perfectly capable of looking after himself (Pogson 1961:11; Walker

---

University curator in Zoology, writer and leading expert on molluscs, something of a legend as Head Mater of Aldenham in its heyday (information from R. J. Evans, *The History and Register of Aldenham School* [O. A. Society, 1969]).

<sup>21</sup> ‘*Self-remembering*’ is a term coined by Gurdjieff. For multiple definitions see Thring 2002: 267ff. As will be discussed later, this concept is a key element, perhaps the key element in ‘the Work’, an emphasis placed on it both by Gurdjieff and Nicoll.

1963:6-7) and, despite 'the gaiety of his life at Cambridge' (Pogson 1961:13) excelled in his academic studies, his aunt saying of him on graduation that he 'had indeed done as well as possible' (Pogson 1961:13). Taking first-class honours 'he became Senior Soph. Prizeman and was elected to a Foundation Scholarship which, however, he did not take up' (Pogson 1961:12). Medical training and qualification at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London followed (1906-1910). But besides acquiring academic and professional skills Nicoll became adept at those 'engineering' skills to which he had shown early such a natural bent (Pogson 1961: 4, 7), besides becoming an expert horse rider and fisherman, painter and musician (Pogson 1961:29). In 1910, with his sister Connie Nicoll wrote a novel, *Lord Richard in the Pantry*, 'a light comedy', 'tossed off lightly with no thought apart from amusing ourselves' (Pogson 1961: 15, 16). Later dramatized and presented on the West End stage, running for three years, and earning them money, this novel launched Nicoll, under the pseudonym Martin Swayne, on a brief literary career. Serialised stories written by Nicoll for *The Strand Magazine* were later brought together in the form of novels (though Pogson calls them 'short stories' [Pogson 1961:21]). Though these books, according to Pogson, 'were condensed' and 'had very effective plots, with curious surprising twists in them', Nicoll wrote them merely to divert himself (Pogson 1961:21). Only later did he write stories (*The Blue Germ* [1918] and the unfinished *Pelican Hotel* [1939-41]) as vehicles for his ideas. The short story *The Blue Germ*, written at the height of the 1919 'flu epidemic, is a parable in which immortality is engendered by an epidemic disease caused by an artificial virus. The possibility of immortality is used to shed light on the illusory nature of the personality which is driven entirely by desire (Pogson 1989:62). *Pelican Hotel* is a novel inspired by Ouspensky's novel *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin*, which was written in Russia before the First World War, though only published in 1947. In his novel Ouspensky explores the idea of a life lived repeatedly in recurrence with the memory of the lives lived earlier. The tragedy of the situation is that the hero, though knowing the outcome of what he does, cannot do anything differently. In his novel Nicoll imagines himself translated as himself aged 55 from 1939 back to 1914. He attempts to use his memory of the events that led to the outbreak of the First World War to prevent this by meeting notables, including

his father, to persuade them that the war could be stopped by letting Germany know that Britain would stand by France. Nicoll also used the pseudonym Martin Swayne for the series of articles, first published as journalistic articles 'from the front' as it were, in his father's *British Weekly*, later collected into the volume that became *In Mesopotamia* (1917).

Nicoll's education culminated in a period of study in Paris, Vienna and, for the last months of 1912 with Jung personally in Zürich. In relating his experiences in Vienna, 'lightly waving away all reference to his studies, he delighted his hearers with accounts of his experiences at the Spanish Riding School and of his gay German lessons with Georgette', she undoubtedly the object of a romantic attachment.<sup>22</sup> Pogson states that 'in Vienna Dr Nicoll studied the Freudian System of psychology although he never met Freud himself' (Pogson 1961:18). His journey to Zürich, however, resulted in 'his contact with Dr Jung [which] was, he told us, the first important event in his life – an event which changed the direction of his career completely' (Pogson 1961:18). Nicoll says in a letter to Jung on sending him the first volume of the *Commentaries* in 1950: 'you stand at the beginning of my awakening, I love you, and have ever not done so in my heart, and deeply hope to meet you in recurrence' (Letter to Jung in Pogson 1995:196). Jung, at this time 'emancipated' from Freud, not only taught Nicoll, but became a firm friend and father figure, and sought to make Nicoll his protégé (Pogson 1961:71).

In the pseudo-autobiographical *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (1961) Jung describes his state of mind during the time he was rejecting parental religion and embarking on a medical career. After studying science, then set on a career in internal medicine, he threw everything up because 'though science opened the door to enormous quantities of knowledge, it provided genuine insights very sparingly. Without the psyche there could be neither knowledge nor insight'. Convinced, through taking part in a number of séances, that 'spiritualistic phenomena' were genuine 'objective psychic phenomena', Jung made what might have seemed from a social or career point of view a fortuitous,

---

<sup>22</sup> There is a portrait of this relationship in *Pelican Hotel*. Georgette features also in the record of Nicoll's dreams.

even unfortunate detour into psychological medicine the highway for his discoveries and the determining pattern for his life. The parallels between Jung's and Nicoll's early lives are obvious. The decisive and determining move on their way to becoming psychic healers was first to become ordinary doctors, and then to become psychologists (Jung 1995: 106, 115-131 *passim*). Though Jung cannot be credited with turning Nicoll's thoughts towards a career in psychiatry (he must have had this idea already when he went abroad), his meeting Jung was professionally and personally a determining experience, not least because, as Pogson tells us (Pogson 1961:19) Jung's relationship to Nicoll became such that we are justified in saying that he became his 'father figure' just as Nicoll, 'at the beginning of my awakening', was emancipating himself from his biological father. Jung not only turned Nicoll towards what would later, as we shall show, be seen as a more 'spiritual', even 'religious' psychology, than Freud's then-more-fashionable materialistic and particularly sexual psychology. The experience of meeting Jung was also 'a mental turning-point [giving Nicoll] confidence in himself so that he lost his stammer' (Pogson 1961:19). Knowing that he could think for himself was translated into the confidence to do so, to move out from under the shadow of a dominating father and begin to speak clearly with his own voice, equipped with a worldly expertise in psychological medicine.

This confidence, however, was not manifested immediately. For if Maurice, returning from his year abroad, was 'already thinking of a future vastly different from that which Sir William had in mind for him' (Pogson 1961:20), he nevertheless dutifully became a GP in Golders Green, set up by WRN. Though generous 'in allowing him his year abroad to study psychology', WRN's generosity 'cannot have been only financial', but involved allowing Maurice to take a road about which WRN had misgivings. Nevertheless the 'kind of inner restraint' that Pogson mentions as having disappeared through Maurice's contact with Jung had obviously not been sufficiently made away with to make Maurice independent. For though he had 'not the slightest doubt of the value of this line of work [that is, psychology] that I am in' (Nicoll in a letter to WRN in Pogson 1961:22), this psychological work was only part time. In a letter, written from Harley Street, where Maurice was practising

psychology, he excuses his decision to visit Jung for his holidays, but thanks his parents for money for the journey. He re-iterates his enthusiasm for his psychological work which he claims 'will give a universal newness as the impulse of Christianity gave a universal newness'. But this letter shows also, I suggest, that he was still financially and emotionally dependent. Though meeting with Jung was indeed 'a mental turning point, representing Nicoll's shaking himself free from "the mechanical influence of your father"' (Jung's phrase), this liberation 'did not become outwardly apparent for some time' (Pogson 1961:19ff).

### *Military service and its aftermath*

Nicoll was only rescued from general practice in Golders Green, work that, in view of his enthusiasm for psychology, cannot have been congenial, 'when external circumstances released [him] from it', when he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps at the outbreak of the First World War (Pogson 1961: 21, 31). Serving in Crete and Mesopotamia, Nicoll treated the normal physical ailments and injuries that beset fighting soldiers, enduring their privations and abysmal living conditions. Nicoll experienced the gruesomeness of war at first hand and recorded it in *In Mesopotamia*. The privations of heat-stroke, preventable by large doses of salt (though this was either unknown or ignored at the time – Pogson 1961:42), and other medical conditions exacerbated by war-time conditions (malaria, dysentery, sand-fly fever) evinced from the authorities in Nicoll's view a completely inadequate response (Nicoll 1917b: 7-8). This gave Nicoll a healthy disrespect for authority, the Army and the medical profession as then organised, and a scepticism towards the way the world was run that informed his later views.

Nicoll came home from Mesopotamia late in 1916. 'His active service over, [he] now entered upon a new phase of war service' (Pogson 1961:50). Working initially with officers from a private address, he was in the autumn of 1917 'appointed to the staff of the empire Hospital for Officers in Vincent Square, where he had already begun his work on shell shock' (Pogson 1961:57). Although certain medical authorities were beginning to realise that 'shell shock', usually treated severely as

cowardice, desertion or other un-military behaviour was a clinical condition, Nicoll argued for 'an approach hitherto undreamed of by orthodox medicine' (Pogson 1961:50), the treatment of shell-shock victims as psychological cases. The war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, treated together in Craiglockhart Hospital in Edinburgh, were far from alone in 'enjoying' extended periods of 'leave' from the front to 'recover' in a medical rather than a rest-and-recreation sense, and many others were saved by a 'chance' posting out of the war zone (Blunden 1928:189). Nicoll says that sufferers showed a 'regression which is to be considered as the result of the retreat of interest<sup>23</sup> from reality [caused by] the excessive impact of reality on the individual' (Pogson 1961:50). Nicoll earned success and a certain notoriety, writing provocative articles in the *British Journal of Psychology* and *The Nineteenth Century* (the latter article characterised by Pogson as 'an indictment of orthodox medicine'), papers he presented at symposia and reissuing *Dream Psychology* (Pogson 1961: 56, 57, 61). In this book, originally published in 1917 when he returned to England, Nicoll applies Jung's theories to those psychologically injured by a war that destroyed the spirit of a whole generation, 'making thousands atheists, thousands raging lunatics and thousands more [like him] think'. Nicoll, thinking that

when we die we do not by any means solve the great mystery. We have our own natures to contend with the great plan is still that of progress by conquest of self,

felt himself, if not atheistic,

no doubt sufficiently condemned by Christians at home already (Pogson 1961:59 quoting a letter Nicoll wrote for the *British Weekly*).

### *Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's apprentice*

Nicoll was on demobilisation set up by WRN as a psychologist in 146 Harley Street with his colleague James Young, despite WRN's continuing uncertainty about the course his son was following. This was, in my view, a form of pressure from the self-made man from a poor background worshipping at the shrine of success by encouraging his son to tread the same way. But though it might seem that Maurice was gaining independence from both father figures (WRN and Jung), in reality his freeing

---

<sup>23</sup> 'Interest' is the word that Nicoll was to use instead of Freud's 'libido' in his book *Dream Analysis*, published in 1917 (Pogson 1961:54).

himself from 'paternal' influences happened only gradually. An earlier indication of eventual liberation had been a dream of 1914, interpreted by Jung (Pogson 1961:24). In the dream WRN appears, having a rifle with a bullet on which is inscribed Maurice's name. Jung says Maurice does not understand his father, should put himself in his father's place and imagine what it would be like to bring himself up. Maurice then 'began to look on his father in a new light and to appreciate some of the difficulties that he himself must have caused him in the past' (Pogson 1961: 21-24). Pogson certainly sees this dream, dreamed 'at the beginning of [this] new relationship [with Jung] which was the strongest influence in his life for the ten years that followed' (Pogson 1961:24), as an indication of the first step in the resolution of the father-son problem. It stands also, however, with a dream which Jung, staying with Maurice, narrated to Nicoll sometime before 14<sup>th</sup> July 1919, in which Jung dreamed that Nicoll and he were both working on the same tree, but Nicoll at a higher level, which Jung says he cannot understand, though, as Nicoll, who interpreted the dream says

he said it without venom. A few years later I met "the Work". It is much completer than Jung (Nicoll in Pogson 1994:261).

If these two dreams seem to stand like two pillars that frame the period 1913-19 when Nicoll stood under Jung's tutelage, this neat picture is obscured by a dream Nicoll 'dreamed, deep level, big, of Jung, Laura<sup>24</sup> and I working on the 3 branches of a tree as it were and Jung got something valuable from his and was very excited about it'.<sup>25</sup> Maybe Jung's dream suggested to Nicoll he might by 1919 have overcome Jung the father-figure, and is already or will soon be doing Jung's work better than Jung. But Nicoll's own very similar dream, most likely dreamed after he had heard Jung's dream, might well show this not really to be so, especially as other dreams tell us Jung was still an overwhelming influence in Nicoll's life at the time. I argue nevertheless that Pogson is right to see that these dreams indicated to Nicoll clearly what was until 1919 only darkly visible:

---

<sup>24</sup> Laura is a name that occurs frequently in the diaries (1919-1921) but that I have found nowhere else in the sources. From what is written about her in the diaries it seems that she was a woman whom Nicoll seriously considered marrying.

<sup>25</sup> Diary entry, no date, but this entry is previous to the note of Jung's departure on 14. June, noted in a diary entry of June 16. 1919.

Both [WRN and Nicoll] were deeply religious in the true sense of the word, in that the spiritual was ever present to them. Sir William was aware of the reality of Man's inner nature, although it was invisible; and it was this mystery which became Dr Nicoll's lifelong study (Pogson 1961:20).

It seems that though Jung's dream shows that Maurice has moved from one stage of psychological development to a higher, and foretells the completely different character Nicoll's psychology was to take from Jung's, Nicoll had at that time only exchanged one father-figure (his own father) for another (Jung).

Nicoll married Catherine Champion Jones in 1920, the couple visiting Jung for their honeymoon. His wife and he 'discovered that they both had the same end in life', since 'she wanted to find the peace which passeth all understanding – "Why do they write about it if it is not there? I must find it" '.

Significant also in this exchange was Nicoll's statement that he had married her in a previous life – 'I remember. I have married you before' (Pogson 1961: 67-70). This intuition reflects the influence of the concept of 'recurrence', that is that we live and re-live our lives many times as ourselves in the same segment of recurring time. Though Nicoll's later development of this concept of recurrence in *Living Time* (1930) was worked out in the light of Ouspensky's similar notions, this intuition shows that Nicoll was aware of the idea before he met Ouspensky.<sup>26</sup>

Nicoll's turning away from 'orthodox' medicine into the at-that-time new field of psychology, viewed with suspicion not least because of the moral implications of the dominance in this field of Freud's ideas on sexuality, can be seen, like his aversion from Christianity 'as taught me', as an example not only of the abandonment of what did not suit his overriding aim, but also, as will be argued, as a stage towards emancipation from WRN and the world he represented. The fact that Nicoll allowed himself to be groomed as Jung's representative in England as Ernest Jones was Freud's shows that Nicoll felt perhaps that he had at last both found his feet and discovered a field where he hoped to find 'what really mattered'. However, that he could so soon so clearly accept that this field of

---

<sup>26</sup> Nicoll had this idea earlier. In a letter to the *British Weekly* (13. Jan 1916) he wrote: 'when we die we retain our individuality. We still have the problems of our own natures. If we have left much to do on earth we are sent back again to learn [and] to complete our labours. In these simple views [is] a message of comfort and a wonderful lessening of the terror of death' (Pogson 1961:59).

psychological medicine was but another stage on the way, thereby abandoning his 'discipleship' and disappointing a man, Jung, for whom he felt such extravagant feelings, shows a confidence in both 'seeing the truth for himself' and in really having '[found] his own feet' (Copley 1989: Introduction, 52). However it was actually a new kind of father figure in the shape of Gurdjieff, with another kind of message, both of which he was also in due course to abandon, who was to entice him from Harley Street.

Nicoll, who in pursuing at this time his quest from a base of 'connections with Theosophy as well as strong links with Jung' (Webb 1980:216) became involved with 'the sort of psychoanalysis that the *New Age* (a periodical) favoured [that] was never very far from the occult' (Webb 1980:217). He joined the 'psychosynthesis' group which included Havelock Ellis, David Eder and James Young, as well as Dr J Alcock, *New Agers* Dimitrije Mitrinovič and editor A. R. Orage, and Rowland Kenny.

Kenny, who first coined the term 'psychosynthesis', wrote that he

yearn[ed] for a secular occultism that could explain man, his soul, and the universe without revolting the rational mind [and, in opposing] the psychic rubble generated by the [psycho]analysts' quarrying sought to] formulate a kind of programme or scheme for building up the psyche on new lines (Kenny in Webb 1980:217).

Nicoll clearly felt that his psychology, concerned with building up the psyche rather than dismantling it, could be aligned with a 'secular occultism' that nevertheless took cognisance of 'the soul'.

Nevertheless, that what he was seeking was religious in nature, even if not a search for orthodox Christianity, is suggested by a diary entry in 1921 noting a prayer of Hermes Trismegistus:

Teach me – instruct me – shew me the Path, so that I may know certainly – help my great ignorance, illumine my darkness? I have asked a question (Pogson 1961:70).

Through an article<sup>27</sup> in *The Quest*, a magazine devoted to occultism, Nicoll heard of Ouspensky's arrival in England (1921). The day he became a father to a daughter Jane, to whom Jung became the godfather, Nicoll attended a lecture given by Ouspensky to the Quest Society, the brainchild of

---

<sup>27</sup> 'On a Speculation in Fourth Dimensionalism', by the Editor, G. R. S. Mead (Mead 1922: 43-55). There is an article, 'Some Remarks on Fourth Dimensionalism and the Time-Enigma' in an earlier edition of *The Quest* (Mead 1921: 493-505) that mentions Ouspensky *en passant* as 'a Russian mathematician' [which he was not, nor was he a 'professor of mathematics', as he was billed in Mead's second article, and told Mead so in his riposte to this article]. But I presume that it was Mead's later article, which is a review of Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum* that caught Nicoll's attention; ideas in both articles were incorporated into *Living Time*.

Madame Blavatsky's erstwhile secretary G. R. S. Mead (1863-1933), who was also editor of *The Quest* journal (Pogson 1961:70). Returning home to his wife in her confinement Nicoll told her: 'You must come and hear Ouspensky. He is the only man who has ever answered my questions' (Pogson 1961:71). This by all accounts crucial encounter turned '[his and his wife's] lives into a direction from which they never afterwards swerved' (Pogson 1961:70). Showing Nicoll the new direction his quest might take (Webb 1980:221), this event was, I suggest, the crucial turning-point in his return journey to the Christianity he had rejected. Ouspensky's influence, and through him that of his teacher Gurdjieff determined the course of the rest of Nicoll's life. Both his wife and he immediately enrolled in Ouspensky's classes, and shortly afterwards (1922), abandoning his Harley Street practice, Nicoll moved his family to Gurdjieff's experimental teaching colony, the 'Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man', at Fontainebleau near Paris.

The history of Gurdjieff's journey from his native Armenia to Fontainebleau has been outlined earlier in this chapter. When Nicoll went to Fontainebleau the inhabitants of the Institute were theoretically divided by Gurdjieff into three classes: observers/scholars ['theoretical'], participants ['practical'], and medical cases ['medical']. In practice the British and the remaining founder-members of Gurdjieff's original group were 'participants', undergoing the full rigours of the regime in quasi-monastic conditions of obedience and poverty, if not chastity, enduring sleep deprivation, personal humiliation, and often seemingly meaningless hard physical work. The others, mostly Gurdjieff's Russian entourage, including members of his family, living at his expense (Webb 1980:235ff) were 'medical cases', supposedly subject to a personal medical regime that was in practice an introductory course for aspiring participants [Webb 1980:236]). Nicoll appears to have experienced at Fontainebleau the practical implementation of the ideas he had learned from Ouspensky in London, the practical interpretation of a symbolic system which was, though religious, not in any way pious or allied exclusively with any particular religion. Nicoll's move to Fontainebleau was the most crucial in his quest.

### *A teacher in his own right*

After less than a year at Fontainebleau, however, Nicoll, though having originally intended to remain there for the remainder of his life (Pogson 1961:73) returned to Britain for his father's funeral.

Though then returning to Fontainebleau, Nicoll and family almost immediately left, never to return.

Returning to England and medical practice, Nicoll was ostracised by his Harley Street acquaintances, who quipped sarcastically: 'a pity about Nicoll; he got religion' (Nicoll 1999:11). He had indeed 'got religion', though the religion he 'got' was not anything his detractors would have recognised. But

Maurice's experience was not lost on his friend Kenneth Walker. Now, the boot on the other foot,

Maurice, fresh from his experience of Fontainebleau, encouraged Walker to join him in his quest,

and giving him a vivid description of 'the method' persuaded him to join one of Gurdjieff's groups

(Walker 1952:61). Walker remained Maurice's best friend until his death, surviving him by many

years. But despite ostracism, Nicoll's professional practice continued. Also, his resumed relationship

with Ouspensky blossomed, and he became his star pupil and chief acolyte.

Pogson has a whole chapter in her biography on the 'deep personal relationship [that] developed between himself and Ouspensky' (Pogson 1961:94) in the period up to Nicoll's severance from

Ouspensky's tutelage, about which she also gives much detail. She quotes extensively from Nicoll's diaries from the time (which are, incidentally, nowhere to be found at the present time) to give a

picture of a somewhat idyllic friendship. Alley Cottage, on the foreshore at Sidenham in Sussex, what

would now be called a holiday home, was owned by Nicoll. It was the scene of frequent visits by

Ouspensky to the Nicolls, with the local pub playing an important part on these occasions, as it was

to do later in Nicoll's life at Great Amwell. But after some years the professional aspect of this

relationship was abruptly broken off when Ouspensky said to Nicoll: 'Nicoll, you had better go away

and teach the system' (Pogson 1961:109). Reyner is of the opinion that because Ouspensky could

laugh with Nicoll, Nicoll's close friendship had been vital for Ouspensky's development (Reyner

1981:84):

Nicoll's Being developed to a level at which he was not only able to communicate with Ouspensky's inner mind but could help him with his task. However, by the inexorable law of esoteric schools, when the point is reached the pupil has to be told to leave, and attempt to teach independently (Reyner 1981:87).

But though this move to complete independence in the furtherance of the very doctrine of questioning and abandoning previously held and externally imposed personal attitudes was the culmination of the process of becoming independent, it represents a reversal in that it was initiated by the authority figure. But most sources agree that Ouspensky's dismissal was in reality not as curt as this vignette might suggest. Though Ouspensky's manner was normally brusque to the point of rudeness, with Nicoll, a great friend, he was always cordial and polite. Perhaps Ouspensky, finding it difficult to send Nicoll away, had to do it with an excess of rudeness. The two nevertheless remained personally on cordial, affable and indeed intimate terms. Perhaps the split affected Ouspensky more than it did Nicoll. Hunter says that 'some people commented that Ouspensky seemed to become even more aloof than usual after his close friend Nicoll left to form his own group' (Hunter 2006:153). After this 'break' Nicoll assembled his own groups. For the remainder of his professional life he worked as doctor, teacher, and independent spiritual advisor, practising in Harley Street until his retirement in 1939 while organising and leading evening-class or weekend residential groups or schools. Acquiring a property, Lakes Farm, Rayne, in Essex, in 1934 (Pogson 1961:120) for weekend meetings, Nicoll built additional plant in the shape of a house named Tyeponds, constructed by members of the 'Work' groups for the same motives that had impelled Gurdjieff's similar endeavours at Fontainebleau.

Nicoll retired from practice aged fifty-four in 1939. Quotations from his diaries from this time, cited in Pogson's biography, give a picture of his style of leadership when, obliged to vacate Lakes Farm and Tyeponds, he became responsible for a permanent residential 'Work' group who, along with their families were evacuated to the small village of Birdlip in Gloucestershire. Though a period of outward disturbance I suggest that release from the burden of daily professional work allowed him time for writing, which he used to bring the formulation of his ideas to fruition. The selection of

material later collected into the five volumes of the *Commentaries* (1957), notes of what Nicoll read out at meetings, includes only material written at this time or later. His 'Gospel studies,'<sup>28</sup> as Pogson calls them, later published as *The New Man* and *The Mark*, were also written at this time. Though always intended, it would seem, to be written down rather than read out, this material was in fact 'read in the evenings to those who were living in the household, and sometimes we read them at the week-ends to those who had come down, and we talked of them' (Pogson 1961:198-201).

### *Later years*

In 1946 Nicoll took ownership of Great Amwell House, Ware, in Hertfordshire, secured quickly when Quaremead, near Ugley in Hertfordshire, first occupied on Nicoll's return from Gloucestershire at the war's end, proved unsatisfactory, being not large enough to be run as an institute. As Pogson says: 'we never felt that we really belonged to Quaremead' (Pogson 1961:231). Living at Great Amwell until he died, Nicoll organised it, modelled on Gurdjieff's *Priuré*, for the transmission of 'this system' (*Commentaries*: 8), 'the Work'. As we have seen illustrated in *Selections from Meetings in 1953 at Great Amwell House* [Nicoll 1997], Nicoll would on a Friday prepare what he had to say at the weekend meetings, which involved large numbers of people. C. S. Nott says that even before Ouspensky's death Nicoll had 'a group of over a hundred at Amwell' (Nott 1969:109), and many 'orphaned' Ouspenskyites joined Nicoll's group [letter from one of these in Pogson 1961:209]. This material, which later found its way into the *Commentaries*, was delivered on Saturday evening, and discussed in question-and-answer sessions then or on Sunday evening after a weekend of 'Work' activities. This schedule was as it were imposed on the routine of the permanent residents, 'a nucleus of thirteen people' (Pogson 1961:240), and maintained, despite Nicoll's protracted illness with cancer, until his death. In this final period many of Nicoll's writings were published.

---

<sup>28</sup> Pogson calls the 'chapters' Nicoll wrote at this time that were eventually incorporated into *The New Man* and *The Mark* 'Gospel Studies' (Pogson 1961:198).

### *Teaching methods*

Nicoll was seen as and functioned as the sort of authoritative teacher that nowadays would be called a guru, even if he himself might have demurred at the label. He acted as a personal advisor to some of his followers, lectured, issued commands, and acted pastorally. He created a following the members of which interacted with him in the situation of a more-or-less closed community. Though he claimed merely to create the conditions in which one might learn oneself, Storr's description of the guru figure makes it clear that Nicoll exhibited many of the secondary characteristics of the guru figure as Storr defines them (Storr 1996: *xiff*). A certain charlatantry, assumed omniscience, immunity from criticism, aggrandisement of the personality, and abuse of devotees are some of the characteristics of a guru's 'feet of clay' (Storr's title), some of which characteristics can be seen in Nicoll's conduct. Copley says Nicoll's teaching of the 'Work' 'began to assume a perceptible "Nicoll" character when he moved to Great Amwell House', though he (Copley) 'counts himself more than fortunate in receiving the teaching in the way it was given me by them' [Nicoll and his wife]; a guru's teaching is nothing if not personal. Nicoll's career as a Jungian analytical psychologist had often led to people placing great personal trust in him, and this carried over into his work with 'the Work', where he counselled individuals privately, in effect continuing to function for them as analytical psychologist and doctor (Copley 1989: 63-64). Yet while the enormities that Gurdjieff indulged in using the people around him [not least in his sexual abuse of younger female devotees – Storr 1966:38; Webb 1980: 331-332 – fathering many illegitimate children – Beekman Taylor 2008: 19-20] were far from anything that Nicoll did, he nevertheless saw people as to be used by each other in pursuance of 'the Work'. Of someone Nicoll says: 'or else you lose your temper, so I cannot use you' (Pogson 1961:271). He advocated 'seeing others in oneself, and even inviting and returning criticism in the attempt to see through others' eyes what you cannot see in yourself' (Nicoll 1997:126).

This using of others in the furtherance of someone's development seems to be in stark contrast to Nicoll's attitude while at Fontainebleau. There Nicoll, asked by B. M. if he could help him, replied:

'How can I help you? Don't you know I need to help myself? We have to help ourselves. You see, don't you? I can do nothing for you' (Pogson 1961:90). Gurdjieff said 'I cannot change your being, but I can create conditions, thanks to which you can change yourselves' (Pogson 1961:83). Whether such rigid exclusion of personal help was ever quite the norm, Nicoll's practice later appears to have been much more personally sympathetic than this. Affectionate personal testimonies suggest that he came to be seen as a leader personally involved with pupils, spending himself in their service. Using others in pursuit of his aim, he allowed others to use him in pursuit of their salvation. Though Nicoll's manner was often personally disconcerting, Diana Pettaval has little doubt that he, though a man with 'many difficulties and faults, was one of the sanest people I have ever met' (Nicoll 1999:21).

*Nicoll's 'Philosophy': the Guiding Principle of his life.*

Copley says: '[Nicoll] was persuaded that the art of living was expressed in the third chapter of 'Ecclesiastes; "For everything there is a season and a time; a time to plant, a time to pluck up what has been planted" ' (Copley 1989:48). The sources suggest that Nicoll constantly assumed positions later abandoned, searching for someone or something to fulfil the request addressed to Hermes, 'show me the Path'. He serially embraced and then abandoned the world as brought to him by parents, schooling, religion, particularly the liberal and social Christianity expounded in his father's *British Weekly*, science, learning, medicine, Jung's psychiatry, 'the sort of psychoanalysis which the *New Age* favoured' (Webb 1980: 217), the occult and Theosophy, psychosynthesis, and even Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's 'method'. Nicoll's initial enthusiasm for all these gave way not exactly to disillusionment, but the discernment that he needed to seek higher forms of truth elsewhere, eventually realising that these could only be found in himself.

Nicoll's interaction with the medical authorities during the First World War demonstrates his character in this process of abandoning a previously held position to find a new one. Early in his medical career with the Army Nicoll saw that the hidebound, inquisitorial and self-regarding

profession needed root-and-branch re-ordering. 'Nicoll's view of medicine generally tended towards what is nowadays called holistic "constructive" as well as "reductive" ' (Copley 1989:11). So that Nicoll could say, when he had caused the ousting of a recalcitrant leading figure in the management of the Empire Hospital, 'It was I who got Buzzard to move, and he is the pillar, being a square man', shows confidence in his own insights and the courage of his own convictions at a relatively young age (Pogson 1961:58). Nicoll was very much a part of the British upper class. Even though he got encouragement both from his father and others for his choice of a career in psychology, this choice, I argue, in many ways against the grain, shows his basically reforming, even rebellious inclinations. He was not prepared to accept that things were as his elders and betters said they were, as for instance when championing the understanding of his shell-shock patients as cases of mental illness, and acted as he saw fit, whatever the cost. But because of his social standing and his independence this cost was not great, and he remained all his life a respected establishment figure and comfortably off. The paradox that although combative and independent in mind Nicoll until later in life always seemed to stand under some father-figure-type mentor is resolved by his readiness to escape from tutelage and work independently, while at the same time maintaining the warmest relations with the abandoned father figure (though perhaps not with his biological father).

Nicoll, in another striking display of thinking for himself, his early intellectual rejection of the purely sexual morality taught by the church, remained nevertheless for a long time in what he calls 'my attitude, a bondage collective one', finding neither 'the Freedom and Joy that I seek [nor] God nor Joy, nor Love nor Wonder nor Hope nor energy in Sexuality' (Nicoll, diary entry, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1919). In a dream of the same time he asks: 'Tell me quickly what is this sexuality of mine – is it horrible[?]' (Nicoll, diary entry, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1919). But the nature of the dreams recorded allows us to see that Nicoll understands that a solution to the problem of sex goes hand in hand with the solution of wider problems. 'Unless we get Freedom and God and Love into our Sexuality, then what Hope have we?' (Nicoll, diary entry, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1919). In another dream he sees the God/Father figure saying, in the face of Nicoll's demand to embrace 'the Quest': 'Lo, I must always appear thus, as the

Father Forbider, forbidding and warning all who seek to depart from the high road and seek the Quest' (diary entry, September 5<sup>th</sup> 1920). Though this seems to move the God/Father prohibition to another area from the sexual, the earlier part of the dream tells us that 'The Forbidden Thing – oh yes it is forbidden by a weary system of forbidders' is quite specifically sexual. Therefore the final divine admonition, 'I come instantly, seeking to turn all back to the broad way, where ye are children, toddlers, with the eternal chorus of the Forbidders forbidding [*in*] your ears' (Nicoll diary entry, 5<sup>th</sup> September, 1920) carries the resonance of sexual prohibition into the realm of discouragement from embracing 'the Quest'. This series of dreams rather nicely encapsulates the idea of the sexual and religious prohibitions coming from the father as hurdles which Nicoll saw had to be crossed. But whether Nicoll ever really felt comfortable with his sexuality is hard to say. Despite his seeming subsequent release from the strictures of an old-fashioned sexual morality he nevertheless saw homosexuality (and indeed all sexual 'deviation') as examples of a failure to solve what a dream suggests is the great problem, to find 'the Great Release, the God [that] cometh from where Man expects him not, [and] for [which] man groans' (diary entry, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1920). Nicoll sees sexual deviance as a crippling handicap in the search for the spiritual (Pogson 1961:155). Till late in life even 'normal' sex does not emerge unscathed from his critique. His view is that 'The Work' will discourage a person from 'getting his soul entangled with someone of the opposite sex' [he means falling in love, I suggest] 'but you can be attracted, yes!' (Nicoll 1999:12). How are we to take this? Did it apply to his own relationship with his wife, giving him release from the sexual turmoil of the relationships he had with women before marrying her that the dreams and diary entries hint at?

In Nicoll's view all men cannot be equal (Pogson 1961:155); 'we have to think of the strange idea that men are differently sown into the earth' (Nicoll 1954:64). But this idea has little to do with social or material equality. It stems from Nicoll's view of recurrence, which sees each person in the world as on a journey the purpose of which is to fulfil tasks which can only be done here, but which cannot be accomplished in only one lifetime. Each person is, in Nicoll's view, at a different stage of

development. Their worth is not a question of where they happen to be sown, spiritually or socially, but what they do to raise their spiritual level. It is in this way that we can understand Nicoll's idea that the degrees of equality that matter are not 'equality in money – in riches' but 'as regards qualities'. Nicoll's meaning has no primarily political or social sense; a person's 'quality' bears no necessary relationship to his social status (Pogson 1961:155).

Nicoll was well aware, nevertheless, that inequality in terms of quality does have social and political significance. Copley says that Nicoll 'was singularly unattached to material possessions'.

Nevertheless, maybe this is the attitude of someone who always (unlike his father) had enough money. Nicoll's father was rich while Nicoll himself was still a young man, and the wealth he inherited, combined with what he earned as an eminent doctor meant that he could finance 'Work' activities, could be responsible for a large number of dependents during the years of the Second World War, and could when it was over purchase a large property for 'Work' purposes, accommodating a sizable number of inmates. Thus when Nicoll says 'a good aristocracy has its advantages', and that there is, in his view, an unfortunate lack of understanding for the 'biological necessity of castes' (Pogson 1961: 155,169), maybe he means more than that having aristocratic castes is a better way of ordering the world in which the absence of spiritual development renders most people's lives determined by their social class. Maybe Nicoll sees this 'aristocracy', of which perhaps he regarded himself as a member, as in the first instance a class of man which 'The Work' defines in its own terms as 'good householder' (and he did see himself as this), 'a man well orientated to life' (*Commentaries*: 1547) who builds a solid place for himself in the world, fulfilling the obligations of the world on its own terms. Nicoll sees becoming a 'good householder' as both a necessary step in the life progress of a man, regarding failure in this as a frequent cause of that damming back of libido that causes neurosis, but also as the first and essential step to spiritual advance. But the building of such a class is obviously also necessary for the good ordering of society. Widespread failure of this sort not only leads, Nicoll thinks, to spiritual and mental illness, but produces a class of people whom 'the Work' calls "Tramps, people who despise *Good Householder*,

but have no feeling of responsibility towards anything; [this group includes] many artists and poets, etc.’ (*Commentaries*: 1457). But Nicoll’s view that achieving the sort of spiritual progress he has in mind is open to all regardless of social class, status, gender and so forth makes him, I contend, not elitist, as some would say, but egalitarian. But in that taking the first step, becoming a ‘good householder’, is not only a way of achieving spiritual advancement but also a way of escaping the consequences of social disadvantage, Nicoll’s view is also socially egalitarian. Advance is not obligatory, but all are called to it, and all are capable of it.

Even though seeing war as thoroughly un-Christian, not least because of its effects on the combatants, Nicoll was not a pacifist. War, often the lesser of two evils, needed to be pursued, if pursued, as efficiently as possible: ‘What is the army doing? Our Navy does not seem to have acted in the Mediterranean’ he says in the middle of the Second World War (Pogson 1961:153). When he talks of ‘our professional killers’, meaning three high-ranking military officers who were ‘members of the group’, he understands that if they do what they have to do in the right spirit, with ‘active non-identification’, then they are protected from spiritual harm (Pettaval 1999:17). Another category of person defined by ‘the Work’ is that of ‘lunatic’, who are

people like politicians who think that they can change life by means of themselves, people who, if they can put their theories into practice, create greater disorder, thinking that they can change everyone by some new enactment (*Commentaries*: 1457).

Such people want to ‘put the world right’ by whatever means. The sort of person ‘built on a big scale’ brought to mind here is the great dictator, a Stalin or a Hitler. Gurdjieff gives the name ‘hasnamous’ (another ‘Work’ definition) to such people:

“Hasnamous are people whose well-being depends on the ill-being of other people” (Gurdjieff in *Commentaries*: 1547).

Though Nicoll saw the necessity of understanding Hitler and Germany (Diary entry in Pogson 1961:219) he nevertheless saw the necessity of defeating him. But there is no record of a similar understanding of Stalin. It seems that any ‘sympathy’ Nicoll might have had for Stalin would have been filtered through the experiences of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. Ouspensky experienced at first

hand the mass psychology that led to Stalin's rise to power and never lost his fear of and hatred for Stalin.<sup>29</sup>

Nicoll, for all his considerable accomplishments, gave the impression of ordinariness. Nevertheless, 'one correspondent from the country' found on first acquaintance with Nicoll that 'here was someone who knew what he was talking about'. 'Altogether I had the impression that I had met a *man* for the first time with a very ordinary exterior, a strange mixture of fierceness, humour, leg-pulling, relaxation; but nothing of what we would call earnestness, or piousness' (Pogson 1961:123, 274).

This 'portrait of Maurice Nicoll'<sup>30</sup> provides, through the delineation of 'his external daily life' (Pogson 1961: xiii) the frame in which the analysis of his writings, and the consequent building of a picture of his ideas and their development can take place. There is a remarkable consistency between the separate periods of Nicoll's life and the literary deposit of each of those periods. Nicoll the schoolboy, Nicoll the student, doctor and soldier, Nicoll the 'seeker', Nicoll the spiritual apprentice, Nicoll the teacher, Nicoll the publisher of his ideas to a broader public, the voice of each, influenced by but responding to some father-figure, is to be heard in each of the works about to be analysed. The portrait represents also a life lived to completion, or perfection. Pogson paints a portrait of a man who had come to terms with life, who had fulfilled his own life and who on death goes into the unknown; 'No, I am not afraid' he is reputed to have said when asked if he feared death (Pogson 1961:277). Though the task of a biographer might be to spell out how Nicoll incorporated his ideas on living into the living of his own life, my task is not so onerous. I make the assumption that Nicoll lived out his own ideas. I merely describe and analyse the development of those ideas. In turning now to this task I begin with a chapter on WRN's religious stance, and the vindication of Maurice's

---

<sup>29</sup> Ouspensky 1978:38-48. It seems likely that Gurdjieff and Stalin were acquainted, and some authorities even suppose that Stalin lived in the Gurdjieff household for some time and that the two went to school together (Webb 1980:45; Beekman Taylor 2012: 168-9).

<sup>30</sup> This is what Pogson calls her book (Pogson 1961: xiii).

rejection of this natal Christianity by the mystical experience that was the catalyst for his 'quest' to find 'what really mattered'.

## **Chapter 2: 'The Religion of my Father'. Nicoll's early 'mystical' experiences**

Maurice's relationship with his father during childhood forms the background for a consideration of his early rejection of the Christian religion 'as it was taught me'. For a view of William Robertson Nicoll the main sources are: Pogson's *Maurice Nicoll: a Portrait*; Darlow's *William Robertson Nicoll: Life and Letters*; and Ives' *Voice of Nonconformity: William Robertson Nicoll and the British Weekly*. WRN's own book *My Father: an Aberdeenshire Minister 1812-1891* and Copley's *Portrait of a Vertical man* amplify this picture. A comprehensive view of Robertson Nicoll's religious standpoint comes from his *The Return to the Cross* (1897) and *A Garden of Nuts* (1905). A record of Maurice's early experience of Christianity and the crucial and determining experience he underwent at school is found in the letter to Bush at the beginning of the *Commentaries*. To win perspective on Maurice's experience similar events described in Jung's *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (1961) and in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) will be examined.<sup>31</sup>

William Robertson Nicoll (1851-1923) [known in his life and even now as WRN], the eldest child of Harry Nicoll, Free Church Minister of Lumsden, born and brought up in this small Aberdeenshire village, describes his father's life in *My Father: An Aberdeenshire Minister*. Harry, an obsessive reader of considerable academic accomplishments amassed a large 'library, as distinct from a mere collection of books' (Nicoll 1910:29) in his manse. The family lived in straitened circumstances, life for the four children being hard and bleak. WRN says: 'I always felt defrauded of my youth – there was little sunshine in it – far too little'. 'W. R. Nicoll seldom tasted beef until he went to college in Aberdeen; the household lived mainly on vegetables, porridge and dairy produce' (Copley 1989:2). Whether the article in *The Times* of 8. May 1963 (the thirtieth anniversary of WRN's death) goes too far in suggesting that the deaths of much of Harry Nicoll's family from tuberculosis were the direct result of too much money spent on books rather than food (*Times* article, 8. May 1963), Maurice believed they died because of 'the very poor diet of Scots oatmeal and nothing else' (Copley 1989:1).

---

<sup>31</sup> The reasons why Gosse and Jung have been chosen will be addressed when their experiences are described.

WRN's mother died when he was eight years old, one sister in childhood, a promising younger brother, Henry, in early manhood and the other sister, Maria, even though by then with family and children, in her twenties, all from tuberculosis. Maurice recalls, 'they all died quite young of T. B.' (Copley 1989:3).

The religious atmosphere of Harry Nicoll's household was just as bleak. WRN calls the 'religious belief [in which he was brought up] as almost as rigid and quite as faithful as that of Mr. Philip Gosse' (Nicoll 1910: x). Philip Gosse, father of Edmund Gosse (1845-1928), in whose book *Father and Son* their relationship, conditioned by overpowering religious tyranny is portrayed, was a Plymouth Brother. WRN's book, *My Father*, was 'written under the impulse derived from Mr. Gosse's remarkable book' (Nicoll 1910: ix). Though WRN thought Gosse's book 'an unmerciful attack', others thought 'he was far too kind to his father' (Ives 2011:176). Darlow says that, in contrast to Gosse *filis*, WRN (anticipating Maurice's later experience), was not tyrannised by his father in religious matters:

the father's attitude to his children in matters of religion was one of characteristic reticence. "We knew that he [Harry Nicoll] was profoundly religious. Religion with him was first and last. We learned our psalms and chapters, and went to church and Sunday school. But my father never spoke directly to any of us about religion" (WRN in Darlow 1925:9).

One compensating factor in WRN's upbringing was the children's access to Harry's library. They were all gifted in a literary direction. The girls were poets, and Henry later wrote a famous book about Victorian literature, *Landmarks in English Literature* (Darlow 1925:42).

Taught in the Latin school at Auchindoir, WRN went, aged sixteen, to Aberdeen University, taking a degree in General Arts. While subsequently attending the Free Church College, Aberdeen, from which he graduated in 1874, WRN also worked extremely successfully as a professional journalist. Though offered a regular position, he would not swerve from his vocation. After three years tenure of his first ministry at Dufftown he moved to Kelso, in the Scottish Borders, there marrying Isa Dunlop, who bore him two children, Constance and Maurice. However, in 1885 illness (of an incipiently tubercular nature) forced WRN, now for health reasons forbidden to preach, to demit office (Darlow 1925:47ff). Moving to Hampstead in London he pursued a highly successful career as

a journalist, taking over Hodder & Stoughton's religious magazine, *The Expositor*, for which he had already written articles, and founding *The British Weekly*, *The Bookman* and *Woman at Home*, all for Hodder. Widowed suddenly in 1895, WRN re-married in 1898, his new wife Catherine Pollard bearing him a daughter, Mildred (Darlow 1925:67ff).

WRN became rich and almost famous. Considered one of the foremost literary journalists of his time, launching the careers of some considerable talents through his magazine *The Bookman*, WRN became 'a dominant figure of the times' (Ives 2011:13) both in Scottish Presbyterianism and the wider religious community. His position as editor of the *British Weekly* brought him (and the paper) the soubriquet 'The Voice of Nonconformity', enabling him in 1914, in a fit of 'terrific activity' (Pogson 1961:33) to rally the non-conformist 'Free Churchmen, by tradition and temperament averse from fighting, unbroken to their country's call' (Darlow 1925:237). Intimate both with significant British literary figures, (such as J. M. Barrie, Arthur Conan Doyle, Edmund Gosse, Horace Vachell), with Scottish theologians (Marcus Dods, William McRobbie, Arthur Peake, James Denney, Robertson Smith) and with such Liberal political figures as Winston Churchill, Lord Riddell, Reginald McKenna, Henry Asquith and David Lloyd-George, he was knighted and made a Companion of Honour (Pogson 1961:25; Darlow 1925:406ff). But this glittering success had its down side. The article in *The Times* already referred to states:

Nicoll had, by today's (1963) standards, a narrow cultural range. He was often wrong (he thought Barrie a genius, but George Eliot less). He is not at this distance the most likeable of men – of poor origins, he became too much a worshipper of success (article in *The Times* – by a correspondent – 8. May 1963).

His daughter Constance confesses: 'we were brought up to consider unsuccessful people not worth knowing' (Darlow 1925:420). Arthur Peake wrote that though 'a remarkably successful man, as he grew older he tended to make success more and more a test of merit' (Ives 2011:257).

Though Maurice 'admired very greatly' his father (Pogson 1961:19), he complained later 'that it was a very great handicap to be the son of a famous father' (Pogson 1961:19). Yet this difficulty did not play out overtly in the field of religion. For though Maurice went through the mill of Presbyterian

Sunday school and church (Maurice found it irksome, looking ‘back on Sunday as a dreary day, the day he liked least’ – Pogson 1961:4), and the conventionally religious education of an Anglican English Public School, there is no testimony, nor is it mentioned in the sources, that WRN personally educated his son in this area. Nevertheless, while this might suggest that religion caused no overt friction in the father-son relationship, there being neither bitterness towards nor reproach of his father when Maurice writes of his early aversion to the Christianity, that Maurice ‘loathed’ what his father, a deeply religious man, was and remained a very public symbol for must have caused unconscious antagonism. Maurice blamed the religious observance and education forced on him for his stammer (Nicoll 1952:8). I argue that Maurice, equating, however unfairly, his father’s religious stance with the views of those whom he came to see as having no coherent understanding of religious matters, and having no idea of how nuanced WRN’s real rather than publicly avowed religious position was, rejected Christianity *per se* genuinely, but also, I argue, as an unconscious move in the father-son conflict.

A literary man, and an effective preacher, even if in later life only in writing, WRN expresses his religious position clearly in his most widely published books, *Return to the Cross* (1897) and *A Garden of Nuts* (1905). Using these sources, the chapter ‘The Mystic’ in Darlow’s biography, and the chapter ‘Preaching and Apologetics’ in Ives’ *Voice of Nonconformity*, I set out my understanding of that position. WRN’s ‘The Secret of Christian Experience’ (Nicoll 1897: 9-40), one of the sermons in *Return to the Cross* starts with an evocation of John Bunyan’s experience, noted in his *Grace Abounding*, of meeting ‘three or four poor Women in one of the streets [of] Bedford’ (Nicoll 1897:9). This picture conveys the crux of WRN’s view of ‘The Secret of Christian Experience’, as expounded in the Bala Theological College 1897 end-of-session address of this title on one of the rare occasions when WRN preached *viva voce*. Bunyan has said that these poor women, ‘“far above, out of my [Bunyan’s] reach in matters of religion” ’ (Nicoll 1897:9), [who], aware of their sinful nature, ‘“of their own wretchedness of heart, of their unbelief, did contemn, slight, and abhor their own righteousness, as filthy and insufficient to do them any good” ’, but had an ‘an exuberant joy’, ‘“as if

joy did make them speak were to me as though they had found a new world” '. That they experienced both wretchedness and joy was something that WRN feels 'has to be explained' (Nicoll 1897:10-11, quotations “ ” from Bunyan's book). WRN says that these women were what they were because ' "God had visited their souls with his love in the *Lord Jesus*" '. This love is WRN's chief concern in this and other addresses published in *Return to the Cross*. He says that the general lack of understanding, so important for spiritual life, of how God's love 'might enter in through the dark soul's door' (Nicoll 1897:19), was an indication that the church had gone astray, something WRN felt to be the case. It was, he feared, as if the Reformation had never been.

Though in his Bala address WRN indicates the root problem, in '*Is the Gospel of Christ forgotten?*' (a sermon in *Return to the Cross*) he presents the issue more starkly. Starting there with a 'moving' description of what Christ, preached as 'the measure of the stature of the perfect man' might mean in practice, which means to bridge the 'yawning gulf between' what we are and what Christ shows us we ought (morally) to be by living 'the glory of a higher personal life' in moral striving, self-sacrifice and repentance, (Nicoll 1897:144), WRN punctures this dramatic representation bathetically:

What is this but the righteousness of the law, by which no flesh can be saved? Virtue' [has become] obedience to a formula, and not the natural reaction of a reconstructed soul [stemming] from the order of an inner faith and love; righteousness is obtained by the effort and struggle of the spirit, and not by the atonement of the Lamb of God (Nicoll 1897:145).

WRN thinks that there may be some excuse for this 'new legalism'. It may be 'the fruit of an intelligible reaction against the heresy of heresies, antinomianism', or 'a righteous impatience of low ideals of the spiritual life'. If this is the Gospel of Christ, however, 'the greater part of the New Testament [is] not only meaningless but glaringly and mischievously untrue'. For the Kingdom of Heaven is not won by moral striving under the law, but through 'the expiatory death of Christ', taken not 'in its magnificence as a revelation of sorrow and self-sacrifice', but as a paradigm for that 'process of convulsion and re-creation by which those who are without hope and without God in the world become fellow citizens and heirs of the grace of life' (Nicoll 1897:146-148). This is

encapsulated in Luther's doctrine of justification by faith. WRN says that failing its acceptance in favour of the 'old falsehood' of 'justification by works', 'the battle of the Reformation has to be fought over again' (Nicoll 1897:145).<sup>32</sup>

In the Bala address WRN says that Luther's doctrine of 'justification by faith was the article of a standing or falling church' (Nicoll 1897:17). In this doctrine 'Christ does with our sins as though He had committed them Himself, doing this by means of the inner marriage (this an allusion to Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* – Luther 2007, Vol 2, 3-54). In this laying hold of Christ's love by this inner marriage we are changed from within ourselves into the image of Christ, we are conformed to Christ. This process is not merely the influence of one soul on another, nor a wilful turning away from evil, but a profound inner change, symbolised by our turning into a Christ, by Christ being born and living in us. It seems to me, however, that WRN is mistaken when he says 'the springs of our life and power lie outside of ourselves'. The impetus for this profound change certainly lies outside our 'personal condition', but, as WRN says, in a way 'outside of our power to understand' these powers are in ourselves, since 'we know that his infinitude is under our finitude, that we are rooted in the Eternal Son' (Nicoll 1897:21). It is through something in ourselves that we lay hold on Christ's love, since Christ is part of us, as the branches are parts of the vine.<sup>33</sup> But WRN's point is that our 'conforming ourselves to Christ', our 'ingrafting' into Christ which follows justification is not achieved by a mere imitation of Christ's worldly life in its moral perfection, or a living of His 'all-encompassing' love for humanity by 'taking up our cross'. This, a form of works righteousness, is no substitute for that inner marriage that Luther speaks of, the real conforming of the person to the image of Christ, for which the 'union with Christ which is the source of sanctification' and the 'laying hold of the high-

---

<sup>32</sup> Luther's main plank in his theological condemnation of the 'Penitential Cycle' of the Roman church; a person is and can only be justified through faith in Christ, not through doing good works as penance for having sinned by breaking the law.

<sup>33</sup> Maybe WRN is alluding here to Calvin's insistence that the righteousness imputed to us is not intrinsic, and in this way 'Calvin affirms justification outside us in Christ, [even though] we are not outside Christ since by God's gift of faith we participate in Christ' (Partee 2008:230). Or else the matter may be looked at as that 'Calvin teaches that our justification occurs *outside* of ourselves, in Christ's work *for* us. Our sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit *within* us' (Partee 2008:211). Whatever, 'Calvin writes that Christ lives inside us and not outside us' (Partee 2008:227).

priestly love in the soul' are dogmatic symbols. But this marriage, this inner transformation shows us our true condition. 'When we discover our union with Christ we are oppressed as we never were before, [aware] of our own infinite distance from God. The sense of sin grows as the sin itself diminishes'. Here we see a true representation of Luther's paradoxical *simul justus et peccator* (McGrath 2005:228), of the

consciousness of peace and joy consistent with a consciousness of sin, the humiliation of ill deserts with the assurance of God's love, the sense of unworthiness and the sense of peace which make the normal Christian experience (Nicoll 1897:23).

All these expressions illuminate and elucidate the image of Bunyan's 'three or four poor *Women*'.

This image of the liberated soul (whether fable or Bunyan's actual experience is no matter), this soul weighed down by sin but joyful because the condemnation of the law is lifted through justification, the very model of both the Lutheran and the Calvinistic view of salvation, is characterised by WRN as 'the result of the [putting] together of these two doctrines of justification by faith and of union with Christ' (Nicoll 1897:21).

This should have been enough for WRN's case for justification by faith, not works, by being united with Christ. But he sees it is insufficient, because the verbal expressions used to describe the redeemed state fail to convey the reality of the experience; what does it mean in practice, or feel like to be 'united with Christ'? At this point WRN's vision falters; he cannot describe, I suggest, how God's love may visit our souls, or how justification by faith may be joined with union with Christ to give the result seen in the women of Bedford. He turns, in this sermon and elsewhere, to doctrine, to bridge the gap, particularly the doctrine of the 'atonement of the Lamb of God'. He mounts an extended polemic in a long section devoted to the disagreement between the Anglican Divine and mystic William Law (1685-1761) and the Methodist John Wesley (1703-1791), a section that, though described as 'this brief survey' upsets the balance of the whole address. Why does he do this?

WRN read much of Law, who was in the religious public eye in WRN's lifetime. Maybe WRN wished to use Law in his argument because Law 'insisted on the sublimity of what the Christian life ought to

be' (Nicoll 1897:27) and, while having a profound sense of personal guilt, knew, like the women of Bedford, how to live in this world in Christian perfection while being aware of just how sinful men are, himself included. He was therefore a living example of the women of Bedford. But WRN is also making an argument about the doctrine of the atonement, and on this issue Law adopts a stance that in WRN's eyes is mistaken. For, as WRN cites Wesley as saying, 'Law grounded nothing on "faith in his blood"' (Wesley quoted in Nicoll 1897:26). Therefore, if WRN is to use Law, he has to counter Law's position on the atonement. To do this WRN evokes the polemic between Law and Wesley, saying that though Wesley's polemic against Law may seem a peripheral issue in his argument, the differences between Wesley and Law touch on the 'vitals of evangelicalism' (Nicoll 1897:26), 'touching on the whole conception of Christianity' (WRN in Darlow 1925:348). But, I contend, WRN's (and Wesley's) polemic against Law is mistaken, since Law indeed grounded everything in 'the blood of Christ'.

Law, however, in my view, understood this 'blood of Christ' in a mystical, metaphorical sense. Though Christ's death may in some ways be for Law 'the great fact of history', he says that unless it becomes in some 'inner', mystical way, the great fact of each and every individual's life, all is in vain. 'A Christ not in us is a Christ not ours; all is essentially within us. Christ in us is our hope and glory' (Law *Spirit of Prayer* in Israel and Broadbent 2001:91). Law will have nothing to do with substitutionary atonement as the vehicle for the satisfaction of God's anger, which for Law is purely figurative, a projection of our own anger on to God. Wesley, contrariwise, sees ' "...the satisfaction of Christ [as] the inmost mystery of the faith"' (Wesley in Nicoll 1897:26). Wesley, has, I suggest, misunderstood Law's position, as has WRN, by taking the death of Christ historically and literally (Nicoll 1897:168). And WRN has misunderstood the significance of the 'blood of Christ', taking it literally, in which form it is useless in his argument. Had he taken it figuratively, like Law, it might have provided the missing link in the articulation of WRN's vision *in toto* in showing what a believer must do to effect union with Christ, as it had in Law's own life. But because of WRN's view that the

significance of the shedding of Christ's blood is literal and historical he cannot, at this time anyway, take this step.

I argue that it would seem that WRN at this time was unable to view doctrine as the analogical representation of inner experience, to see that Luther's theology is an analogical representation of the process of the making or building inside oneself of the Christ in us, this process being a necessary replacement for moral effort and good works as the chief engine of spiritual development. If so, that WRN fails to articulate this in the next part of his address is no surprise. The rest of 'The Secret of Christian Experience' is an anti-climax. Before there had been acuity and clarity of argument, now there is wooliness. A recapitulation of the necessity for a belief in justification by faith is followed by a sentimental treatment of the theological significance of Christ's earthly life, while the suggestion, from Dora Greenwell (a well-known writer on religious matters from whom 'WRN considered that he had learnt more theology from than from any other teacher' [Ives 2011:203]) that 'at the very centre of Christianity lie the doctrines of intervention and substitution' is meaningless reiteration of dogmatic formulae without showing what they mean for the believer in terms of inner psychological practice as earlier adumbrated by WRN. How may Christ be married to [as Luther says in *The Freedom of the Christian*], or [as Law says in *Appeal to Doubt* {Israel/Broadbent 2001:77}] be born in the soul? How does the mechanism of 'this union of Christ through which we attain his likeness and are conformed to the image of the Son' (Nicoll1897:20) work? What do we have to do, or allow happen in us, to bring this transformation about?

It seems to me that WRN needs to answer these questions to make his vision coherent and applicable to his readers' efforts at seeking that union with Christ which he with justice sees as all-important. Presenting the Holy Spirit as 'the next element of Christian experience' which leads the soul to 'the comforting reality of pardon and acceptance through the gate of God, the Meritorious Sacrifice' (Nicoll1897:38) gives the impression of being just that backward move to some kind of 'legalism' to which WRN objects in 'Is Christ dead in vain?' But even were that combination of

awareness of our sin and joy in being justified that the women of Bedford evinced achieved, WRN's reader would, if he were like WRN imagines him to be, remain bogged down, as WRN does, in an inability to accept the reality of justification or to feel that conversion truly takes away his sin, unable to understand that it is possible to live with this sin without it weighing him down, that it is not necessary to glory in the *peccator* element of *simul peccator simul justus* as WRN thinks will happen. Although WRN can write, in a pithy presentation of Luther's position, that

the normal Christian life is the simultaneous presence in the soul of grace and peace, and of the consciousness of sin; and [that] by virtue of our union with Christ we who are still sinners are nevertheless justified, and partakers of the peace of God [though we nevertheless] utterly contemn, slight, and abhor our own righteousness as a possible ground of justification before God [and] for what it is in itself (Nicoll 1897:38),

the impression is left at the end of the address that WRN imagines that he and his reader are each a guilty, weak, helpless worm' (as William Carey's hymn, quoted as an 'epitaph' to the address, says [Nicoll1897:40]). Maybe WRN's attitude in 1897 was inevitable in one brought up in the 'rigid [but] faithful and sincere religious belief' (Nicoll 1910: x) as WRN was.

Yet I would argue that WRN has an intuition that there is more than this. Darlow has in his biography of WRN a chapter entitled 'The Mystic'. Though Darlow says that

Nicoll himself made no claim to be a mystic of the first order. Yet he had profound sympathy with mystical aspirations. He believed in the symbolism of Scripture (Darlow 1925:405),

he also says that WRN 'always maintained that he was a Christian Mystic' (Ives 2011:202, citing Darlow). Though Darlow's view of WRN's mysticism starts from a generalised definition of a mystic as someone who knows the 'immediate intercourse between the human soul and the Divine Spirit' (Darlow 1925:395), it soon emerges that what Darlow (and WRN) sees as a mystic is something different. It is rather someone who can read Scripture 'with the eyes of the spirit', and see the truth that is presented poetically and symbolically in it. WRN, it is suggested by Darlow, is such a person.

That WRN is indeed such a person is demonstrated by his address on mysticism given in 1905 to The Summer School of Theology of Glasgow. WRN's address, printed as *A Garden of Nuts*, reveals another side to WRN's spirituality from that of the Presbyterian minister. If the address suggests that

at a rather trite level WRN saw mysticism as the attempt to 'pursue the inward way' in an atmosphere of 'peace and retirement [and] the silence of the passions' (WRN in Darlow 1925:396), at another it shows that Darlow is right in his assessment of WRN and of what makes a mystic. For WRN, seeing the power of the mystic lying in a kind of poetic understanding above human reason, incomprehensible to human reason, an inner gift of the spirit, an attitude to doctrinal truth that can be summed up as no 'either-or', cites as an example of this no 'either-or' thinking the understanding that the meaning of Scripture is not cut and dried. In the address WRN's addresses the problem of the various levels of meaning in Scripture, saying that 'the higher criticism rejects allegory and parable; but for the mystic this cannot be true' (WRN in Darlow 1925:399). Asking whether mysticism 'makes historicity unimportant', whether it matters 'whether Christ rose from the dead or not, whether Joseph's tomb was left empty' (WRN in Darlow 1925:399) WRN is straining, I argue, towards views that are very 'liberal'. The view hinted at here is that the truth of Scripture is not in the letter or the literal meaning, but in the spirit, veiled by parable. 'All mystics believe that beyond the obvious sense of the Scripture there is often a second sense' (Nicoll 1905:7). Scriptural truth is not to be found in the sphere of the rational, the mathematical, the grammatical, all of which make it 'unrecognisable and unreal'. It must be found in the poetic, the allegorical, the irrational, in the 'illumination of the Spirit'. 'We cannot rightly speak of such a thing as the simple Gospel. There is no simple Gospel' (Nicoll 1897:100).

WRN's address reveals, however, at yet a deeper level, an understanding of mysticism that suggests to him that his task is

to describe the inward way and its stages as apprehended by the mystics in language as little technical as may be [for this] inward way and its stages make up the central doctrine of mysticism (Nicoll1905:3).

WRN outlines six stages of this inward way, an *ordo salutis*. The aim of walking this way is a *palingenesis*, a coming again

out of the great centre, and an individual reversion to the fontal source, a knowledge and union, the sense of necessity of the Divine Union, the realisation of Christ on earth, the true, certain, and absolute knowledge of God the Supreme; [all this] is the heart of mysticism (Nicoll 1897:3), [and] the ultimate mystery and experience of the Christian Faith (Ives 2011:203).

The first stage of the *ordo salutis* is to see the created universe as a sacrament, as, in a Platonic sense, a copy of ideas from a higher realm. The second stage is to distance oneself from this created universe, a form of 'detachment', so that 'the true light can be sought within'. This detachment is brought about through mortification, self-denial in the sense of denying oneself things. This stage is followed by 'attachment' to, or 'identification' with Christ:

It must be allowed that the mystic tends to say little about the work of Christ for us, outside us. His thought is that the individual Christian must live through the experience of union with Christ so that each step of the redemptive process, the life, the death, and the resurrection, are repeated in the believer (Nicoll 1905:5).

WRN equates this 'perfect correspondence with Christ' with 'conversion'. He goes on to describe the other steps, which are the 'dark night of the soul', the 'irrigation of the garden of the soul' and the 'union that comes to but few on earth' (Nicoll 1905:5-6).

Though WRN was obviously aware of the mystical, as the above passages show, he believes that it is not for everyone, suggesting in his address that 'the vast majority rest content [with being] ordinary Christians' (Nicoll 1905:5). Indeed, as Ives says,

in setting out his stall with a theoretical approach to the benefits and also the dangers of mysticism [there is] an inherent weakness from the fact that the author fails to give any personal illustrations of how this looked or felt in his own life (Ives 2011:204).

The impression given is that WRN himself is a part of that 'vast majority' who 'study the mystics for the most part to learn from them', rather than to imitate them, since 'they do not describe our common Christianity' (Nicoll 1905:3). But if we thus get the feeling that WRN himself was a stranger to mysticism we are disabused of this notion by his saying that he has himself experienced the dark night of the soul, talking of 'those labours that I who endured them for many years can testify [to]' (Nicoll 1905:3). It would therefore be wrong, I suggest, to take WRN's lucid description of the mystic way as an intellectually expert analysis of a phenomenon that he only knew at second hand. But something is needed to integrate this vision with that in WRN's earlier Bala address. How does this mystical *ordo salutis* connect with WRN's vision as expressed there? And is not WRN mistaken in saying that the mystic way is not for everyone? As James Denney reports it,

I heard from a non-professional man, not much educated, but intelligent. "As far as I could make out," he said, "mysticism seems to be another name, and not so good a one, for Christianity." It struck me as not bad (Letter from Denney to WRN, quoted in Darlow 1925:401).

The lynchpin that is missing from WRN's vision in 'The Secret of Christian Experience', I suggest, is *metanoia*, understood by WRN as the 'perfect correspondence with Christ', which he also calls in his Glasgow address 'conversion' (Nicoll 1905:5). This crucial step in Luther's and Calvin's *ordo salutis*, where it is both a *sine qua non* and a *panacea*, drives the whole process of regeneration. It is just this idea that would in an inner sense make real to WRN's reader the dogmas he invokes. For as Luther makes clear, *metanoia* empowers the process of becoming, of perfection, of salvation, that he and Calvin describe as turning away from the world, by understanding the figurative nature of revelation, by denying and dying to the self and by living in the inner life of Christ that WRN describes as the first three steps of the mystical *ordo salutis*. But WRN seems to be content, in the Bala address, and in his dismissal of the 'simple faith' of 'the ordinary Christian' (Nicoll 1905:5) in the Glasgow address, with a literal outer imitation of Christ's earthly life. There is no clear picture in the Bala address of how to achieve the mystical transformation being discussed there.

This view of WRN's religious stance, which by the standards of Scottish Free Church Presbyterianism of the time could be seen as a liberal was probably not communicated to Maurice in his formative years, however, for, as already said, though WRN remained technically a minister and continued to be passionately involved in religious matters, it would seem that he had little direct *religious* influence on his son during his adolescence. Though WRN was immensely broad-minded compared with those who were to teach his son 'religion as it was taught to me' (*Commentaries*: 8), who were themselves not Scottish Free Church Presbyterians, but English non-conformists or Anglicans, and though his religious stance was in some tentative ways close to what that son would later articulate so clearly, he was ultimately unable to articulate intuitions of a wider mystical truth in an intelligible way. For he can describe *metanoia* and many of its facets, and assent to, if tentatively, the primacy of the inner life and the figurative nature of Scripture and dogma, and can see that

God is not to be discovered in the consolations and felicities of external nature nor other than dimly in its symbols. The true light is to be sought within. The avenues of interior contemplation, of the withdrawn state, of the hidden life are the way to God (Nicoll 1905:5).

But he was, if the Bala address is to be taken as describing his considered position, unable to move these insights centre-stage in himself and allow them to do their transformative work. Therefore, though his religious stance was far removed from that 'rigid, faithful and sincere' form that was his father's, the religion that WRN practised and represented in this son's eyes must have remained that of the 'orthodox' Presbyterian Minister, representative of the Christian religion that Maurice Nicoll came to hate so much, a religion in which 'only the conviction of sin is important' and that 'in general sin and the feeling of being a sinner was the main idea of religion' (Nicoll 1957:8). This moralistic religion that in the end 'sends empty away' those who would seek the things of the spirit certainly sent Nicoll 'empty away' (Luke 1:53). But ironically Nicoll's rejection of the Christian religion in ignorance of his father's real views was the catalyst for his embarking on his quest.

### **Nicoll's first act of 'self-remembering'; his first 'mystical' experience**

Nicoll's early rejection of religion was first vindicated in an experience he had when a sixth-former. This experience, I suggest, has definite religious overtones. Nicoll describes his realisation that the clergyman-schoolmaster (the Head Master of Aldenham School), who was expounding parables to a class, knew nothing about 'what really mattered':

I actually experienced my first moment of consciousness, my first experience of self-remembering – that is, I suddenly realised that *no one knew anything*. This is a definite experience and was my first experience of self-remembering (*Commentaries*: 9).

Nicoll realised that all the adults whom he expected to know about all the things that puzzled him were in fact just as puzzled as he was, but they put a good face on it.

The second [moment of consciousness was] that no one knew what I was thinking, [and] from that moment I began thinking for myself, or knew that I could (*Commentaries*: 9).

Nicoll realised that no one knew that he had understood that this was so. No one knew what was going on in his inner self. No one (himself included) knew what was going on in any other person's inner self.

The inner revelation of *knowing that he* [the Head Master] *knew nothing* – nothing, that is, that really mattered – was my first inner liberation. I knew for certain, by inner authentic perception, the only

real source of knowledge, that all my loathing of religion as it was taught to me was right (Nicoll 1952: 9).

This knowledge not only set him free to think for himself, rather than be influenced only by what he was 'taught', but also let him see that knowing something comes to you from inside you, and that this is the only kind of knowledge that is valid.<sup>34</sup>

This experience, described by Pogson as a 'disillusionment' (Pogson 1961:10) besides being a shock, seems to have had something ecstatic, almost uncanny about it. I argue that it was a 'state of altered consciousness' in a psychological sense, though lying within the realm of the normal. To show this I compare Nicoll's experience with the similar experiences of Edmund Gosse and Carl Jung. I choose these two: because their experiences caused them the same or a more intense feeling of something 'objectively' religious as Nicoll's did to him; because they were connected in life with Nicoll; and because they like him they were critically introspective and described and evaluated their experiences, allowing us to analyse the effect of their experiences on their lives. For these experiences were, as Gosse phrased it, 'second in real importance to none in my mental history' (Gosse 1907:27) and stood at the beginning of the extraordinary evolution of the philosophical and religious development of these individuals. The striking similarity between their experiences allow us, I suggest, to draw conclusions about the nature of Nicoll's own experience. After comparing the experiences of the three I analyse them (but chiefly Nicoll's) using William James' description of the category of Mysticism from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), which book appeared during Nicoll's and Jung's youth, to affirm my argument that these experiences were 'religious' and revelatory in nature, and further to delineate the features of these experiences in general.

---

<sup>34</sup> Although it may seem previous to expatiate on Gurdjieff's term 'self-remembering' at this point, because Nicoll uses the term to describe his early mystical experience it is necessary to make a statement to suggest that Nicoll is right to call this early experience self-remembering. Self-remembering has been 'defined' by Gurdjieff in so many ways that a simple definition cannot encompass the variety of points of view these definitions give expression to. I therefore append at this point a definition from Gurdjieff's *Life is only then when I am, Third Series* that, it seems to me, encapsulates one facet of Nicoll's early experience of it. 'There, suddenly, as if by itself, came into existence in me a conviction of the full possibility of attaining tasks indispensable for me, through the forces of inner struggle; my whole being was filled as if by some singular, never till now experienced, feeling of joy' (Gurdjieff III: 42 in Thring 2002:276).

The six-year-old Edmund Gosse, as recorded in his memoir *Father and Son*, experienced ‘a series of minute and soundless incidents which, elementary as they may seem when told, were second in real importance to none in my mental history’ (Gosse 1907:27). Gosse, like Nicoll rendered motherless at an early age, says of the first of these experiences: ‘what came to me, the result of one or two shocks, was the consciousness of self, as a force and a companion’. The first of these shocks was the realisation that

what my father had said ‘was not true’. The theory that my father was omniscient or infallible was now dead and buried. There was a secret in this world and it belonged to me and to someone who lived in the same body as me. I had found a companion and a confidant in myself. In this dual form the sense of my individuality now suddenly descended upon me (Gosse 1907:28, 30).

Jung had a considerable number of similar experiences which, as ‘related’ in his ‘autobiographical’ *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*,<sup>35</sup> draw attention to the significance of them for his later development. Jung, whose experience was conditioned by an early dream of the underground phallic god (Jung 1995:26), a dream he described as being of religious significance, says that as a result ‘there arose in me a profound doubt about anything my father [who, like Gosse’s and Nicoll’s, was a ‘priest’] said’ (Jung 1995:59). ‘Church became a place of torment to me’ (Jung 1995:62).

The experiences of Nicoll, Gosse and Jung present certain clearly defined features: they occurred at early formative times in their subjects’ lives, bringing a ‘coming to’ after a period of perplexity, as though seeing things for the first time. Those who experienced them were convinced of their authenticity and significance. They were secret, by-passing ordinary reality, bringing the feeling of special knowing while others ‘know nothing’. They were involuntary and transient. They involved an altered state of consciousness. They were either the result or the cause of what Gosse calls a shock.

---

<sup>35</sup> Jung was of two minds about this book. Though ‘for a long time his attitude towards the book was highly critical and negative, [he] dreading the reaction of the public’, being afraid also of the memories the writing of it might cause to surface in him, he was for the most part ‘active and affirmative’. He wrote some complete chapters himself. Aniella Jaffé wrote much of the rest of it herself, either from conversations with Jung, or by editing and incorporating some of Jung’s other writings. At all stages Jung was fully conversant with the progress of the work, oversaw it and corrected the finished result. Even so he decided that the book should not form part of his collected works. Nevertheless, Jaffé writes that ‘the further the book progressed the closer became the fusion between his work and mine’. (Information and quotations from Jaffé’s introduction [Jung 1995]).

They changed awareness of reality, especially the relationship between 'inner' and 'outer' realms, and the power structure in personal relationships. There was an awareness of multiple loci of the sense of "I", and of other personalities and 'other worlds' within the self. There was a feeling of the ability to exert will from a more robust source of the self. These facets of the experiences that these three underwent I will analyse in more detail when I compare them with James' description of mystical states.

The autobiographical descriptions and analysis of these experiences are obviously retrospective. How much did Jung, Gosse and Nicoll understand at the time? First, though all three were 'in rebellion' against the Christian religion 'as it was taught me', they early experienced these moments as being of a definite religious nature. The cause of Nicoll's experience was the Head Master's ignorance of what a particular *parable* meant. For Gosse, 'hearing so much about an *Omniscient God*, a being of supernatural wisdom and penetration, [confusing his father] in some sense with God', it was no longer possible to 'believe that my Father was not as God and did not know everything' (Gosse 1907:28). For Jung, beside the fact that he realised that his father really knew nothing about religion from personal experience (Jung 1995:63), the conundrum generated by his phallic dream, and the vision of God defecating on Zürich Cathedral, were causing him immense 'spiritual distress' as though 'God himself was arranging a decisive test for me' (Jung 1995:55). I argue therefore that all three boys were immediately aware of the religious dimension of their experiences.

Second, all three were aware at the time of a different sense of I, both in 'that no one knew what I was thinking', and that they could think for themselves, rather than assent to and parrot other people's ideas.<sup>36</sup> Nicoll's 'loathing of religion as it was taught me was right' showed him that 'inner individual perception [was] the only source of real knowledge' (Copley 1989:2-3). Third, all three

---

<sup>36</sup> To suggest that Nicoll is right to see these experiences that he, Gosse and Jung report as 'self-remembering' I quote another definition from Gurdjieff's *Life is only then when I am, Third Series* that encapsulates the altered sense of self that all three observers describe: 'That full sensing of the whole of myself, in me, during the process of self-remembering' (Gurdjieff III: 1 in Thring 2002:276).

were aware immediately that the event was significant in their lives and would remain with them. Fourth, they saw for the first time that the 'inner life', a place of refuge for all three, was more significant than the 'outer'.

Though I have used the term 'religious' to describe these experiences, because I am arguing for an analysis of them using the work of William James, the label 'mystical' must now be attached to them. But before I turn to my analysis I need to place James' understanding of mysticism in the context of how mysticism was viewed in the early years of the twentieth century.

Lee Eric Schmidt, in an article 'The Making of Modern Mysticism' (Schmidt 2003), a survey of mysticism since the seventeenth century, describes the background to the revival of interest in mysticism at the turn of the twentieth century, evinced in James' life and book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and Evelyn Underhill's seminal work, *Mysticism* (1911). This revival, Schmidt says, was a nineteenth-century reaction against the earlier view of the sectarian nature of 'Enlightenment aspersions of mystics and mysticism'. Schmidt cites Thomas Hartley's (a devotee of Swedenborg) view that Mysticism was 'nothing more or less than spiritual, [the mystics being] "guardians" in all ages of "the spirituality of true religion" ' (Hartley in Schmidt 2003:281), and the 'fountainhead of all genuine spirituality' (Schmidt 2003:281). Schmidt then describes 'New England Unitarianism' as the immediate seedbed of James' thought, saying that the New-England mystic Henry Ware's view, 'what is mysticism but the striving of the soul after God, the longing of the finite for communion with the Infinite; without it there is, and there can be, no religion?' (Ware in Schmidt 2003:287) is the foundation of this Unitarianism. Schmidt says that Octavius Frothingham, another New Englander, amplifying Ware's view, writes that the mystic 'sees through the show of things becomes independent of time and space, master of his body and mind, ruler of nature and [is] elevated above all partial religions into the Universal Religion' (Schmidt 2003:287). Frothingham also says that 'Mysticism provided "a psychology" that served as a basis for spiritual union', and that 'we

love the mystic for their inward, not their outward life; because they lift us up above the world, not because they make us faithful in it' (Schmidt 2003:288).

Schmidt characterises such a view as 'an anti-positivist, anti-materialist tool offering an intellectual shield against untrammelled naturalism, "the fierce onward current of purely scientific thought" '.

Schmidt then cites Rufus Jones, a noted Quaker, as saying that mysticism 'does not mean something "occult", or "esoteric", or "gnostic", or "pseudo-psychic", and that 'mysterious voices, strange sights, bodily oozings, and fleshly mortifications were freakish sideshows compared to an abstracted experience of divine union, an immediate consciousness of God's presence, or a contemplative intuition of the Absolute' (Schmidt's paraphrase of Jones). Jones also characterises mystics as "hundred-horsepower" men and "tremendous transmitters of energy".

Such is Schmidt's idea of the mysticism that he claims lie behind James' ideas. But James claims to be no mystic himself, saying that his constitution shuts him out almost entirely from the enjoyment of mystical experiences: 'I have no living commerce with God. I envy those who have. Entanglement with Christianity on the part of a mystical utterance has to be abstracted from and overcome before I can listen' (James 1902:321). This illustrates, I suggest, both Jones' dictum that 'we are in the midst of "a profound revival of interest in Mysticism" but not "a distinct revival of mysticism itself" ', and that either Christianity had grown far away from the 'true religion' that Mysticism was the vehicle for, or a 'true religion' existed that Christianity and all other religions were subservient expressions of, 'my mystical germ', as James called it. Mysticism for James and his contemporaries, according to Jones, 'was primarily a construct formed of lacking and loss, an emptied space of longing for "a heightened, intensified way of life", a search for "and *undivided whole of experience*" ' (Jones in Schmidt 2003:294).

I argue that this lacking and loss, being of the 'worldly', is precisely what Nicoll will argue is needed before the 'undivided whole of experience' (Jones in Schmidt 2003:294) can be found. Since that is the case, I suppose that what Nicoll proposes can indeed be seen as a mysticism such as James

would have understood, but with the difference that Nicoll would eventually say that the participator, unlike James, did indeed 'have commerce with God' (James 2003), that he was not a mere bystander. A striking similarity, however, between Nicoll's stance and James' is that in his pursuit of commerce with God, Nicoll at first seemed, like James, to need to abstract the Christianity from any 'mystical utterance' that he came across. Later we will see that this abstraction was only seeming, and that at the end Nicoll has no need for any abstraction of Christianity from what he thinks because he re-embraced, indeed re-vivified it, as I shall argue. But any connection of the argument of this thesis to mysticism, any thought that Nicoll is a mystic enjoining mysticism, will not be pursued in this thesis. My invocation of mysticism at this point is purely to underpin my practical use of James' terminology. Because James calls experiences he describes mystical I feel it necessary, in using his analysis to analyse experiences that I argue resemble what he describes, to use his term mystical. While understanding that the word can have a broader meaning than James gives it in his book, a meaning that I have already applied to WRN's thought, in the rest of this chapter I confine my use of the term to the meaning it bears in those sources I cite, particularly James.

James' use of mysticism in his somewhat narrow definition is in the service of psychological analysis. Explaining his use of 'mysticism', James<sup>37</sup> says: 'personal religious experience has its roots in states of mystical consciousness' (James 1902:321), which are

a group of states of consciousness peculiar enough to deserve a special name and to call for careful study. Let it then be called the 'mystical group' (James 1902:323).

James 'calibrates' such states, arranging them from those involving 'that deepened sense of a maxim or formula' (James 1902:323), through more ecstatic but still involuntary and transient states of altered consciousness, through those of various kinds induced by music, poetry, art, and the contemplation of nature, to those induced by chemical stimulants, culminating in the experiences of the 'professional' religious, the great practitioners of 'mysticism' of various faiths, for whom the

---

<sup>37</sup> WRN met William James when in America in 1896. From what Darlow says, James's 'charming wife (such good eyes)' made a great impression on WRN, who saw James himself, an 'unspeakably kind' man, as 'the brother of Henry James the novelist'. We do not know whether WRN ever read anything James wrote, ever discussed with him any matters of consequence, or attended his Gifford lectures in Edinburgh that resulted in James' famous book (quotes from a letter in Darlow 1925:140).

ecstatic state becomes more continuous, more reliably induced by ascetic practices, and more overtly 'religious' in content. Nicoll's mystical or, as he would later say, 'self-remembering'<sup>38</sup> experience lies at what James calls the lower end of this range, but some of the comments James makes about the higher end are still pertinent and what he says in general about 'mystical' states applies across the spectrum. We can therefore justifiably extrapolate in our endeavour to elucidate these extraordinary events.

In his initial exposition, embracing all kinds of 'mystical' experiences, James says that there are

four marks which may justify us in calling it [an experience] mystical. They are ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity. [The first two marks] entitle any state to be called mystical [whereas the latter pair] are less sharply marked, but are usually found (James 1902:322).

James says of the ineffability of a mystical experience: 'No adequate report of its contents can be given in words' (James 1902:322). *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives as a second meaning of ineffable 'That must not be uttered', which, I argue, echoes St. Paul's admonishing: 'he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter' (2 Corinthians 12:2). When Nicoll writes:

Self-remembering is a placing of the consciousness, but in a new way, one that we cannot see, or comprehend at first (Nicoll in Pogson 1995:295),<sup>39</sup>

or Jung says, of his dream of the phallus, that it

haunted me for years [and that] only much later did I realise that what I had seen was a ritual phallus (Jung 1995:27),

a certain incomprehensible or ungraspable quality is being described. However, the experience Gosse describes is not indescribable in itself; it is 'its quality, [which] must be directly experienced [and which] cannot be imparted or transferred to others' (James 1902:322). Similarly, when Nicoll recounts his earliest experience, it is not the insights, the illumination, that cannot be described, but

---

<sup>38</sup> The exact nature and the significance of 'self-remembering' in 'the Work' will be discussed extensively in due course. By calling attention to it here and by citing above Nicoll's equation of his youthful experiences with it I am making the point that Nicoll retrospectively came to see that his youthful experience being analysed here was an episode of 'self-remembering'.

<sup>39</sup> Making an effort to bring our attention back to ourselves, to what we are doing, to remember ourselves' (Orage in Nott, C. S., *Teachings of Gurdjieff*: 161, cited in Thring 2002:281)

the quality of feeling: it is 'that I knew for certain, by inner authentic perception, the only real source of knowledge', that is the ineffable component.

James says, apropos his second 'mark', the noetic, that

mystical states seem to those who experience them [to offer] insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect (James 1902: 322).

All three subjects report a feeling of illumination or revelation, an increase in understanding or consciousness. James cites the experience of Luther, who, hearing the words of the creed read, had an experience that James describes as 'I've heard that said all my life, but I've never realised its full meaning until now', and later wrote of it: 'and straightway I felt as if I were born anew, as if I had found the door to paradise thrown wide open' (Luther in James 1902:323-4). But, I argue a more important aspect of this noetic consciousness is an enhanced sense of self. Gosse said that 'the sense of my individuality now suddenly descended upon me' (Gosse 1907:30). Jung writes:

At such times I knew I was worthy of myself, that I was my true self (Jung 1995: 62). I was taking the road to school, when suddenly for a single moment I had the overwhelming impression of having just emerged from a dense cloud. I knew all at once: now I am myself! It was as if a wall of mist were at my back, and behind that wall there was not yet an 'I'. But at this moment *I came upon myself*. (Jung 1995:49).

Nicoll cites Tennyson's (voluntarily induced) experience (also cited by James and Jung) of reciting his name to himself to bring about a state of altered consciousness. This state brought a change in the whole feeling of I, Tennyson saying that

individuality seemed to fade away into boundless being. Death was an almost laughable possibility. The loss of personality (if it were so) seeming no extinction, but the only true life this seeming no extinction but the only true life (Tennyson '*The Two Voices*', Tennyson, n. d., quoted in in James 1902:325).

The noetic state, which we shall encounter in *Living Time*, is one of enhanced consciousness of the self. Jung's feeling that he was now himself was also accompanied by an awareness that he could act from himself rather than merely react to life:

Previously I had existed too, but everything merely happened to me. Now I happened to myself. Now I knew: I am myself now, now I exist. Previously I had been willed to do this and that: now *I* willed (Jung 1995:49).

This feeling that what is done is more than reaction, is the exertion of real will, is a crucial aspect of 'self-remembering', as will be related in Chapter Five.

Another aspect of these experiences we are analysing is the awareness of multiple personality. Jung was aware of his self (as were Gosse and Nicoll) being divided into two personalities, for Jung a No 1 personality, his outer self, and a No 2 personality:

The play and counter-play between personalities No 1 and No 2, which has run through my whole life is played out in every individual. In my life No 2 has been of prime importance, [yet] most people's understanding is not sufficient to realise that he [No 2] is also what they are (Jung 1995: 64-65).

Nicoll writes that in '*self-remembering*' 'a conscious duality must be created in us. Nicoll and I' (Pogson 1995:296). Gosse says, as we have seen, that his secret belonged to the companion and confidant he had found who lives in the same body as him (Gosse 1907:30). From this comparative account it appears that each 'personality' has its own state of consciousness, and even lives in a different 'world'. James, drawing the conclusion that 'our normal waking consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, as we call it' (James 1902:328), says, however, that these various 'worlds' or 'realms' nevertheless have a unifying significance:

Looking back on my own experiences (of these various states of consciousness, actually in this case induced by nitrous-oxide inhalation) all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance, as if opposites were melted into unity (James 1902:328).

James says that his last two marks, the transiency and the passivity of these experiences, are often but not always present. With regard to passivity Nicoll says that the 'shock' that occasions an increase in ordinary consciousness is integral to it; 'it is to give you a shock of awakening' (Nicoll in Pogson 1995:298). Jung, Gosse and Nicoll were overwhelmed by 'something powerful to you' but something emotional too, a 'lifting the consciousness' that was a kind of awakening (Pogson 1985:298). But Nicoll says, regarding both the transience and the passivity of such experiences, that though many undergo this kind of experience in a spontaneous and fleeting manner (Pogson 1995:295) only with certain people will this experience bear fruit. James says, however, that

mystical states are illuminations, revelations, carrying with them a curious sense of authority for after-time. Some memory of their contents always remains and a profound sense of their importance [also]. They modify the inner life of the subject between the times of their recurrence. [Though transient] when they recur their quality is recognised. From one recurrence to the next this quality is susceptible of continuous development (James 1902: 322, 323).

Nicoll has said that after his first inner liberation from the power of external life, his first moment of real self-remembering stood always in higher parts or centres and remained, awaiting, as it were the further moments of realising, more consciously, what life actually is (Nicoll 1957:8). Only later did he see that 'self-remembering' could be permanent and self-induced [which I describe in detail in Chapter Five]. James also concedes that this 'transient' or 'passive' state can be induced voluntarily, although where the boundary with the passive stops is unclear:

Although the oncoming of mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations by fixing the attention through certain bodily performances, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance as it were grasped and held by a superior power (James 1902:322).

James sums up his description of these 'mystical' states with three statements, all of which apply to Nicoll's experience. First,

Mystical states are authoritative over those who have them. They are as direct a perception of fact for those who have them as any sensations ever were for us [and] are absolutely sensational in their epistemological quality (James 1902:361).

Second,

['Mystical' states] spring from that great subliminal or transmigrational region of which science is beginning to admit (James 1902:363).

Third,

The existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretensions of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictator of what we may believe. May not mystical states be superior points of view, windows through which the mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world to which new meaning is added? (James 1902:364)

We might paraphrase this by saying that Nicoll's experience, albeit of in James' view of a lower order, gave him a glimpse of a new world, a new realm in an immediately sensational fashion, a world more real to him than the ordinary one yet inaccessible to discursive intellect, though transcending it rather than invalidating it. We might add that this world was also ineffable. These descriptions apply, as I shall show, to the higher states which Nicoll explores in *Living Time*, in 'the Work' and in the Gospels.

Nicoll's rejection of his natal Christianity, vindicated by his Jamesian noetic experience was, I argue, tripartite. At the simplest level he rejected Christianity 'as it was taught me', which he found

disagreeable. On a second level he separated himself from his father in the adolescent rite of passage, this made easier because he was genuinely interested in and had aptitude for things of no concern to WRN, (science, mechanical things, music) at which he could be 'his own man'. However, he was also gifted in some areas which were of concern to his father, like writing. So it is some measure of Nicoll's need to compete with his father that his earliest successful publishing venture, a novel written with Connie that became a West-End hit, *Lord Richard in the Pantry*, was published by another publisher than Hodder.<sup>40</sup> This earned him his father's respect (Pogson 1961:26). But if the rejection on the first level involved the father's Christianity, and on the second level the father himself, rejection on the third level, the most significant for my argument, was a process of separation from that self created by upbringing to become who one really is, what Nicoll would later call realising 'real'. Nicoll's experience of self-remembering was therefore, I argue, the first step to his becoming his 'true self' in a Jungian,<sup>41</sup> or, later, his own Nicollian sense. It was expressed also as the first step away from the religion of his father towards a religion that he could make his own.

Nicoll's retrospective analyses of his experience are illuminated by his mature thinking. So while certain elements of his vision, of the 'system' in a Gurdjieffian sense, could be made out from his descriptions of this early experience, all this was for Nicoll still in the future and obscure. Though therefore a full psychological and theological analysis of this early experience must wait until the whole 'system' is presented in Chapter Five, we can say that the base of this structure was laid at this time. This experience was, as Gosse expressed it, second in real importance to nothing else in Nicoll's psychological history.

---

<sup>40</sup> Pogson does not tell us who the publishers were. *The Strand Magazine* published the novels written for it when they were in serial form. The modern reprint of *In Mesopotamia* informs us that Hodder and Stoughton published it, and that they also (eventually) published *Lord Richard in the Pantry*, *The Sporting Instinct* and *Cupid Goes North*. I understand that all the Martin Swayne novels were later published by Hodder.

<sup>41</sup> 'a return of the individual to the ground of human nature, to his own deepest being with its individual and social destiny' (Jung *CW7* [1918]: p5).

### **Chapter 3: Psychological training with C. G. Jung**

In 1912, Nicoll, following visits first to Paris, and then Berlin, went to Vienna, studying there the Freudian system but without meeting Freud himself (Pogson 1961:17). By then psychoanalysis, the discipline encapsulating Freud's work had been, according to Ernest Jones, Freud's first biographer, a going concern in Austria and Germany since 1895, starting a little later in Switzerland and Hungary (Jones 1953-7:217). Though by 1902 only 'four Jewish physicians were interested enough in [Freud's] ideas to meet him weekly' to discuss them, by 1906 this 'famous Psychological Wednesday Evening Circle' had grown to seventeen members. At this juncture, however, in what Noll calls 'its first fateful success', Eugen Bleuler, the most eminent alienist in the world at that time, and the director of the hospital where Jung had by then been employed on and off for six years, was 'converted' (Noll 1994:45). Nevertheless, 'the Viennese psychoanalytical movement grew rapidly in professional circles in Europe and America only after 1911 or so'. The '1908 First International Congress [mustered only] forty participants from six countries' (Noll 1996:45). Freud founded the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1910 (with Jung as President) with branches in various countries (Jones 1953-7:351). But although uptake of the new ideas of psychoanalysis was rapid in America, following the visit of Freud and Jung there (1909) where they both met William James, the International Psychoanalytic Association only formed a branch in London in May 1913, with Ernest Jones as president. Jones tells us that although there were originally nine members, only four of them eventually practised psychoanalysis (Jones 1953-7:377).

Nicoll's affiliation to the 'psychoanalytical movement' (as it was called from 1910 – Jones 1953-7: 350) came through Jung, however, whom he visited after his study in Vienna in 1912. He remained with Jung during the later months of the year, studying and being trained through analysis, and an intimacy grew up between the two men, Jung becoming for Nicoll a father figure who gave him confidence in himself and the way he was following (Pogson 1961: 19). Returning to England early in 1913, Nicoll started practising psychotherapy in the Harley-Street practice of Hugh Chrichton Miller

(1877-1959), founder of the Tavistock Institute (Pogson 1961:21; Begg 1977:80), presumably working along (Jungian) analytical-psychological lines. By this time Jung had parted company with Freud, and therefore Nicoll was not in association with the recently formed London branch of the International Psychoanalytic Association. A letter of summer 1914, written to Nicoll's parents before he went again to Zürich, suggests that the training Nicoll had received from Jung took the form of being analysed. Nicoll writes in anticipation of this 1914 visit:

It is altogether a sense of my inadequacy to meet with my work, and the feeling that in order to keep my brass-plate bright I must get a better grip of things. And I think that this is only possible by going through the process oneself that one is constantly putting others through (Begg 1977:80).

In this chapter I will analyse Nicoll's 1917 *Dream Psychology*, a setting down of his understanding of analytical psychology gained from his experience of dream analysis, both with Jung as analysand and in his work as an analyst in Harley Street before the war. I first present an outline of the theory of analytical psychology that Jung had by 1916 formulated, adumbrated in what I argue are the key textual sources of Nicoll's book. Three of Jung's works are cited in its bibliography: *Theory of Psychoanalysis* (1912), a long and thorough exposition of Freud's psychoanalysis but with criticisms of his ideas, and indications of how these criticisms might be incorporated in Jung's own therapeutic technique; Constance Long's translation of a number of Jung's essays, papers and lectures from the years 1912-1914, compiled under the title *Analytical Psychology* (1916), which discuss the theory and practice of Jung's therapeutic methods, presenting particularly Jung's position *vis-à-vis* Freud; and *Analytical Psychology*, a translation made in 1916 by Beatrice Hinkle, an American doctor staying in Switzerland during the war years, of Jung's *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* (*Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*), a key work written in 1911-12. It must be observed, however, that during the times Nicoll spent with Jung, first in 1912, when Jung was wrestling with *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* and the general situation of his split from Freud, and then in 1914, during the summer of which Nicoll visited Jung, almost being stranded on the continent by the onset of World

War I (Pogson 1961:22 *passim*), he may well have learned much besides what is recorded in the three source texts.

To set the scene I first give a brief overview of Jung's early career. The sources for my remarks are Jung's *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (1995), the semi-autobiographical account to his life assembled and partly written by Aniela Jaffé referred to above (see footnote on p 78); *A Dangerous Method*, by John Kerr (2012), a history of Jung's early career giving particular attention both to the detailed history of the psychoanalytical movement in the years after 1904, and to the genesis of Jung's writings written in the shadow of the nexus of his complicated relationships with Freud and Sabina Spielrein (1885-1941); and *The Red Book*, Sonu Shamdasani's edition of the relatively recently released text of Jung's *Liber Novus* ('Red Book'), the written-up and commentated record of his 'confrontation with the unconscious', the period from 1913-1916 when he faced the possibility of psychotic breakdown in the face of the invasion of unconscious material. Shamdasani's introduction to *Liber Novus* provides a particularly useful assessment of Jung's intellectual life in the period leading up to these 'Red Book' experiences, and also an assessment of the 'several essays and a short book in which he began to attempt to translate some of the themes of *Liber Novus* into contemporary psychological language, and to reflect on the significance and the generality of his activity' (Jung 2009:49) before he wrote *Liber Novus* itself.

Jung, after qualifying as a doctor, secured a post at the Burghölzli psychiatric teaching hospital in Zürich (December 1900). Under the direction of Eugen Bleuler the hospital had become renowned for its treatment of hysterics and schizophrenics, securing for Bleuler and the hospital an international reputation. The hospital also became famous for the experiments in 'free association' conducted there, inaugurated by Franz Riklin. These experiments helped to make a case empirically for the existence of the 'complex'. Jung joined in and soon dominated this work, especially as Riklin left to go elsewhere, and the results of these experiments enhanced Bleuler's, Jung's and the hospital's international standing. The phrase 'the Zürich School', used to describe the practitioners

of the therapeutic methods derived from these experiments came into general circulation at that time (Kerr 2012:105). Though soon marrying, Jung continued to live in what Kerr calls this 'psychiatric monastery' of a hospital, devoting all his time to examining schizophrenic patients, convinced that their dreams, visions and hallucinations had some meaning, which he was determined to find. Both Jung's association experiments and his researches into schizophrenic symptoms and the mythology he soon saw as lying behind them brought him to the notice of Freud, and suggested to him the utilisation of Freud's ideas in his own work. A deep friendship between the two men ('the deepest friendship in each man's life', as Kerr says on the cover of Kerr 2010) led to a co-operation in launching the psychoanalytical movement beyond its Viennese cradle. But though this meant, according to Kerr, that Zürich became the international centre for psychoanalysis (Kerr 2012:9), Jung always had reservations about Freud's ideas. But it was only after a period of six fruitful years in which we might say that each brought their own system to some degree of fulfilment that the tensions between the two men drove them apart, making them 'bitter enemies' (Kerr, cover note to Kerr 2012). What I describe below is the development of Jung's ideas that grew with and to a certain extent from Freud's, moving psychoanalysis away from its Jewish Viennese origins and forming the body of thought that, I argue, Nicoll represents in *Dream Psychology*.

Jung said in 1912 that 'it would be impossible to construct an adequate picture of analysis from the existing literature' (Jung/Long 1916:376), something I argue Jung himself achieved only in *Die Psychologie der unbewussten Prozesse* (1917). *Die Psychologie der unbewussten Prozesse* is, as Shamdasani says, a 'text book' that 'attempts to translate into contemporary psychological language' (Jung 2009:49) some of the themes of Jung's 'perilous adventure' (Hannah 1977:113) of exploring 'the depths of my own psyche' (Jung 1995:200) in his 'confrontation with the unconscious' (cited as the title of chapter in *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* [Jung 1995:194] in Jung 2009: xi). Between 1913 and 1916 Jung was assailed in a more graphic and agonizing way than the more sober sources suggest by described as 'visions', in which he in a waking state 'conversed' with parts of his psyche, and by dreams (Jung 1995:200). These experiences he recorded first in a diary called the

*Black Book*. Then, using his 'new constructive method' of hermeneutic analysis (Jung 2009:32) he added 'to each fantasy a section explaining the significance of each episode with lyrical elaboration' (Jung 2009:30). This has only recently been published as the *Liber Novus (Red Book – Jung 2009)*.<sup>42</sup> Saying that 'this work took precedence over everything' (Jung 1995:201) Jung gave up all his teaching at the University, and, although keeping his patients and maintaining contact with his family, withdrew in order to assimilate and set down in writing the deluge of material coming from the unconscious (Jung 1995:214). Confronted by 'the same fantasy material to which the insane person falls victim' (Jung 2009:29), Jung 'decided that I was menaced by a psychosis' (Jung 1995:200). However, the idea that he was 'committing myself to a dangerous enterprise, this scientific experiment which I myself was conducting not for myself alone, but also for the sake of my patients helped me over several critical phases' (Jung 1995:202-3). Using a technique of 'evoking fantasy in a waking state' which he called 'active imagination', Jung interacted with images, 'some of which derive directly from his reading' (Jung 2009:23). The most significant of these were Philemon, blind Salome, and a snake 'which displayed an unmistakable fondness for me' (Jung 1995:206). He felt compelled 'to find some way to understand these strange things'. Failure to understand would lead to madness – in one dream he was told 'if you do not understand the dream you must shoot yourself' (Jung 1995:204). But Jung, thanks to a 'demonic strength in me' (Jung 1995:201) and helped throughout by an intimate relationship with Toni Wolff, erstwhile pupil turned colleague and lover, emerged by his own account stronger and more knowledgeable from this experience that continued incessantly until it suddenly stopped in 1916 with the writing of *Septem sermones ad mortuos*.<sup>43</sup> As Jung says in the epigraph to the *Red Book*, which Sonu Shamdasani sees as 'nothing less than the central book in his *oeuvre*' (Jung 2009:95):

---

<sup>42</sup> Called 'Red Book' because Jung had the finished parchment manuscript sheets bound in a large red-leather folio volume (Jung 2009: 32).

<sup>43</sup> *Septem sermones ad mortuos*, which Jung felt impelled to write because of a wave of para-normal happenings in his house (which ceased as soon as he began to write) is incorporated into the Red Book, but appeared as a separate publication with limited circulation in Jung's lifetime. It was eventually included as an appendix in the German edition of *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. The book borders on 'automatic writing', and is in the form of a gnostic treatise, Jung ascribing it to one of the earliest Gnostics, Basilides. This name is, as Jung noted, a pun on Basel, Jung's home town.

The years, of which I have spoken to you, when I pursued the inner image, were the most important in my life. Everything else is derived from this (Jung 2009: epigraph).

But though this experience was already in the past when Nicoll wrote *Dream Psychology*, and he cannot have been aware, I argue, of any of it or its effects on Jung's thinking, it nevertheless forms the background to the source material that Nicoll uses for his book. And although *Die Psychologie der unbewussten Prozesse* was written before Nicoll published *Dream Psychology*, and is a seminal account of Jung's thinking, being part of 'an attempt to translate into psychological language some of the themes of his Red-Book experience' (Jung 2009: xi), and would have made an excellent basis for an exposition of Jung's thinking at the time, it seems certain, because of war-time conditions, that Nicoll at that time had no knowledge of this work. Therefore I take as the basis for my exposition of what Nicoll would have known of Jung's thinking only the three works of Jung cited in the bibliography of *Dream Psychology*, even though these give a less developed picture of Jung's thinking at the time.

In what follows I present Jung's thinking with a view to a coherent presentation of the material, argued from the point of view of Jung's increasingly distinctive position stemming from his disagreements with Freud, citing the sources as appropriate. I start with *Neue Bahnen der Psychologie* (*New Paths in Psychology*), the last essay in Long's compilation. *Neue Bahnen* was published in 1912 in Zürich in a local literary magazine, *Raschers Jahrbuch für Schweizer Art und Kunst*. It was with some misgivings that Freud read the piece as an offprint of this journal, because the title of the paper is a direct allusion to the title of 'a popular Austrian novel, one of a series in the "blood and soil" tradition [that was] blatantly anti-Semitic', and if this Swiss year book was 'a collection of edifying articles on all manner of popular topics', there is no mistaking that its character was similar to the sort of literature that in Austria would have been very much more anti-Semitic (Kerr 2012:386). This was an eccentric publishing move on Jung's part, compounded by the publisher Rascher becoming from then on his regular publisher. It would seem to have made more sense for Jung to publish the piece in the *Yearbook for Psychoanalysis and Psychopathological Researches*, a

journal that had been his brainchild, had carried most of the ground-breaking papers from the psychoanalytic movement from the journal's launch in 1909, and which, becoming the *de facto* journal of the International Psychoanalytical Association, remained firmly under Jung's control. Publishing the piece with Rascher was one more thread in the unravelling of Jung's relationship with Freud, giving rise to the suspicion in some quarters that Jung's general disagreement with Freud, made vivid by the nature of the contents of the paper, had anti-Semitic overtones (Kerr 2012:386).

Charting in *Neue Bahnen* the progress of the new science of psychotherapy Jung says that the previously dominant 'exact empiric method' of experimental psychology was no longer adequate to treat the mentally ill. Psychotherapists now needed to understand that 'neurotic disturbances are of psychic origin. It is in his soul that the patient is really sick' (Jung/Long 1916:353). Saying that in future 'the doctor must needs be a psychologist, must needs understand the human soul' (Jung/Long 1916:358), Jung calls attention to 'the inception of a new psychology called "analytical psychology" or "Deep Psychology" ' by means of which the doctor can now become a psychologist. Psychoanalysis, defined as 'research into the functional nervous diseases', is something quite different from 'what science calls "psychology" [and] takes as its province the deeper regions, the "hinterland of the soul", the "unconscious" ' (Jung/Long 1916:354). But although Jung thus salutes Freud for having laid the foundations of a psychology of the neuroses it was actually a case of Freud's collaborator Josef Breuer (1842-1925) that helped Freud to two fundamental psychoanalytical insights: that the seeming physical symptoms of neurosis (*parelia*, speech disturbance in this case) were not caused by anatomical disturbances, but had unconscious psychological causes (though this was recognised to a certain extent earlier); and that the patient's condition could be ameliorated by her relating reminiscences and fantasies through 'the "talking cure" ' (Jung/Long 1916:357, in English in the original). In the light of Breuer's case Freud cast doubt on the what had become known as the 'English "nervous shock" trauma-theory' (Jung/Long 1916:357), according to which the cause of the neurosis was an 'actual traumatic experience' to the psyche, by saying rather that some people, having a '*predisposition*', are psychologically vulnerable

through ‘a *significant erotic conflict*’ (Jung/Long 1916:364 – italics in original). Jung relates a case study to illustrate Freud’s theory of repressed material of a sexual nature operating from the unconscious as a destabilising neurotic symptom. A woman patient, unable to face the moral implications of being in love with her best friend’s husband, had ‘repressed’ the resultant erotic conflict ‘into the unconscious’ (Jung/Long 1916:372),<sup>44</sup> where, as a complex, it operated autonomously (the term ‘autonomous complexes’ appears in Jung/Long 1916:375, in English in the original) causing symptomatic disturbances. From studying such cases Freud, formulating the concepts of the Unconscious, repression, and the psychological nature of hysterical symptoms, advanced his theory of the sexual aetiology of neurosis,<sup>45</sup> citing neurosis as a special example of a general problem where the repressed complex (arising initially from the suppression in upbringing of the ‘animal’ through the constraints of civilisation) is the cause of neurotic disturbance.

Discussing ‘the shortest and best path to knowledge of the patient’s “unconscious”’, the elucidation of which for purposes of effecting a cure was seen as the ‘main problem of psychiatric technique’ (Jung/Long 1916:370), Jung dismisses hypnotism, the usual method of treatment used by the ‘experimental psychologist’ to access unconscious contents as ‘too primitive’ (he himself having given it up in his own practice). Though mentioning ‘the so-called association method<sup>46</sup> evolved by the Psychiatric Clinic, Zürich’, but saying that it ‘is chiefly of theoretic, experimental value’, Jung (in another paean of Freud) says that it is dream analysis, ‘the cornerstone that the builders rejected’ [the ‘*via regia* for discovering the unconscious’ is Freud’s phrase cited in Jung/Long 1916:373] that is the ‘more penetrating method’ (Jung/Long 1916:371) of bringing unconscious contents to light.

---

<sup>44</sup> ‘Repression’ is the driving into forgetfulness of some experience and its associations towards which a conscious aversion, often of a moral nature, is felt. The material repressed forms a ‘complex’, a coherent complex of ideas, in the ‘unconscious’.

<sup>45</sup> This, and most of the ground covered thus far are laid out in detail in *The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Jung [1912b] CW 4: para 203-313), one of the works cited in Nicoll’s bibliography.

<sup>46</sup> The association method here spoken of is the experimental method used by Jung in his association experiments. It involving mapping a complex by timing an associated verbal response to a word given by the experimenter, the trigger and response words being part of a ‘chain of association’. A delayed response means that the words are part of a repressed and feeling-toned or affective nexus, or complex, which can then be ‘constructed’. See Jung CW 4: para 338.

Freud, in his ground-breaking *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1900) (Jung/Long 1916:371), asserts that the dream is a product of the unconscious, which, evading the 'censor', the power of moral disapproval that causes repression in the first place, formulates in dreams forbidden wishes in symbolic form. In Freud's view, one of the most powerful and almost ubiquitous repressed desires was the forbidden infantile desire of the young boy, 'in love' with his mother, to kill his father and incestuously 'marry' her. Freud called this fundamental repressed *significant erotic conflict* (Jung's italics) the 'Oedipus complex'.

Jung says that Freud's idea that such a complex as this can exert a disturbing influence on the neurotic person became the basis of Freud's theory of the aetiology of the neuroses. According to this theory anterior conflicts and 'traumas', mostly sexual, often infantile, repressed and therefore unconscious, such as the Oedipus complex, are later revived by psychic energy (which Freud calls 'libido')<sup>47</sup> being drawn back into the unconscious from its appropriate outlet and mode of expression in outer life (adaptation) by the unconscious complex. This regression activates ('cathects') the complex, causing the neurotic symptom. But Jung soon began to disagree with this view, seeing instead 'the regression to infantile complexes' that happens 'whenever the libido meets an obstacle that seems to be insurmountable [as] a secondary phenomenon'. It is only 'failure to apply the stored-up libido in a suitable way [that] activates those complexes that Freud [takes] as the cause of the neurosis'. In contrast to Freud, Jung thinks that the activated complex, 'these sexual fantasies are not the end-root of the disease, but have [to be] pulled up<sup>48</sup> [only] because [they contain] the energy the patient needs for his health'. The cause of the neurosis is not the reactivation of the complex, but the thwarting of the libido. He 'no longer finds the cause of the neurosis in the past, but in the present'. Also, the cause of the neurosis is not necessarily sexual. Indeed, unconscious contents, previously repressed personal memories, may not be sexual at all, but as much concerned

---

<sup>47</sup> Jung says 'all psychological phenomena can be considered as manifestations of energy'. This energy he calls with Freud *libido* while emphasising that 'the original meaning of this term is by no means only sexual' (Jung/Long 1916: 221).

<sup>48</sup> Brought into the light of day rather than rooted out, I suggest.

with 'the will to power'; Jung, in asserting that '*libido* is by no means only sexual', is of the opinion that the true aetiology of the neurosis is non-sexual; 'Psychoanalytic theory should [therefore] be liberated from the purely sexual standpoint' (Jung/Long 1916:231-2, 234).

Though Freud may seem to have been the leading light in all the developments of psychoanalytic theory so far discussed, Sonu Shamdasani draws attention to the falsity of the 'Freudo-centric legend' that sees Jung as Freud's follower and disciple. Jung, who said 'I in no way exclusively stem from Freud' (Jung 2009:11), was, as we have seen, an equal contributor to the structure of psychoanalytical theory, both bringing his own ideas and developing Freud's ideas with an originality of his own. For instance, though not discovering or inventing the 'autonomous complex' (though often credited with that)<sup>49</sup> Jung saw the significance of what Kerr calls 'the "complex" doctrine of the Zurich school' (Kerr 2010:243) for psychoanalytic theory, even though Freud believed that 'there was no room for mixing the [association test] experiment with psychoanalysis proper, as Jung had done' (Kerr 2012:183). Of more significance on the wider world of psychiatry, however, and the dissemination of psychoanalytical ideas in it, was the fact that

at the time the people who mattered were Jung and his Zurich mentor, Eugen Bleuler, not Freud. Jung and Bleuler already possessed international reputations as pioneering psychiatrists and the institutional resources needed to turn psychoanalysis into a scientific movement (Kerr 2012:9).

A pupil and one-time 'disciple' of Freud's, Alfred Adler (1870-1937) formulated in 1907 a view of neurosis based on 'the Struggle for Power' (Jung/Long 1916:345), an as-it-were mirror image of Freud's psychological view. In the light of this, and of Jung's disagreement with Freud over the sexual aetiology of neurosis, Jung came to see Freud's ideas not as the whole of this new psychology, but merely as Freud's particular interpretation of it. But though at first seeing the two theories, Freud's and Adler's, as merely points of view useful in curing patients that emphasised issues of sex and power, respectively, rather than as general principles, Jung soon realised that they were indicative of 'two psychological types which are obviously different' (Jung/Long 1916:348). Jung, then still under

---

<sup>49</sup> See footnote on page 108.

the umbrella of the International Psychoanalytic Association (he was the president of the association), defended himself at its 1913 conference in Munich against accusations of advocating a different form of psychoanalysis from Freud by unveiling *in foro publico* his idea of the *extraverted* and the *introverted* personality, suggesting that analysts of differing psychological types would gravitate to different ways of seeing things (Kerr 2012:460). He cited on this occasion Freud (present at the conference) as the typical extravert, and Adler, (absent, deprived in 1911 of the presidency of the Viennese Psychoanalytical Society and expelled from it) as the typical introvert. The *extravert* 'finds unconditional value outside himself' (Jung/Long 1916:348), the *object* (perhaps another person) being of supreme importance in stilling a craving for pleasure, the satisfaction of which is his governing principle (according to Freud's 'pleasure principle'). The *introvert* 'finds within himself the unconditional value' (Jung/Long 1916:348), the *subject* being of supreme importance in the satisfaction of the craving for power, security and supremacy which is his governing principle.

As we have seen, Jung thinks that the neurotic person is one whose libido cannot find an appropriate outlet. Instead of being employed to solve present real problems by adaptation, the libido regresses to infantile and primitive ways of adaptation. Introverted libido, dammed up and turned destructive, is marooned in the Unconscious in an inferior and unserviceable form, unavailable for ordinary life, causing a neurosis. Restoring the flow of libido, the task of analysis, is not easy. In taking the first step, which is to bring to consciousness the complexes that have trapped the libido, the neurotic person faces repressed material of a personal nature previously and perhaps still disapproved of consciously. The resolution and integration of this material into consciousness may in analysis lead to the patient's 'medical cure'. But regression of libido into the unconscious leading to neurosis can also play a part in the fuller development of the person. In *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* Jung suggests that such a regressive journey in a neurotic patient may also be characterised as

a current of libido leading inward and beginning to flow towards a still invisible, mysterious goal. It seems that the libido had suddenly discovered, in the depths of the unconscious, an object which powerfully attracts it. The life of man, turned wholly to the external by nature does not normally

permit such introversion; there must therefore be surmised [in the case being discussed] a certain exceptional condition, that is to say a lack of external objects, which compels the individual to seek a substitute for them in his own soul (Jung/Hinkle 1916:193).

Jung saw that this regression, though it might cause an illness, could be an opportunity rather than a danger:

The libido has now sunk to the lowest depths, where 'the danger is great' [Faust Part II, Mother's scene]. [But] there 'the god is near'; there man may find the inner sun, his own nature, sun-like and self-renewing, hidden in the mother-womb like the sun in the night time (Jung/Hinkle 1916:446).

In making conscious the unconscious contents, material other than the personal pregnant with greater meaning for the patient may come up. But analysis of this impersonal material not previously repressed and symbolic in nature needs a different technique. Such material must be understood symbolically:

one of the principles of analytical psychology [is] that dream images are to be understood symbolically; that is to say, one must not take them literally but that behind them a hidden meaning has to be surmised (Jung/Hinkle 1916:8).

In this search for hidden meaning Jung says that the constructive or synthetic method of analysis must be employed. The 'objective-scientific' or reductive method, which Freud uses exclusively

reduces the phantasy of the patient [the dream images] to their simple and most generally valid elements. This Freud has done. But that is only half the work to be done (Jung/Long 1916:343)

The *subjective*, the constructive or synthetic method, on the other hand,

absolutely denies the conception that the subjective phantasy-creation is merely an infantile wish, symbolically veiled. This method analyses, but it does not reduce. It decomposes the images into *typical*<sup>50</sup> elements (Jung/Long 1916:344, emphasis original).

To give some idea of what this means, Jung gives the example of the reductive method, seemingly scientific, being used to consider such a thing as 'a sculpture from the historical, technical and – last but not least – from the mineralogical standpoint. 'But where lurks the *real meaning* of such a work of art?' (Jung/Long 1916:340). Similarly, where lurks the real meaning of the dream images? Not, Jung would say, in how they are related reductively to repressed infantile wishes, but what they mean for the dreamer's future.

---

<sup>50</sup> Typical here means archetypal, that is a symbolic representation of fantasy elements of an impersonal nature.

The idea that the contents of the unconscious had both a personal and an impersonal or symbolic aspect<sup>51</sup> came to Jung through his analysis of the neurotic patient's fantasies which forms the basis of *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* (published in 1916 in translation by Beatrice Hinkle as *The Psychology of the Unconscious*). This mammoth literary exercise, however, as Shamdasani says, turned into an analysis of the contents of Jung's own unconscious: 'Jung came to realise that *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* "could be taken as myself and that an analysis of it leads inevitably into an analysis of my own unconscious processes" ' (Jung 2009:19). This self-analysis led Jung to the idea that most impersonal unconscious material (images and symbols that resembled what he was so familiar with from his experience with schizophrenics) was a phylogenetic inheritance (everyone had it as a part of their inherited nature) that sprang from a great abyss that he surmised was at the root of everyone's unconscious. Jung says that both the neurotic and the 'normal' person who engages with the unconscious need to come to terms with these 'collective' contents which are couched in the symbolic language of the unconscious. Jung argues that the cathecting, either in illness or in normal development, of unconscious contents by regression of libido generates an implacable imperative which impels the subject (because of the accrued libido) to a confrontation with those contents. They represent our 'fate in which there is something immeasurable [and which] usually hides unknown dangers'. Though 'in the face of [this] fear is understandable' (Jung/Hinkle 1916:117) what the Unconscious brings, both personal and collective, 'which has a power which beautifies everything and which in other circumstances destroys everything' (Jung/Hinkle 1916:116) has to be 'come to terms' with and lived out if we are to bring

---

<sup>51</sup> Jung uses the terms Personal and Impersonal Unconscious in *The Structure of the Unconscious*, written in 1916. Although Jung discusses in *The Content of the Psychoses* (Jung/Long 1916:312-351) the synthetic and the constructive methods of analysis, and although he mentions in that paper 'individual material' and 'mythological formations' (Jung/Long 1916:345), both of which concepts imply the idea of the personal and collective unconscious, he has yet to arrive, I suggest, at the concept of these as psychic structures. Nicoll, I contend, is most unlikely to have seen the paper *The Structure of the Unconscious*, (he might very early in 1917 have seen the French translation, or even a Swiss version transmitted through France, but if he had, why does he not give it as a source?) where the idea of the personal and impersonal unconscious as a structure is advanced in a complete form with the terminology later used. The paper is incorporated into the second (1917) edition of Long's *Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology* (Jung CW 7, footnote to para 442), but this only appeared after Nicoll had written his own book. Nicoll therefore discusses the two types of analysis in ignorance of the formulation of the underlying idea of the bi-partite structure of the unconscious, as Jung had in *The Content of the Psychoses*, Nicoll's source.

our lives to fulfilment. Even though unconscious contents may be depraved and revolting, they show that 'the values that the individual lacks [may thus] be found in the neurosis itself' (Jung 1917a:79).

Although Shamdasani suggests that the writing of the *Transformations and Symbols* 'marks the discovery of the collective unconscious, though the term came later' (Jung 2009:14), in the earliest version of *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* the later theory of the bipartite structure of the unconscious, consisting of personal and collective contents, and the archetypes, is only dimly visible. Only by searching the 1951 version, where appropriate formulations of the theory can be found, can one find the obscure hints in the 1911/12 version of what was then still in the future. As Jung says in the preface to the later version: 'here I discovered, bit by bit, after a lapse of thirty-seven years, the connecting links that I should have known about before I wished to join up the fragments of my book' (Preface to 1950 version of *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*).

The idea related to the existence of an impersonal unconscious, the collective material

present in every individual, [aside from] his personal memories, those 'great primordial images', as Jacob Burckhardt called them, the inherited possibilities of human imagination, the primordial images of humanity (Jung 1917a:85),

which later became formulated as the theory of archetypes, was not formulated until 1916, and was also not really derivable from *Transformations and Symbols* either, and Nicoll could therefore not have known either idea from this source. Though the germ of the idea of the archetype, as 'the personification of the libido in the form of a conqueror, hero or demon' (Jung/Hinkle 1916:191) was present in *Transformations and Symbols*, it was only Jung's further 'investigation of [his own] subjective contents' with respect to this image that led eventually to the development of the chief archetype in his firmament of symbolic archetypal images, the SELF. Although there are in *The Structure of the Unconscious*, delivered in Zürich in 1916, published in English only in 1917, hints of these two ideas, the collective unconscious and the archetypes, and also of the idea of the process

of 'individuation',<sup>52</sup> Nicoll cannot have seen this paper. I think it remarkable that, as I shall show, Nicoll, developing ideas found only in the sources I have enumerated, comes, in *Dream Analysis* very close to the idea of individuation as a means of realising the self being the goal of, in the first instance the cure of neurosis, and ultimately the fulfilment of life, without having any clear idea of Jung's formulations of the ideas of the archetypes and the collective unconscious.

The development of Jung's ideas up to 1917, formulated above, forms, I argue, the substructure of Nicoll's understanding of Jung's system, and is reflected, I also argue, in *Dream Psychology*.

Shamdasani helpfully summarises the development of Jung's system at this point:

Jung, beginning to attempt to translate some of the themes of [his experience] into contemporary psychological language, had already provided a structural account of general human functioning and of psychopathology. In addition to the earlier theory of complexes, he had formulated conceptions of a phylogenetically acquired unconscious peopled by mythic images, of a non-sexual psychic energy, of the general types of introversion and extraversion, of compensatory and prospective functions of dreams, and of the synthetic and constructive approach to fantasies (Jung 2009:49).

If Nicoll had not read or heard these ideas in their then-most-developed form, which as I have argued he in some cases did not, he was nevertheless able to piece together the overall view of Jung's system from the three sources he quotes, supplemented, I will argue, by some intuitive extrapolation of Jung's ideas, and possibly also by earlier oral exchange of ideas that find no deposit in these sources.

### ***Dream Psychology***

I turn now to Nicoll's text *Dream Psychology*. Considering the exigencies of Nicoll's active war service, from which he escaped only on his return to England 'early in 1917' (Pogson 1961:50), to produce *Dream Psychology* by March 1917 (date of preface, [Nicoll 1917a: vi],) was a remarkable achievement. From a letter sent to WRN in November 1916 we learn that Maurice was 'very anxious to overhaul my MS. and have it ready for a favourable moment' (Pogson 1961:49). If this MS. is

---

<sup>52</sup> Individuation, which 'plays a large role in our psychology, is the development of the psychological *individual* as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of *differentiation*, having as its goal the development of the individual personality' (Jung [1920] CW 6: para 448).

*Dream Psychology*, then it would seem that much of the text was already written in Mesopotamia. But though Pogson suggests that ‘during his years abroad Nicoll reflected continuously on the plight of those who would return from active service with injuries of the mind which medical skill could not cure’ (Pogson 1961:50), if the material on shell shock included in *Dream Psychology* really was derived from ‘his work with shell shock patients’, then it must have been included at the very last minute. For Nicoll only started ‘observing war neurotics, taking notes and having the idea of bringing out a small volume on war neuroses’ while working at 10, Palace Gardens in London from January 1917 (Pogson 1961:50). Only in March, by which time the book was dated, did he start working in the Empire Hospital, in Westminster, ‘where he established a considerable reputation’ developing a new approach to the treatment of shell-shock, and founding a journal (with George Riddich), *The Journal of Neurology and Psychology* (Begg 1977:83). In this same letter to his father Nicoll characterises the book as ‘a simple non-technical volume – quite polite – on the attitude I take to the psycho-analysts, [who] are pessimists. It is an offshoot of Zürich, but independent’ (Pogson 1961:49). Written to enable ‘readers to regard the dream, in some degree, from Dr Jung’s standpoint’ (Nicoll 1917a: vi), and reviewed, Pogson tells us, as ‘“a summary of Jung’s view” ’ (Pogson 1961:55, 51), the book, it seems, from Nicoll’s concession in the preface of the second 1920 edition, had been condemned as ‘unnecessarily hostile to Freud and his school’.<sup>53</sup> It reworks, I argue, Jung’s ideas in Nicoll’s own language, with certain changes of emphasis, some anti-Freudian polemic, and certain crucial alteration of terminology. The book is not as original, thorough or inspired as Freud’s description of the mechanism of dream formation in his 1900 *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where he builds a case for the dynamics of the unconscious and the mechanism of repression based on dream-analysis. Nor is it as original as Jung’s *Die Psychologie der unbewussten Prozesse* discussed above. But Nicoll’s book offers, I argue, a more profound and more universal view of life than either Freud’s, whose immediate concern is therapeutic relief from suffering, or Jung’s, for whom any

---

<sup>53</sup> Nicoll writes in the 1920 version of the book (which is, apart from the Introduction, dated 1919, unaltered: ‘In so far as I have been accused of being unnecessarily hostile to Freud and his school, I accept the criticism’ (Nicoll 1920: ix).

progress beyond therapy is only for those 'destined for it and called to it from the beginning' (Jung 1917a:133). The point of Nicoll's argument is the presentation of a philosophy of life 'to widen the conception of responsibility' in the face of 'the capacity for non-realisation which people possess [that] is universal' (Nicoll 1917a:187). Although Nicoll's analysis of dream formation comes from Freud's book (cited in the Nicoll's bibliography), the fact that Jung is frequently mentioned, and that Nicoll's theory mirrors Jung's so exactly despite reticence in using Jung's terminology, makes the book, I argue, despite a specifically Nicollian slant, deliberately 'Jungian'. Described by one commentator as 'the earliest original work in this field by a British colleague of Jung' (Begg 1977:82), it does for English-speaking Zürich-school Jungians (then a still nascent group but soon to increase considerably) what Freud's book did for 'Viennese' psychoanalysis.

Nicoll, during his year practising psychotherapy in Harley Street before the war had abandoned hypnotism as a means of reaching unconscious contents, as had Jung previously (Pogson 1961:22). Nicoll does not tell us specifically that its place in his method was taken by dream analysis. But, as the book's title suggests, his main argument, taken over from Jung, is that the unconscious, both 'personal' and 'collective', is accessible through dreams. Dreams throw up symbols that, bizarre when viewed by ordinary consciousness, have a decipherable meaning, manifesting unconscious contents in the language of the unconscious, which is 'a language of symbols that contain meaning in a latent and condensed form' (Nicoll 1917a:24). The nature of the dreams Nicoll cites, and the characterisation of the dreamers suggests these dreams were culled mostly from his immediate-pre-war psychoanalytical experience in Dr Chrichton Miller's practice in Harley Street.

I now analyse Nicoll's *Dream Psychology* loosely under headings found in Shamdasani's summary list of the themes that he argues Jung translated into psychological language: a system of general human functioning and psychopathology; a phylogenetically acquired unconscious peopled by mythic images (reductive and synthetic analysis); a non-sexual form of psychic energy; complexes;

the general types of introversion and extraversion; the compensatory and prospective functions of dreams and of the synthetic and constructive approach to fantasies.

### *General human functioning and psychopathology*

Nicoll says that the term 'neurotic' is erroneously used as a label for an 'illness [for which] no cause can be found'; there seems to be nothing wrong with the man, and he must be playing some elaborate trick (Nicoll 1917a:7). This illness, however, is, Nicoll maintains, a functional nervous disease, maybe involving on the one hand 'palsies, convulsive seizures and other dramatic forms' and on the other 'undramatic disorders known as neurasthenia, or psychasthenia, or nervous exhaustion'. Though often seen as 'nothing but', or 'all in the mind', the suffering involved is, Nicoll emphasises, very real. The treatment of neurotic illness suggests that the problem is an interior one, its causes lying not in the symptoms, but in some underlying roots 'in the background of the mind' (Nicoll 1917a:7 *passim*). These roots, evidence, Nicoll maintains, of 'a wrong use of life', of 'development gone wrong', of 'a damming back of energy owing to false attitudes', are both irrational, bearing 'no relation to comprehension by reason', and unconscious, in that what they 'grip lies beyond consciousness'. To bring about a cure it is necessary to make contact with these unconscious roots of the disease. Though the patient's resistance makes this approach difficult for both doctor and patient (Nicoll 1917a:11-22), analysing dreams allows access to complexes in the unconscious. But neurosis also has a 'prospective' aspect to it. For the patient carries in his psyche not only the roots of his malady but also the promise of his own cure. For in understanding through analysis the way that the symptoms have been constructed by the unconscious lies the solution to the illness, which consists of the resolution of false attitudes to and the wrong use of life (Nicoll 1917a:2ff).

In elucidating the idea of 'mental background'<sup>54</sup> Nicoll cites evidence for its existence in what Freud explored as parapraxes, slips of the tongue and give-away unconscious behaviour the significance of

---

<sup>54</sup> 'Mental background' [chapter title] is Nicoll's term for the Unconscious.

which the perpetrator is unaware. Though these everyday symbolic symptoms (symbolic means for Nicoll having 'latent meaning') are indeed generated by the unconscious, their interpretation depends on the interpreter, since 'the expression on the face, the configuration of the stars, a poem or a dream are things that contain no clear circle of focussed meaning'. But though the interpretation of neurotic symptoms can lead to the mental background that generates them, it is the dream, when the unconscious is drawing a picture or cartoon 'that may contain valuable material [and] may have behind it a definite motive', that offers the most fruitful way of approaching the unconscious, and we should look for understanding there (Nicoll 1917a:14ff).

Nicoll, following Freud, analyses the symbolic language of dreams, how and why they are constructed, and how they relate to the tensions and problems that lead to neurotic symptoms. The unconscious forms dream images in the same way as the cartoonist creates his images, conveying an oblique meaning by a technique of condensation, using day-to-day images of topical interest in unusual juxtaposition. But though the cartoonist must produce something generally intelligible, 'coherence is not typical of the dream' (Nicoll 1917a:24). Nicoll cites a number of dreams in which every-day images are irrationally or haphazardly juxtaposed. He says that these images will take on meaning when the contours of the intersecting lines of interest are exposed (Nicoll 1917a: 23-33 *passim*). This is his way of saying, I argue, that the images of the dream can be understood when the chain of associations that connect them are unravelled. Nicoll shows how this is done by citing the dream of a man who

was staying in a hotel, really a cathedral, chilly and uncomfortable. The manager was a priest with an ascetic face [who] carried the dinner-bell belonging to my old home. Ringing the bell he pointed to a Latin inscription on a tablet on the wall, reminding me of an incident when the headmaster flung a book at me because I used "arable land" instead of something more poetical. The priest became like the headmaster. He pointed to the tablet on [which] I saw three shining objects, like stars which merged into one (Nicoll 1917a: 27-28).

When Nicoll says that 'certain hints set up a train of interest, and establish some mental relationships' (Nicoll 1917a:29) he is, I suggest, talking about associations. Since in Nicoll's view it is impossible for the dreamer to relate a dream without 'embellishing' the images in the form of associations, he accepts that the manifest dream is a mixture of true dream images and associations.

These associations, ramifications of ideas that spring up spontaneously on the part of the dreamer in response to the images, 'not only form the symbolism, but [are] also the key to the interpretation of the symbolism' (Nicoll 1917a:30). The dreamer talks: of the idea of the bell invoking unpleasant duty; that such people as the priest/headmaster, remind him of Newman and Tolstoy, neither of whom, and none of what they stand for, especially the idea of religious conversion, the dreamer finds amenable; and that his failure in the Latin class, and the idea of conversion ['that is, a complete change in one's attitude to life'-Nicoll 1917a:31] reminds him of his own inadequacy. Nicoll implies that the dream gives the patient (and the doctor) insight into his own inadequacy which the patient, finding this too disagreeable, has repressed and is therefore unconscious of.

### *Reductive and synthetic analysis*

Nicoll develops further the idea of association as a technique of interpretation of dream images by referring to Jung's two types of dream analysis. He says that while the material for dreams can be personal, even topical

the sources of the dream lie very much deeper, and its symbolism is not always drawn from the passing fashion of the age, but from the foundations of the human mind (Nicoll 1917a:35).

To illustrate Jung's distinction between reductive associations or analysis and the 'synthetic or constructive' approach, characterising the first as Freudian, the second as Jungian, Nicoll quotes two dreams 'from the same source':

I was in a cave. A long narrow passage through the rock led to the sea. I struggled through and found myself in the surf, battling for life. I got into a boat and was helped into it by F. W.

I was in a ship on a broad river. On deck was a baby, naked, curled up in a curious way, apparently asleep, with its knees bent up and arms pressed tightly to the side, with bent elbows. Someone threw it into the water. Then I saw a big ship with a great rent in her side. Someone said, 'Oh that often happens. It can be repaired easily' (Nicoll 1917a:40).

Nicoll says that seen from the 'objective' or extravert view, these dreams can be interpreted on Freudian lines, with attempts to reach and recover infantile or even birth experiences from the unconscious which the dream might seem to refer to. But he asks, 'what is gained?' (Nicoll 1917a:42). On the other hand, the 'subjective' (Jung's term here used by Nicoll) mind sees the dreams from a teleological viewpoint. F. W. is someone who offered the dreamer a new position,

which he refused. The dream tells him he has to develop himself (to get into the water, or even undergo another birth or a rebirth), else he (the ship) is sunk – but this can easily be repaired. To reduce every symbol to some arbitrary meaning, saying that the dream ‘means’ its components, as Freud does, is to say that a painting ‘means’ the chemical analysis of the pigments used, or a cathedral ‘means’ analysis of its bricks and mortar. Jung’s constructive method, though ‘more speculative’, conveys a meaning on a completely different plane from such trivialities (Nicoll 1917a:44). The two methods of interpretation might be characterised as ‘wish-fulfilment’ and ‘foreshadowing’. The unconscious, in producing these images, ‘compensates’ for maladjusted conscious attitudes and experiences. There can be over-compensation and under-compensation, but in both the dream reveals to the dreamer a conscious attitude incongruent with reality.

### *A theory of Libido as ‘Interest’*

Nicoll says that in neurosis there is a disturbance of the flow of what Nicoll, unhappy with term libido, calls instead ‘that force that reveals itself as interest’ [Nicoll 1917a:77].<sup>55</sup> Developing a theory of ‘interest’ Nicoll examines the idea of that

the material that forms the dream [does so through] the intrusion of latent and un-refracted material, *nascent* material. [This material] must contain a motive in the sense that it is a psychical force. In handling a dream the aim is to discover [this] motive of the unconscious (Nicoll 1917a: 75-76).

The outlet that ‘interest’ coming from the Unconscious must find through the conscious is blocked by the conscious attitude. To illustrate this Nicoll cites a dream of a spinster who never goes out or does anything, who dreams of stagnant water, saying that this is a symbol for interest, marooned in the unconscious, unavailable to the conscious mind. Similarly he cites the dream of a boy, in reality

---

<sup>55</sup> Nicoll inserts here a discussion of the term *libido*, airing the alternative possibilities of *interest*, *life force*, *élan vital* and *horme*, saying that none is satisfactory, but that he elects to use *interest* (Nicoll 1917a:77). Henri-Louis Bergson (1859-1941), French philosopher, coined the term *élan vital* to describe ‘a sort of life force’ (Bergson’s phrase) that enabled a ‘non-Darwinian evolutionism that made room for religion’ (Lyon 2005: 91). *Horme* (ὄρμη) is Greek for impulse, inclination or intention, and was I presume a possible alternative in Nicoll’s mind for the Latin *libido*, but having no specifically sexual connotations. Jung was unhappy with Freud’s use of *libido*, and tried to persuade him to change it because it was too sexual and therefore aroused antagonism. Freud, who believed that all psychic energy was sexual, thought it the only appropriate term, and was suspicious of Jung’s objections (Kerr 2012:276). Jung notes that *interest* ‘as Claparède [Edouard, nephew of the philosopher/psychologist Théodore Flournoy, a prominent Genevan psychoanalyst who was very helpful to Sabina Spielrein] once suggested to me, could be used in this special sense’ (Jung/Long 1916:348). Nicoll in no sense rejects the idea of libido, but was simply unhappy with the use of the term, though he did use it at times.

tyrannized by his bullying schoolmaster, who dreams that he cannot get out of a swimming pool because this master standing on the side with a long pole prevents him (Nicoll 1917a:80). Nicoll interprets this as showing that the conscious attitude that prevents him is in this case cowardice, an inability to use 'the pent-up interest, symbolised as water, representing that force that should have gone into personal development but which lay useless in confinement' (Nicoll 1917a:81). The necessary flow of 'interest' into conscious realisation of the unconscious contents is like an electric current flowing between opposite poles. When the current is impeded this stops

the '*proper use of interest*', [which is] the utilisation, expression and application of interest that the unconscious continuously concerns itself with (Nicoll 1917a:83).

Nicoll, anticipating his later 'theory of life, either philosophical or spiritual, or both', calls the proper use of interest 'the one problem in life' needing to be solved, therefore, conversely, the only real impediment in life. This 'expressed interest' is the motive of the grouping of ideas, feelings and experiences in the unconscious that Nicoll terms (after Jung, he says) a complex (Nicoll 1917a:87). Symbols represent these complexes of accrued interest, or formed psychic energy, to the conscious mind in dreams and neurotic behaviour, but these complexes are autonomous, and unconscious, expressing themselves independently from the conscious personality. Nicoll shows how a dream of an irritable, nervous man illuminates the unconscious complex that lies at the root of his irritability by lampooning his usually too extreme and violent behaviour, showing him that his conscious estimation of himself was at odds with the real situation. The doctor's task is to show the patient, often against extreme resistance, what the dream and his neurotic behaviour show, which Nicoll says is their purpose (Nicoll 1917a:89).

It is Nicoll's view that even in so-called 'normal' people the conscious attitude and the often-rigid personality that expresses it, especially when formed by *mores* instilled by strict upbringing, often stand in the way of the natural flow of 'interest' through the symbols, leading to its damming up, the stalling of normal development and the siphoning off of interest into the formation of neurotic symptoms. Dammed-up energy grows in intensity, eventually being of such force that we can speak

of 'nascent material constantly welling up from the unconscious' attempting 'to find free expression' (Nicoll 1917a:173). The bringing about of this development, not necessarily neurotic, Nicoll sees as the aim and purpose of the psyche.

### *Complexes*

Nicoll pays respect to Jung for inventing the term describing this 'mass of ideas and emotions collected around a common nucleus in the mind' (Nicoll1917a:131),<sup>56</sup> suggesting that these complexes are often numerous and are on the verge of consciousness. But when ideas associated with them 'trigger' them there is often fierce resistance. Complexes are almost like split-off personalities. Indeed, Nicoll in a footnote draws attention to William James' description of them as 'the many *selves* in the personality' (Nicoll 1917a:137), this being an obvious resonance with Gurdjieff's idea of the fractured personality consisting of many 'I's.

### *Extraversion and introversion*

Nicoll's treatment of Extraversion and Introversion is not a description of Jung's classification, but assumes and specifically acknowledges it. For Nicoll extraversion is the means of taking hold of life successfully; 'a pushing out of interest means a coming-into contact with life' (Nicoll 1917a:138). Extraversion in the adult is the natural development of 'the extrovert spontaneity found in the great majority of young growing things' (Nicoll 1917a:140), but is viewed as 'a life of emotional experience that is essentially a surface life' (Nicoll 1917a:149). Nicoll says that though extraverts are socially useful, and often successful, they 'have little self-knowledge'. Taken up with external life, with a sort of worldly excess, through the too-easy conscious outpouring of interest, their experience of the unconscious is almost always one of compensatory set-backs. This Nicoll illustrates by relating the

---

<sup>56</sup> When Nicoll says that 'the conception of complexes is due to the work of Dr Jung' he is wide of the mark. Kerr says 'by mid-1905, Jung had got over the temptation to present his theory of complexes as entirely original' (Kerr 2012:72). Kerr says that the idea and the timed association experiment came from the Englishman Francis Galton; Theodor Ziehen of Berlin picked up where Galton left off. Kerr says also that the autonomous nature of complexes was first suggested by Pierre Janet; Freud, as we have seen, established its relevance for psychoanalysis by understanding that it was a feeling-toned [sexual] complex that was repressed in neurosis. Even the famous timed association experiments that 'established' its existence and characteristics empirically was not Jung's work alone, his colleague Franz Riklin having started these experiments by himself (as already noted).

dream of a woman who dreamed of trying to catch a train, but failing because she cannot pack all her things into her suitcases; even when she abandons these, the press of people in the street still prevents her. Nicoll interprets this as meaning that she was 'prevented from getting near her true object. She misses the train' (Nicoll 1917a:144).

Nicoll sees *mutatis mutandis* introversion as an inhibition to living a full life. For the introvert

the assault on life does not occur naturally; he finds life difficult and assumes that it is continually hostile; he hides everything [about himself and] anxiety is a constant state of mind with him (Nicoll 1917a: 146, 148).

Though conceding that 'this picture portrays only one aspect of introvert psychology' (Nicoll 1917a:147) Nicoll nevertheless illustrates introversion by analysing dreams that show his patients struggling to cope with moving to the next stage of external life. For example a man, who, 'on his own admission, shirked a certain side of life', dreams that, seeing a bull fight on the stage of an amphitheatre from high up in the seating, felt great fear, 'the fear that I always associate with heights'. There is an earthquake; he falls, finds himself looking down on two women 'catching some sort of fish or animal hidden in a tub full of water'. Nicoll interprets the dream by saying that the patient 'avoided any function or ceremony that brought him into immediate contact with women' (Nicoll 1917a:155). A later dream, where the patient, dressed in pyjamas, in charge of a shop, is unable to fulfil the requirements of a woman customer, having in a catalogue but not in reality an item she required, confirms the validity of Nicoll's interpretation (Nicoll 1917a:157). I argue that the symbolism of these dreams at one level is obvious. We are not told what neurotic symptoms the man had (apart from a fear of heights), but the earthquake would suggest, I argue, a profound upset in his ordinary life which drove him to seek Nicoll's help. But the emphasis of the analysis is that the man has *in himself* what is needed to advance to the next stage of his fulfilment by coming to terms with sexuality, the clamour for this step coming from within.

I argue that both Nicoll's and Jung's view on extraversion and introversion are undeveloped at this point in their careers. Both psychologists equate the extravert with someone whose 'character seems to lie in the slightness of the barrier between feeling and its expression' (Nicoll 1917a:140),

while the introvert is someone who is 'reserved, outwardly cold, guarded, watchful, and difficult to understand whose emotion is not practical' (Nicoll 1917a: 147-8). Put succinctly, there is a confusion of extraversion with the 'feeling type' and introversion with the 'thinking type', which both writers emphasise, Nicoll in *Dream Psychology* and Jung in *Die Psychologie der unbewussten Prozesse*. The truth of the matter is that, as Jung will in 1920 argue in *Psychological Types*, that introversion and extraversion are typological characteristics completely independent of feeling, thinking, sensation and intuition. This confusion vitiates much of Nicoll's discussion of the matter in *Dream Psychology*. But I argue also that Nicoll's view of the extraversion/introversion dichotomy makes both extraversion and introversion seem pathological. While granting abnormal legitimacy and 'normality', but superficiality to extraversion, Nicoll sees the introvert as someone who does not engage with life.

Nicoll provides a more balanced view of the conundrum, however, I suggest, by citing a dream where a traveller meets a North-American Indian chief wearing women's clothes who explains that he has 'done it all', being so successful. Therefore the 'great White Spirit has told him he must become a woman'. Nicoll interprets this dream as meaning that the unconscious was telling the chief (and through him the dreamer) that he must 'modify his life'. Being a woman means here turning from 'action' inwards towards the unconscious, where complexes representing the hitherto ignored and undeveloped areas of 'thought [and] feeling' (Nicoll 1917a:145). The significant aspect of this balancing act is introversion. I have shown above that Jung has suggested that while the introversion of libido may lead to neurosis, it may also provide an access to the positive values to be found in the unconscious, but that 'the life of man, turned wholly to the external by nature does not normally permit such introversion' (Jung/Hinkle 1916:193). Nicoll says that the extravert has the first half of life easy, the tasks of life, work, marriage, family, success, being taken for granted, but then suffers upset when, at the 'zenith' of life,<sup>57</sup> called to turn inwards, to convert, finds himself unequipped for

---

<sup>57</sup> 'Zenith' is used for this concept at Nicoll 1917a:172: 'there is a zenith in every individual, and once that is past regression begins'.

this task. The introvert, on the other hand, being unsuccessful in the socially approved tasks of early life, often experiences his call from the unconscious as the imperious demand that he fulfil them (as the dreams cited above show) before he can turn inwards. But when, as Nicoll says, 'the tide turns, the sun sets, the fire dies out' (Nicoll 1917a:165), when in the waxing and waning that apply to a life, where in the first half of life one side is developed, the other repressed, and then 'failures' call for a redressing of the balance and introversion sets in, something that happens to extravert and introvert alike, the introvert is abundantly equipped to handle this, since he 'knows himself, if he knows nothing else, whereas this is the last thing that the extrovert learns' (Nicoll 1917a:149).

### *Compensatory and Prospective Function of Dreams*

*Dream Psychology* ends by drawing together the threads explored in it to show how the anthropology built up is not only an indicator of neurosis and how to treat it, but leads to a view of the ideal functioning of the psyche which is a philosophy of life. Nicoll presents what he calls 'a theory of life, either spiritual or philosophical, or both, upon which to act' (Nicoll 1917a:181). Explicitly influenced by his work with shell-shock victims Nicoll discusses 'Regression' (chapter title), which is 'the retreat of interest from reality assuming a pathological form' (Nicoll 1917a:166). Perhaps Nicoll's use of the term interest for libido stems from his work with shell-shock victims, in whom, their psyches overwhelmed with experiences of warfare 'the force that reveals itself as interest had retreated down to levels of the first years of their life and this process was called regression' (Nicoll 1917a:166). But though the patient seems to be reliving his childhood, Nicoll maintains, with Jung and against Freud, that this 'regression belongs very intimately to the formation of the neurotic symptom', caused by the 'combination of circumstance immediately responsible for the neurosis in the present' and not, *pace* Freud, by the re-vivifying of some past conflict (Nicoll 1917a:168). The mind is trying to bring about some sort of balance, which in less stressful situations would represent a '“progressive adaptation”', but in these shell-shock victims leads to '“regressive adaptation”' (Nicoll 1917a:169). The nexus of associations the shell-shock patient brings from the stressful situation (Nicoll calls it the 'battle complex' [Nicoll 1917a:170])

cannot be coped with and is repressed. In order to recover the patient must assimilate this repressed complex, bringing back the 'interest' associated with it into consciousness. In so doing he 'has to re-tread the path of his own development'. Such assimilation 'may be regarded as an effort towards healing' (Nicoll 1917a:171).

Nicoll sees the overwhelmingly unpleasant realities faced by the victims of 'combat neurasthenia',<sup>58</sup> causing their psychic functions to break down, as the trauma that meant that the overwhelmed psyche was unable to assimilate this repressed material. But even in non-combat circumstances the neurotic psyche may be unable to undergo this experience assimilation, forming neurotic symptoms instead. In this connection Nicoll cites a dream of a woman, who, unable to face the reality of war, dreams of seeing soldiers in her garden, which terrifies her. The unconscious, flagging up that 'life [is] showing itself as some menacing factor' in the face of 'an attitude of superficial suppression of certain aspects of life', is making a demand for a more realistic attitude to a profound problem. 'Life assumes a menacing aspect until the adaptation is made', until a 'false outlook' is abandoned, 'for it is necessary to assimilate and not to suppress'. This 'seems to be the plan [of the unconscious] behind individual development' (Nicoll 1917a: 48, 50).

But Nicoll maintains that

though regression, such as occurs in shell shock is not so obviously a moral question; often seem[ing] to point to a lack in the power of conscious adaptation, it may be a reaction coming from the unconscious that has as its aim the ultimate good of the individual (Nicoll 1917a: 169 -171).

In support of this Nicoll quotes a dream of a shell-shock patient who dreams that

in the trench my great toe, with its nail, had come off, and I was debating with another soldier whether I should put it on again (Nicoll 1917a:171).

Nicoll suggests that, though the experience of the shell-shock patient seems so much more abnormal, and so much more horrifyingly intense, it is a pathological exaggeration of the usual

---

<sup>58</sup> Euphemism for shell-shock; see Sassoon, *Sherston's Progress*, where a whole gamut of phrases are used for this condition: war neuroses; nervous disorders; a touch of neurasthenia; anxiety neurosis; functional nervous disorders. One army officer 'never had and never would recognise such a thing as shell shock', Sassoon was told by his doctor, W. H. R. Rivers (Sassoon 1936:8).

development of a person who, 'in advancing age', passes 'a zenith'.<sup>59</sup> At this mid-life point the person may experience 'the accumulation of potential interest in the unconscious', this driven there by the 'lack of proper expression' of legitimate aspirations denied by the ordinary course of life. The 'battle complex' in normal circumstances replaced by that 'nascent material constantly welling up from the deeper levels of the psyche, [from] the unconscious, to find free expression' that we have already referred to, an urge for 'right expression' that will become the main idea of Nicoll's philosophy (Nicoll 1917a:166ff).

In the case of young shell-shock victims this upsurge of unconscious contents, too powerful for their damaged psyches to endure, was also premature, occurring long before the 'zenith' that Nicoll mentions.<sup>60</sup> These victims escaped into the neurotic symptoms of shell-shock, often severe depression and listlessness (*accidie*). But just as not all these victims were eventually to 'make an effort towards healing', remaining broken for the rest of their lives, many, facing in civilian life a psychologically similar, if far milder, more 'normal' crisis, also fail to make an effort towards healing.

As an example of this failure to confront life Nicoll cites the dream of a man, who, passed over for promotion, 'in some respects a disappointed man', unable to perform the now routine tasks of his necessary but unfulfilling work because of writer's cramp, dreams that he is 'in a desert. Before me was a tremendously tall wall. I was cowering at its foot in terror'. Nicoll analyses this dream as the patient being shown

a fear connected with growth and expression and fulfilment. It is a biological – or spiritual – necessity that some kind of fruit should crown labour in human affairs (Nicoll 1917a: 120, 129).

---

<sup>59</sup> It is remarkable that Nicoll discusses the idea of the 'zenith' of life, an idea not found in Jung's books that are his sources. The idea is found in the introduction to the 1950 version of *Symbols and Transformations of the Libido*: 'The time is a critical one, for it marks the beginning of the second half of life, when a *metanoia*, a mental transformation, takes place' (Jung [1911-2] CW 5: page xxvi). Whether Jung uses the term zenith I cannot say.

<sup>60</sup> Sassoon remarks on those older combatants whom he met in Craiglockhart Hospital 'of whom too much had been asked' (Sassoon 1936:9), seeing them as unfortunates who were simultaneously overwhelmed both by combat stress and by what would later be called the mid-life crisis.

The urge to bear this fruit is felt as a constant 'welling up' from the unconscious seen as a 'source'. But in saying that 'from the teleological point of view of the Zürich school, when the repressed material surrounding consciousness is liberated and properly assimilated into the conscious life, there remains the unconscious' (Nicoll 1917a:178) Nicoll shows clearly, I argue, that he assents to the idea of the bi-partite unconscious. The 'unconscious' he talks of here, the impersonal unconscious, is the source of the imperative to bear the fruit of growth and expression and fulfilment. But this cannot be accessed until 'repressed material' (the personal unconscious) is cleared away.

In another dream a man suffered from *accidie*. Unable to settle to any task, he dreamed he was at a gathering of pompous philosophers, dressed in ancient costume. Someone was sitting at his writing table. He fell through the floor, arriving in a dirty kitchen, where he was confronted with a fat, ugly cook, demanding a drink of beer or stout from him which he had in his hand. He found some more and poured her a drink, to be told 'you must always mix the clear with the muddy'. Suddenly the room became a tall imposing one in which he found himself alone. In a later dream he dreamed of firing a rifle with inadequate sights and killing (accidentally) 'a very bright-eyed bird, not yet fully grown'. The patient felt that lack of scholarship impeded him in his work. Though unable to achieve anything of maturity (the not-fully-grown bird), he felt ancient philosophy was not adequate to fill this gap, which needed a much more 'earthy' skill such as the cook (who looked like Socrates) had (Nicoll 1917a: 105 -110). Besides showing again the need both for the patient to confront his own sexual nature, the goriness of competing with men in the world, and the 'muddy' nature of real life, this dream demonstrates, Nicoll says, the richness of the unconscious contents, caused by the loss of 'interest' to consciousness, causing apathy, while the unconscious is vivid:

When the force that reveals itself as interest [libido] deserted conscious levels, the activity of the unconscious, as shown in the dream life, became distinctly increased. The dream-psyche began to weave a number of unusually clear pictures which might be given a special and purposeful interpretation, the purpose being to eject that dammed-back force in a particular direction shunned by the patient (Nicoll 1917a:118).

These last two dreams show the power of the unconscious rising up in people in relatively normal circumstances driving them to some sort of transformation or fulfilment. Under the form of symbols the 'interest' in the unconscious manifests itself vividly as a 'form-giving cause or principle' which Nicoll sees as equivalent to Aristotle's *entelechy* (Nicoll 1917a:180).<sup>61</sup> This force rising up from the unconscious is goal-orientated. Nicoll maintains that it drives a person to his fate, making overwhelming demands on him to submit to the universal impulse in man to attain fullest expression' (Nicoll 1917a:183). According to Nicoll 'there appears to be a particular line along which fullest expression is most easily experienced in every individual' (Nicoll 1917a:184). Finding this line, which is a person's fate, is the purpose of life. But not everyone will allow this purpose to be fulfilled in him. 'A struggle may arise in a man between his self-conscious will and that *entelechy* which surrounds him' (Nicoll 1917a:180). The 'average neurotic [is] someone who has failed to discover his special line' (Nicoll 1917a:184). He either refuses or is unable to confront his fate. His failure is not in coming to terms with his past, with the repressed material in his unconscious, but is his inability to face the future, the 'non-expressed part' of himself: he suffers from 'non-expression or non-realisation of unexpressed interest' (Nicoll 1917a:179).

In his final chapter, 'Responsibility', Nicoll says that if the patient submits to this force from the unconscious, if he 'adjusts the life of experience and the life of the unconscious', a philosophy of personal responsibility will emerge that will give him his fullest and best expression (Nicoll 1917a:183). I suggest that the 'form-giving cause or principle', the *entelechy*, which drives a man to self-realisation, is Jung's archetype in another guise. Although, as noted, Nicoll could not in my view have had any access to Jung's later formulation of the idea of the archetypes and the bi-partite (personal and collective) unconscious, I cite the following to argue that these essential ideas were known by Nicoll:

---

<sup>61</sup> Nicoll defines *entelechy* as 'a form giving cause or principle', but in Aristotle it is more than that. It is the thorough-going organisation of an entity in teleological terms. In other words, an entity is *ab initio* constituted so as to achieve some goal, to bring itself to some form of pre-ordained completion, and this completion is its only purpose.

The conception that the unconscious contains primitive ways of thinking which belong to the evolutionary background of man is supported by the myth formations that are found in dreams. Myths are innate in the human psyche as tendencies that clothe themselves in forms of expression which belong to environment. In the same way, in the case of the individual, the tendencies in his unconscious clothe themselves in symbols that belong to his own environment, forming **a system, the unconscious, and the symbols that belong to the whole human psyche** (Nicoll 1917a: 175-6, my emphasis).

Through the adjustment of the conscious life and the unconscious life that the patient undertakes the images of the unconscious, the archetypes, become the engine of growth and fulfilment.

Nicoll's final conclusion is that this growth and fulfilment has an 'eschatological'<sup>62</sup> dimension. Nicoll writes:

Some practical psychologists frequently dismiss certain problems which appear in the course of their work with the remark that they belong to eschatology and do not in any way concern them (Nicoll 1917a:181).

But Nicoll prefers to emphasise the 'eschatological' nature of therapeutic work by saying that the cure of neurosis is intimately connected with spiritual or philosophical development. Nicoll writes:

I do not see how any neurotic patient can live successfully unless he has a theory of life whether spiritual or philosophical, or both. The patient must solve his conflicts for himself (Nicoll 1917a:181).

The 'eschatological' dimension is vital for the full unfolding of the life of the patient because in the 'task of synthesis', in which the patient's healing will come from himself, from the full development of his potential, with the imperative that wells up from the unconscious, 'eschatological questions will constantly arise, and these must be regarded as factors of supreme importance' (Nicoll 1917a:183). Nicoll here joins together the ideas of an imperative from the unconscious that needs to be adjusted to allow the patient to assume responsibility for the fullest and best expression of himself with the eschatological:

Eschatological questions must be regarded as factors of supreme importance in the future development of the patient. Adjusting the life of experience and the life of philosophy of personal responsibility give[s] him his fullest and best expression (Nicoll 1917a:183).

---

<sup>62</sup> Eschatological is a strange word to use: Nicoll defines it in the text as concerning 'ultimate things – that is, with eschatology' (Nicoll 1917a:181). Whether 'ultimate' is to be understood here in its temporal sense, or in the sense of ultimate significance, is not clear. The word carries almost exclusively Christian theological overtones, the *eschaton* normally being seen as the *parousia*, the second coming of Christ at the end of time, an idea that Nicoll will firmly reject when he returns to Christianity. The word seems to be used here instead of 'religious', which nowhere appears in Nicoll's text. Jung says: 'gnosis, that is knowledge of ultimate things' (Jung CW 11: para 192)

Nicoll ends the book by saying that in ‘paying the enormous price for every expansion of consciousness’, thinking can only take us so far, but that ‘in the dream we will find the shadow’ (Nicoll 1917a:187), the part of us we despise and repress. Analysing our unconscious through dreams, however, is hard work:

the proper understanding of the procedure of examining our own dreams is only acquired after patient study and only comes with difficulty (Nicoll 1917a: 181-187).

The culmination of Nicoll’s argument, his therapeutic philosophy in a nutshell, is something mentioned earlier, but referred to again at the end: ‘The capacity for non-realisation which people possess is universal’ (Nicoll 1917a:186). Against this is set the dictum: ‘there is only one problem in life – the proper use of interest’ (Nicoll 1917a:83).

**Towards ‘a theory of life, either spiritual or philosophical, or both, upon which to act’ (Nicoll 1917a:181)**

How might we summarise this ‘philosophy of life’ here presented? Regression and the formation of neurotic symptoms show the doctor the *mechanism* of normal development, in which the unconscious, allowed to act purposefully in a compensatory fashion through progressive adaptation, lets the patient, retracing the path of his own previous development, assimilate unconscious contents. These unconscious contents are at first repressed personal material previously conscious, and their assimilation is the ‘medical’ resolution of a pathological condition, what Freud sought exclusively. But during this process never-before-conscious contents from the deeper level of the psyche arise, and their assimilation is not a medical matter, but rather a ‘spiritual or philosophical’ or even ‘eschatological’ matter related to the purpose of life. Nicoll argues that in the second half of life the realisation of a person’s life task becomes urgently imperative. The mechanism of this command is psychic pressure of the nascent material from the unconscious, powerfully cathected through regression of ‘interest’ welling up and driving the individual to allow freest and fullest and right expression of this material. Dreams can show the nature of this unconscious material; assimilation of it leads to complete self-expression. The *purpose* or aim of this psychic pressure is seen by Jung and

Nicoll as bringing about the fulfilment of the overriding purpose in life, and it is a goal-directed *entelechy*.

This summary, I suggest, shows the congruence between the six themes of Jung's experience that Shamdasani argues that Jung attempted to translate into contemporary psychological language. In his analysis of the nature of neurosis Nicoll presents a clear view of Jung's system of general human functioning and psychopathology through an understanding of the non-sexual aetiology of neurosis, that it is a disease caused by the inability of the patient to marshal his libido to solve the external problems that life throws at him, this incapacity causing the libido to be introverted and to regress into earlier, often infantile modes of expression. Nicoll outlines a bi-partite unconscious made up first of repressed material which it is the physician's first task to bring to the light of day, but secondly a phylogenetically acquired unconscious peopled by mythic images, these two parts of the unconscious being analysed reductively and synthetically. By using the neutral term 'interest' Nicoll shows his adherence to Jung's view of the non-sexual nature of psychic energy and argues how this non-sexual 'libido' functions in the dynamics of the psyche in a similar way to Jung. Attributing, if falsely, the chief place in the creation of a theory of complexes to Jung Nicoll also shows that he subscribes to a view of their importance for the brand of psychoanalysis that Jung evolved from Freud's thought. Nicoll assumes Jung's idea of the general types of introversion and extraversion and draws the conclusions that Jung did for the crucial role of introversion in cathecting contents of the impersonal unconscious in the struggle for full realisation of the person. Nicoll accepts Jung's assertion that dream analysis is the most potent way of gaining access to unconscious contents, but goes further than Jung in saying that the compensatory and prospective functions of the unconscious is best articulated through dreams, and that this process is best understood through synthetic and constructive approach to dream fantasies.

I would suggest also that Nicoll's views go further than those presented in the three books of Jung that are his sources in two important respects. Nicoll expresses clearly the idea that the full

realisation of the person can only be achieved through a diminishment or even repressing of a person's personality. And Nicoll is more explicit than Jung in saying that 'a working philosophy of life' (Jung's phrase), or 'a theory of life' through which the patient can live (Nicoll's phrase) has some 'religious' dimension.

It is only in *The Structure of the Unconscious* that Jung says that 'conscious intention has to be supplanted. As long as the persona<sup>63</sup> persists, individuality is repressed'. Though Kerr gives the impression, by quoting selectively from *Neue Bahnen*, that Jung thinks that

the therapeutic process might pivot on "the mystery of self-sacrifice" in providing the patient with "a working philosophy of life" (Kerr 2012:340, quoting from Jung CW 7: para 437, 440)

the impression is false, since the first half of the quotation comes a page earlier than the second, and though Jung refers to the sacrifice that psychoanalysis demands as 'a veritable torture', this sacrifice is only of 'cherished illusions in order that something deeper, fairer and more embracing may arise within' (Jung CW 7: para 437), not of the ego. The sacrifice referred to here is only of a kind of false personality.

Nicoll agrees with Jung's *Neue Bahnen* statement that the 'false personality', our erroneous ideas and illusory attitude about our actual personality and life, has to be sacrificed, this being brought about by the compensatory activity of the unconscious. As regards the ego he is more explicit, though only marginally so, than Jung is in the sources Nicoll uses:

living your life according to what you imagine that you find in those fleeting and shadowy visions which traverse your mind in sleep is to give the individual fuller expression. [But] this does not mean that it emphasises egotistical expression. Someone who takes his dreams into consideration may *modify* his conduct' (Nicoll 1917a: 186-7, my emphasis).

But though highlighting the difference between giving 'the *individual* fuller expression' and 'egotistical expression' Nicoll is being reticent. Both he and Jung will later move this 'self-sacrifice' into a central position in their systems. For Jung, by 1918 the two arms of Kerr's *Neue Bahnen* misquotation are joined and the 'self-sacrifice' is intensified to 'death for the personal being':

---

<sup>63</sup> Persona is defined by Jung's thus: 'the conscious personal contents constitute the conscious persona[lity], the *conscious ego*' (brackets and emphasis Jung's in Jung CW 7: para 517).

the connection with the supra-personal or *collective* unconsciousness means [also] death for [the] personal being and rebirth in a new dimension, as literally enacted in certain of the ancient mysteries (Jung CW 10, para 13).

For Nicoll, even as early as 1917 the thorough-going confrontation with the unconscious that is exhorted will be far more than a mere 'modification' of conduct or a mere curbing of 'egotistical expression'. Individuation (not yet conceived at the time *Neue Bahnen* was written) the realisation of the most significant archetype, the *Self*, is 'the whole range of psychic phenomena in man'. The realisation of this, 'no mere psychological procedure, but a matter of his or her whole life' (Jung CW 6: para 789), the crown of both Nicoll's and Jung's systems, will indeed be torture, and a greater one, I suggest, than Jung has in mind in *Neue Bahnen* or Nicoll in *Dream Psychology*. Nicoll posits the idea of the *Self* as the person reaching fullest expression, and individuation as the means of bringing that about in a way that, though not using the labels that Jung was later to attach to these ideas, gives a clearer idea of them than Jung does in the books that Nicoll used as his sources.

While the sacrifice that Jung talks of in *Neue Bahnen* will 'provide the patient with a "working philosophy of life" ', Nicoll has in mind already at this time something more 'eschatological' (a term, we have argued, that is here a substitute for 'religious'). He writes:

[The patient needs] a theory of life, either spiritual or philosophical, or both [by means of which the] neurotic patient can live successfully. [That is] impossible to do without reference to ultimate things (Nicoll 1917a:181).

We thus have the irony that Nicoll, bashful in mentioning 'religion', is much more 'religious' in his attitude than Jung, understanding that it is the religious nature of the philosophy of life that is the *causa efficiens* in 'the plan in treating the neurotic' (Nicoll 1917a:181), and that 'our theories, in their ultimate outlook, are spiritual' (1916 letter to his father in Pogson 1961:49). Religion is certainly significant for Jung:

the devaluation and repression of so powerful a function as the religious naturally has serious consequences for the psychology of the individual (Jung 1917a:116).

But he does not characterise this process of regeneration through sacrifice as religious in itself, the patient, in *Neue Bahnen* anyway, settling merely for a "philosophy of life".

### **Nicoll's parting from Jung**

Nicoll's final break with Jung was not to take place, I argue, until Nicoll returned from Fontainebleau in 1923. The period from 1919, when Nicoll interpreted Jung's dream in which both he and Nicoll were clipping a tree, but Nicoll at a higher level (interpreted by Nicoll as suggesting that Nicoll was working on a higher level than Jung, which Nicoll came to see as a premonition of the split to come), was one in which there was considerable contact between the two men. As Ean Begg says, the re-establishment of contact between the two after the First World War was between men who were almost equals, Nicoll having become 'a man of standing and promise in the worlds of medicine and letters' (Begg 1977:84). Jung had visited Nicoll in 1919, when the dream referred to above was interpreted. Nicoll spent part of his honeymoon with the Jungs in 1920, and they returned to Sennen Cove at Padstow in Cornwall in 1921 to take part together with Nicoll in a summer school of which more will be said below. Jung became godfather to Nicoll's daughter Jane, born in October 1921. Nicoll went in to bat for Jung's ideas throughout this period in a number of papers and presentations: Begg notes that Nicoll gave lectures at Birmingham University, and a talk to the British Psychological Society (Begg 1977:83). *Dream Psychology*, as noted a text very affirmative of Jung's ideas, had been re-issued in a second edition in 1919. I have already noted in Chapter One the papers that Nicoll wrote that forged his reputation in the medical world, all of them presenting the Jungian version of psychoanalysis. Nicoll thought in 1921 of 'making a book of Freud's theory versus Jung in detail' (diary entry, July, 1921, cited in Begg 1977:87). As already noted, Jung 'hoped that Nicoll would act as the chief exponent of his psychology in London' (Begg 1977:87). But though Nicoll from 1919 became a 'seeker', exploring various forms of psychoanalysis, theosophy, and the occult (Webb 1980: 213-219), it was only when he met Ouspensky in 1921, of whom he said immediately that here was someone who 'answered all my questions', that the premonition from the dream that Nicoll would find something 'much completer than Jung', as he later reported, was fulfilled. Begg says that 'this sudden apostasy, Nicoll's conversion to the esoteric system taught by Ouspensky', marked by Nicoll's (along with James Young) throwing everything up and going to

Fontainebleau, was ‘the end of his official connection and collaboration with Jung’ (Begg 1977:87). Begg, citing Freud’s sardonic comment ‘ “You see what happens to Jung’s disciples” ’, made *apropos* Nicoll’s (and James Young’s) journey to Fontainebleau, sees the journey to Fontainebleau as a decisive point in the parting (Begg 1977:87).

I argue, however, that this ‘sudden’ change of direction, a turning point in Nicoll’s career, was the end point of a process of change in Nicoll that had been maturing for some time. The lineaments of this transformation are visible in a series of entries, I suggest, in what I have alluded to before as ‘dream diaries’ from the years 1919-1922, these unpublished materials held now by Edinburgh University. I have said that these entries consist not only of dreams, but soliloquies, waking visions, perhaps even examples of Jung’s ‘active imagination’, poems, and essays presenting considered analysis of these states of altered consciousness.<sup>64</sup> The break with Jung, I argue, is the outward manifestation of a deeper disturbance, revealed by these diaries, just as Jung’s break with Freud was in one sense the playing out in the world of Jung’s own radical re-orientation that later found expression in the *Red Book*.

The general tenor of the ‘dreams’ set down in these books shows both Nicoll’s resolution of his continuing uncertainty over his own independence from his father and other father-figures, particularly Jung, and his confrontation with his sexuality. I suggest that the former can be seen as coming to terms with the Shadow, that latter with the unconscious through the Anima.<sup>65</sup> The reconciliation with both the inner and outer father, enabling Nicoll to ‘take my place with men – in the world of men’ (diary entry, 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 1920) is illustrated though ‘dreams’ that concern

---

<sup>64</sup> All the ‘diary’ entries refer to the recently discovered collection of notebooks that have been lodged in the Library Special Collections at Edinburgh University. This material has yet to be catalogued. Most ‘diary’ entries are dated in the original, and will be referenced in this thesis by date alone.

<sup>65</sup> Anima (animus in women) is one of the archetypes, mentioned first in 1916 in *The Structure of the Unconscious* as ‘a kind of persona, a compromise formation between the individual and the unconscious world, that is, the world of “primordial images”’. The anima is the face of the subject as seen by the collective unconscious’ (Jung [1916] *CW* 7: para 507, 521). Jung also calls it ‘soul image’ (Jung *CW* 6: para 808).

'professional' matters and Nicoll's place in the world of men (usually involving Jung in some form, but Ernest Jones and WRN figure prominently too). Shortly after making the diary entry that he was thinking of making a book of Freud's theory versus Jung's Nicoll dreamt:

I see Jimmy [Nicoll's fellow psychologist James Young]. His face changes to Elyston's [husband of Connie]. It is full of hate – I can never do anything with him. I am with Jones [Ernest Jones, Freud's biographer] – a long scene. E. Jones is in black, fattish. We seem to wrestle – fight – I overcome him? Then he has surrendered – he has never really believed his standpoint? What is left to do[?] He mentions a clergyman – somebody in the church – as "all that is left". I speak sarcastically. He goes out (diary entry 15<sup>th</sup> September 1921).

This dream might, on a 'Freudian' interpretation, suggest that Nicoll saw Jones, and behind him Freud, as a harbinger of death who had waxed fat on ideas that had no reality, but who could (and should) be overcome. A deeper analysis, however, might suggest that Jones stands for the whole panoply of medical psychology, including Jung (and Young; is this a 'pun'?) Jones is in fact what Nicoll is in danger of becoming (Jones being Freud's representative in England, Nicoll potentially Jung's). Nicoll's apparent wrestling victory over Jones can be read as a conquering of himself, and overcoming of this shadow, since defeat, meaning pursuit of a career as Jung's representative in England, would be a kind of death (Jones is dressed in black). After this victory, however, there remained nothing other than to turn to the church, Nicoll's sarcasm suggesting, however, that this was for him still an unpleasant prospect. Clergymen are dressed in black, and the self-sacrifice demanded of conventional Christian religion is also a kind of death. But perhaps the dream is prophetic, as we shall see; Nicoll will return to a version of 'the church' after abandoning Jungian psychology, and this 'church' only looks to him at this point like a form of death because of his conscious attitude to it. It will in fact become a psychological vision of eternal life, or the Kingdom of Heaven.

In a dream dreamt while Jung was staying with Nicoll in 1919, and which it seems from the text that Jung interpreted, Nicoll

dreamed, deep level, big, of Jung, Laura and I working on the three branches of a tree as it were and Jung got something valuable from his and was excited about it. Then was in a church. One of four priests in white. Then two preachers, the Chiefs of the Church. They had written the sermon together and the younger man was delivering it and they sat side by side. The younger had woven into it personal domestic stuff – about his wife – the older was surprised and I felt that this was not right of

the younger...Jung says it is Philemon, the older, and I am mixing personal with Collective [and that] I must separate it and be very critical of everything I do. Jung said we have to learn of Philemon first of all that is to be learnt. Why four priests? They are the four Functions in their Purest Form who move before Philemon (diary entry, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1919).

This dream begins with a re-run of Jung's 1919 dream of him and Nicoll working on the same tree which Nicoll interpreted, but with a different outcome. We also see here, I argue, the two men, Jung and Nicoll, represented as Philemon (an *alter ego* figure from Jung's 'confrontation-with-the-Unconscious' *Red Book* experience) and his 'assistant', leaders of a 'church' disagreeing over the proclamation of its teaching. It is difficult not to interpret this as a reference to Nicoll's position in the analytical psychology movement. The figures of four clergymen, dressed in white, analysed in the dream by Jung as representing the four (Jungian) *function types*<sup>66</sup> confirms this view, showing Nicoll's continuing theoretical dependence on Jung, who appears in the same dream also as himself in an explanatory role, as does Nicoll.

Nicoll records in his diary for 14. September 1921 the following:

1. Everything I do, I seem to do in orientation to Jung. He is the Father and I the one who shall please him and gain his approval. How far this is the whole truth I know not. 2. I am Jung. Jimmy [James Young, friend of Nicoll, fellow analyst, who accompanied him to Fontainebleau] has come as Jung. There are many Junges – Baynes [H. G. 'Peter' Baynes (1882-1943), Jungian analytical psychologist, Jung's assistant in Zürich, translator of *Psychological Types*] is Jung – all Junges meeting Junges – so when I as Jung, meet the real Jung, I am jealous.

A. I am jealous of Jung, as Jung, because I seek to be Jung.

B. I am jealous of Jung for Jung because I wish him to love me, to establish and confirm me, to accept and applaud me, to encourage me, and not to see at the same time that I am Jung really, and that on the sly I hate him because he is bigger than I am. Therefore if he shows no affection I get anxious because I fear he has discovered me (unpublished diary entry 14<sup>th</sup> September 1921).

The 'dream' shows starkly the degree of identification, veneration, love, and dependence on Jung that Nicoll still had in 1921.

Alongside these dreams, however, in which we might detect some resolution of Nicoll's relationship with his father (and often interwoven with them) are others saturated with 'anima' figures, which deal with Nicoll's relation to sexuality and the contra-sexual *noumena*. I select one of these dreams, dreamed on 25. June 1919 when Jung was visiting Nicoll, and when Nicoll was courting his wife to

---

<sup>66</sup> Term used for Sensation, Feeling, Thinking and Intuitive character types in Jung *CW* 6: para 556.

be. Whether this dream is an example of dream, reverie, or self-analysis is not clear from the source. The finished report is such a magnificent literary creation in the form in which Nicoll records it, is so elevated in tone, so logically consistent, and explains its symbols so succinctly yet clearly that we have to understand it, I argue, as that combination of dream narrative and association that Nicoll thought every report of dream material must inevitably be; the writing down of a dream goes beyond a mere description of the dream images and is the first stage in unravelling its associations. The account has also something of the expository about it, is almost a work of art. It is, I suggest, a symbolic representation of the place of sexuality in Nicoll's life, and of the role that the coming to terms with sexuality will play in the resolution of the wider spiritual issues in that life. Nicoll writes:

I dreamed I was trying to telephone to Laura – there was some trouble. It was about 1800 or so and the telephone had just been invented – it was the first telephone as it were, and it was troublesome to work. But I got to her at last and got very close seeming to lie on her or over her.

What is the telephone?

You are in communication with your soul. I am the soul, who speak[s].

Oh soul, thou art a great mystery. I was going to write I adore thee but I made a slip. Now why cannot I adore thee?

Adoration is the glory of fire descending from the High One.

Then I am not yet capable of adoration. Free Me, for I am enslaved with things that I loathe, with pretense, with doing things really for the opinion of other people and not for the opinion of thee.

Now sing – My words – sing as you sang today – I am the Star of Hope and thou art in a weary desert. Follow me.

How shall I follow[?]

Marry Laura and follow me. For I am the fair one and thy beloved for whom thou yearnest. O Beast, thou yearnest for the golden one – because thou hast yearned, I will come to thee. But thou art sunk in earth.

Tell me quickly what is this sexuality of mine – is it horrible[?]

Horrible. Nay, but it is not what you mean – you want that feeling which absorbs me and makes you forget yourself and because of the desire to get away from yourself you plunge into the sensations of sexuality which is Me in my lowest form of love and union. So have I had union with thee for endless limits and have transformed myself into the forms of lust that hath made thee forget thyself and cling to me as woman – as physical body – but now there are wings to be grown and manhood to be won and I will bear thee up on high because with Laura you will cease to live in the pocket mirrors of other people.

Oh my soul redeem me – be close to me – prompt me in my speech and actions – let me feel thy presence so that I can live for thee as the upward Flying One, as the Upward flowing Jordan – fill thou the Empty Space in myself if whereby I have to crave for lust to fill it and free myself from the hollowness of my life. Oh, let me be full and living with all the Great Ones in me as they should be and let me so express thee, my Soul, that thy union with the Mighty One who has the sword and stands betwixt the two worlds, may be consummated. Guide me, hold me, pour love into my heart so that I am sustained by thee. Turn thy face and thine eyes to me – those boy's eyes that are bright and glad and strong and fill me with thy being – fill me – I crave for penetration, a union, for absolute contact. I who am in the snows and must fain warm myself artificially – fill me with the eternal fire so that my

life may be dedicated to the mysteries and eternal hiddenness of God.

Oh Soul are you male or female[?]

I see a dancing woman, as Salome, she grins or laughs or makes eyes or flings her hair about. She has a phallus, or not – She turns herself about and shows her back – she is lolling on skins of animals – She is that one who thy lust has charged with life and she is greedy and at war with the Bright One.

Then I cannot feel that she is wrong, if I have made her.

Ah, mysterious one, deep as night, dark as the clouds of night, with thy in-breathing and out-breathing which cause the phallus to rise and fall – oh dark magician, whose flesh is soft and firm, whose figure is rounded and like an animal of perfect form, who art thou[?]

I am the ancient harlot, the one who has been since the beginning of Man. I live deep in the heart and when thou goest deep, thou meetest me.

Then why art thou there – do you drag men from the purpose of life[?]

I am the purpose of life. Free thyself and fall into my arms and I will fashion thee.

How do I meet you[?]

In the Way. Look in my eyes.

You would keep me down?

Ah I could crush thee.

Yes. But I want to know why you are evil if you are evil. Sexuality need not be evil.

You are not evil there.

It is all right. Dark and Bright God and Bad, Down and Up. What of all you of the Dark? I have not found the harlot worse than women.

She scatters the force.

Aye, but virtue may scatter it more.

She spoils the green things and withers them.

Aye, but ignorance, narrowness and bigotry does worse than that. No, I say to you all, wait. The judgement is not yet on these matters – I am quite vile – yes – with whores and lusts, but they are not so – nor am I. No I say[.] Wait and let me hear your sayings – let them not be parrot talks of old teachings but be vital sayings that mean something to Life as it is Now. Now speak and I will write and none shall read my writings.

I am the good One, the Bountifier, the Blessed One, beginning with the first. I saw the clouds with the dark band and saw them split. I sat here, stirring my hand, with my crown on my head, and I see the primeval clouds and the black bar that appeared in them. I am Kronos, time, For I am the separation, the Black Bar that divides. For time divides all things and when it has divided, lo, it is Space to mortal. So must time separate this world from chaos and not so must space. So must time separate you from me, and not so must space. Miriam the harlot is there. She plays with time, she makes time when it should not be, and takes time from where it belongs. Lo, the harlot is the spoiler of time, who makes clocks go fast and slow. Aye, me – she is the Thief of Time – aye aye –

Now you are foolish – what do you mean[?] – if you are the ancient god Kronos you could punish Miriam – you laugh? She is your daughter? Oh yes she is one of my children – that is as acts human – we must suffer our children– (diary entry June 25<sup>th</sup> 1919)

There is much in this dream that could be analysed, but there is no room here for that. I say briefly, however, that Laura, whom, I argue (from other mentions of her in the dreams) Nicoll considered marrying, is in the dream Nicoll's 'soul', but in its dark aspect. I interpret the dream as showing that this dark aspect of Nicoll's soul is something of which he is, to say the least, uncertain, but that it is something which he has to engage with, first by understanding and forming a different attitude to his own sexuality, which he sees mostly only in its dark aspect. The dream suggests that such

reconciliation, such a change of view will mean a growing of wings [meaning the acquisition of a spiritual attitude], a winning of manhood, and a release from the weary desert of the hollowness of his life. This dark aspect of himself is a Star of Hope, an upward Flying One, the Upward flowing Jordan [a common symbol, appearing in the Old Testament, of *metanoia*] which will fill him with eternal fire so that his life may be dedicated to the mysteries and eternal hiddenness of God. The equation of this image with a hermaphroditic Salome draws a parallel with Jung's *Red Book* visions. In the dream Nicoll asks not to shirk the confrontation through ignorance, narrowness and bigotry. In the final part, in which Nicoll asks this anima figure to speak and he will write 'and none shall read my writings', the soul reveals itself as Kronos, time. This might be interpreted as Nicoll being shown that his goal is the understanding of time through the realisation of his own soul. If this is so, then the dream is remarkably prophetic of Nicoll's spiritual progress.

Nicoll was aware, I suggest, of the necessity not to evade this reconciliation. He is even tempted in a dream to succumb to the ever-present social pressure to give in to 'a weary system of forbidders', especially in the realm of the sexual: 'O thou mortal, become as a toddler and do not meddle with what lies outside the well-trodden path'. But he will have none of this, and answers (in the dream):

Nay, I seek my jewel. Sooner I die than not seek it, even if I do not find it. The Quest is everything. To find the Quest, to gain the idea of what the Quest is – that is everything. Not to find it is death (diary entry 15<sup>th</sup> September 1920).

For both Jung and Nicoll the path to understanding led through reconciliation with a contra-sexual side of themselves perceived as laden with negative qualities, the possibility of madness in Jung's case, moral dubiety in Nicoll's. I think it not an accident that even Emma Jung saw that without his mistress Toni Wolff to show him the way Jung would never have survived his confrontation with the unconscious (Clay 2016:255). Though there was no such equivalent real-life figure in Nicoll's life, the dream related above shows a conflict within him to reconcile himself to and wholeheartedly accept forces in himself, personified as an anima figure, towards which his conscious attitude was one of moral disapproval. The reward of reconciliation with this dark aspect of themselves was for both men the fulfilment of their life's work.

The impression given by these 'dreams' might be that Nicoll was held in thrall to Jung by the lack of resolution of his personal problems. Maybe this was true in terms of his inner life. However, I suggest that Nicoll eventually escaped through the resolution of his most pressing professional problem. This is demonstrated, in my view, by a letter of April 1923 to Jung, written when Nicoll had returned from Fontainebleau 'owing to the illness of my father, who is dying' (Letter to Jung, 9. April 1923:6). I shall now analyse this letter in detail to show how taking stock of the Fontainebleau experience led Nicoll to see the inadequacy of Jung's practical healing technique and seek to apply Gurdjieff's teaching in its place.

In what was in intention a letter asking for Jung's views on 'some of my conclusions about some of the teachings [of Gurdjieff]' Nicoll asks Jung cryptically 'whether such things could be developed apart from special circumstances'. Nicoll explains this as meaning whether by

working through the personality or "self" in the ordinary sense of that word – selfishness not being quite the idea I mean – one could not achieve anything that actually took place in the right manner (Letter: 1).

In explication of this cryptic allusion Nicoll calls to mind the Sennen Cove seminar Jung held the previous year (at which ideas on religion and psychology had been developed) saying that *apropos* 'your conversation in Cornwall about the Church Invisible', and 'certain things I said to Mrs. Jung about

a supreme orientating principle, or crown, in relationship to which change might be effected and not only in the imagination or in the wrong places in oneself

there must be 'some methods about which I knew nothing' (Letter: 1-2).

Nicoll then says that he had at the time of the Cornwall meeting a dream in which he, on the top floor of Selfridges [a pun on Self]<sup>67</sup> was faced with difficult trials, which he feared, but he overcame them and became very big, like a spirit-giant: a festival of fire begins and he is walking on a wooden floor with furnaces all around him that burned with great energy. Someone says 'it is a pity it is all self'. He then realised that the whole place would eventually catch fire and burn (Letter: 2-3).

---

<sup>67</sup> Selfridges is a department store in central London.

Nicol relates that in another often-dreamt dream from the time before he met Gurdjieff and

Ouspensky

a schoolmaster whom I used to admire, a lean black-moustached man who taught me a little about physical courage, [who was] very strong, but quiet and thoughtful, was trying to get me to come with him (Letter: 3).

The resemblance to Gurdjieff is obvious, but only with hindsight.

I could not understand why this long forgotten figure appeared [but] some months later I met Gurdjieff and saw the resemblance (Letter: 3).

Nicoll then suggests that the Selfridges dream might provide the key to the exchange at Sennen

Cove over the invisible church as a crowning orientating principle:

The dream [of Selfridges] states the problem and not the solution, but it brought together in my mind a number of difficulties about the Church Invisible in the "Kingdom of God" – what it meant. There has to be some way, other than dream analysis, of getting to the start point for change in the person to take place; to begin from a point outside oneself is necessary. If the 'Church Invisible' actually was a superior or crowning orientating principle, *it must give possibilities for starting at a point outside self, and it must exist in some form that was actual*. An imaginary idea of it could not be effective (Letter: 4, emphasis original).

Nicoll is saying that he now understands from this that treatment through the dream is not enough

to bring about this leap to the start point, which he says Gurdjieff had told him before he went to

Fontainebleau, when he said (cited in the letter):

"We first have to understand how force can be produced to affect change. As it is we have no force to change with. The body must be studied and understood as well. Through the body and the mind in conjunction the emotions can be changed ultimately" (Letter: 5-6).

Nicoll says that after going to Fontainebleau he had experienced something of the possibility of

making this leap by stopping his reading of any psychology (at Gurdjieff's behest) and, through

exercises, concentrating on his hitherto neglected body. Nicoll says in the letter that Gurdjieff had

already told him that he was too fat, and that would be a good place to start. Nicoll now realised

that he was physically lazy, and lacked endurance: 'I had not realised it, but the inertia in my body

was one of the chief factors preventing me from changing myself' (Letter: 7). As Gurdjieff had said to

him, the three centres (moving, thinking and emotional) have

to be turned [should this be tuned?] and brought to a certain level first *before the establishment of the subjectivity is attempted*. The subjectivity cannot be gone into until the misused forces are absorbed in some degree (Letter: 8).

Nicoll says that though dream analysis could with certain people provide enough 'real intensity' to foster change, a 'crucible' of real intensity was needed in which this change can take place that could not normally be produced by group activity. Nicoll says 'we had tried a group or circle, but none of us was equal to it' (Letter: 6-7). All this is despite Gurdjieff thinking, Nicoll says, that 'the psychological [that is modern medical psychological therapy] method, in group form, is possible in very rare cases' (Letter: 8). Nicoll's conclusion is that

a crucible is thus necessary. Physical extension and effort [led to Nicoll] becoming gradually aware of myself as it were for the first time. My rapid vigorous complexities of ideas began to fade and I felt myself more simple (*sic*) in myself. This "task" that I experienced was very wonderful for me, so that I am willing to continue (Letter: 9).

In this way Nicoll prepared himself, he says, for the experience of Gurdjieff's 'crucible', where

great friction of personalities arises, in which no appeal to ordinary standards is of weight, when the most unusual efforts of mind and body are necessary, the whole being linked up to a teaching that finds expression in (Gurdjieff?) who shows himself easily capable of dealing with every situation within the crucible itself (Letter: 10).

Nicoll sees this as 'an extra factor which I had thought was needed in addition to analysis of myself' (Letter: 10). This 'crucible' is, I suggest, what Gurdjieff had tried to engineer at Fontainebleau. But how successful Gurdjieff was, and whether he could really up to cope with anything thrown at him is highly debatable.

I contend that this letter demonstrates a turning point in the development of Nicoll's thought. As I have shown through my analysis of *Dream Psychology*, Nicoll had learned from Jung, theoretically, the necessity of developing the self by the abnegation of the ego to bring a balance between consciousness and the unconscious, resulting in the first instance in freedom from neurosis, and then the full flowering of the personality. Learning this through dream analysis, Nicoll had imagined that he would be able through it to bring about these developments practically both in himself and others. Dissatisfaction through having a clear idea of what to do but unable to do it came to a head in the years after the First World War, when Nicoll pursued his quest amongst alternative authorities including G. R.S. Mead and P. D. Ouspensky, before meeting Gurdjieff, as outlined in Chapter One. But while James Young found the Fontainebleau experience something of which he could say (to

Jung) 'thank you for your congratulations at my deliverance from the G. fantasy' (Letter to Jung, 12. 11. 23), Nicoll found in this experience what he needed to achieve what he wished to do. He sees that although Jungian analytical psychology can bring understanding of this, only 'exceptionally' can it actually bring about healing, and then perhaps by accident, and not for Nicoll (Letter: 6).

Understanding is not enough; one must be able to do in order to heal. In Christian religious terms (which Nicoll more than hints at in the letter) no person by 'taking thought can add to his stature' (Matthew 6:27). Nicoll thought that he had discovered through Gurdjieff's teaching how 'to do'. The experience of Gurdjieff's 'crucible' stamped itself on Nicoll for the rest of his life, and he strove to recreate it in whatever situation he found himself.

In his letter Nicoll asks Jung whether, if what he has said in the letter 'is of any use to you as regards understanding what we are up to, will you tell me? Or ask a definite question that I can answer?' (Letter: 10). If this might suggest that Nicoll had imagined that there was still a possibility of remaining in Jung's camp, but that Jung's response (or lack thereof) to this is the real point of the break between them, it seems natural to think that Jung found it all deeply disturbing, and it is difficult to see what he could have answered at this time. So perhaps there is no reply to this letter, and although it is presented by Nicoll as 'this first letter' (Letter: 1), there appear to have been no more. It would seem that from this point, as Emma Jung wrote to Pogson (in 1953, on Nicoll's death), 'contact had sort of dwindled away' (Letter from Emma Jung [Begg 1977:90]).

Begg says (Begg 1977:87) that the passage in Jung's *The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious* (Jung CW 7: para 263) inveighing against prophets, groups and disciples (written in 1925) shows Jung's reaction to the news of Nicoll's 'apostasy'. If this passage is really directed at Nicoll, then I would contend that Jung has misunderstood Nicoll as a man, and the nature of the 'prophet' Gurdjieff's relationship with his 'disciples'. In this passage Jung accuses the disciple of a prophet of 'mental laziness', of enjoying 'archaism and infantilism of his unconscious fantasies' in an 'effortless conforming [of his] own convictions by engendering an air of collective agreement'. But, I

suggest, far from entering into a relationship of disciple and prophet with Gurdjieff, which relationship Nicoll had, it could be argued, to some extent enjoyed with Jung, Nicoll, by parting from Jung, had enhanced his 'independence of the individuality', rather than 'suffering injury' (Jung CW 7: para 265). Jung's comments might be interpreted as showing that he saw Nicoll's 'apostasy' [Begg's term] towards him as a threat to his authority, Nicoll substituting Jung's 'legitimate' (in Jung's eyes) authority for that of a spurious 'prophet'. But while a superficial view of Gurdjieff's methods might suggest that a form of absolute obedience was required from his followers, this was only in outward matters for the purposes of doing 'the Work', and was not absolute. Gurdjieff often tested his pupils' common sense by 'ordering' them to do something outrageous to see whether they had the perspicacity to see that they were being tested, and refuse. Regarding 'inner convictions', as I shall show, a slave-like 'collective agreement' was decidedly not required, and Nicoll certainly did not give it to Gurdjieff.

But if Nicoll seemed to have found out how to put theory into practice at Fontainebleau, it was a long time before he worked this out in himself sufficiently to take charge of his own 'crucible'. In *Living Time*, his next book, the most densely argued theoretical work he wrote, Nicoll remained very much the theoretician, moving towards seeing 'eschatology', as he has put it, as 'psychology', a view that will determine his whole future approach to 'the Work'. For though finding what 'really mattered' is a psychological process that brings contact with 'ultimate things', with the 'eschatological', it is Nicoll's particular view of this as conditioned by his views on time and its connection with personal psychology which is the subject of this next book.

## **Chapter 4: 'Living Time': a response to P. D. Ouspensky**

Nicoll's *Living Time*, written during the 1920s, and completed around 1930 (Pogson 1961:116),<sup>68</sup> was described by Pogson as 'a study of the inner man – a study of reality from various points of view, of scale, of dimension, time, eternity, recurrence, and concludes with the possibilities of integration in *Living Time*' (Pogson 1961:117). Since, quite apart from quotations from Ouspensky's *A New Model of the Universe* much of the book consists of direct representation of 'the idea of *higher space* that Ouspensky has especially made his own' (Nicoll 1952:234), and as Ouspensky's book does indeed address the subjects that Pogson claims Nicoll's does, I present as the thesis of this chapter the idea that we can see *Living Time* as a direct response to some of Ouspensky's ideas found in *A New Model of the Universe*. Pogson tells us that Nicoll was a member of one of Ouspensky's classes that had the task of 'revision and preparation for publication' of the book (Pogson 1961:95), and it seems likely that Nicoll, since he cites the book so liberally, had personal access to the typescript of it. Pogson says that Nicoll 'absorbed Ouspensky's ideas' and expressed them 'in the light of his own philosophical and psychological knowledge' (Pogson 1961:117). This chapter will demonstrate that this is indeed the case, but that Nicoll recasts and develops Ouspensky's ideas, reaching conclusions that go far beyond the ideas in his model. But in the light of the contents of *Living Time*, and Nicoll's later continuing affirmation of Ouspensky's ideas, we can see, I contend, just why Nicoll said of Ouspensky that 'he answered all my questions'. Before analysing Nicoll's ideas I give a brief overview of those ideas from Ouspensky's book that directly influenced *Living Time*.

Four chapters of Ouspensky's *A New Model of the Universe* ['The Fourth Dimension', 'Superman', 'The Symbolism of the Tarot' and 'What is Yoga?'] were published separately before the complete book was published in 1931. This illustrates the fact that the book is a series of interconnected but self-standing essays, rather than one connected argument. Each essay is a comment on the two

---

<sup>68</sup> *Living Time* was not published when written because 'Work' practitioners were 'not permitted to publish anything about the System' (Pogson 1961:265).

ideas mentioned in the preface to the 1934 edition; that is ‘esotericism’<sup>69</sup> and ‘the psychological method’. In my presentation of those ideas from the book that I suggest influenced Nicoll I do not cover all the chapters. I present the ideas in: chapter one, ‘Esotericism and Modern Thought’, a survey of the historical and social context of esotericism; chapter two, ‘The Fourth Dimension’, Ouspensky’s thoughts on the connection between esotericism and the fourth dimension; chapter three, ‘Superman’, which introduces the idea of the kind of person who can use the ‘psychological method’ to acquire esoteric knowledge and effect the self-transformation that it brings. Chapter four, ‘Christianity and the New Testament’ I leave until I discuss Nicoll’s New Testament writings in Chapter Six of the thesis, since the ideas in this chapter have little influence on *Living Time*. Chapters five, six and seven of Ouspensky’s book I ignore completely for the same reason. I cover chapter eight, ‘Experimental Mysticism’, the record of Ouspensky’s experiments on himself which Nicoll reports and comments on in *Living Time*. Chapter nine is a travelogue which again I ignore. Chapter ten, ‘A New Model of the Universe’ is a survey of the ‘New Physics’ and its impact on Ouspensky’s theory of the fourth dimension in which he extends this idea to postulate a world of six dimensions, and is in some ways a continuation of his argument in Chapter two; Chapter eleven, ‘Eternal Recurrence and the Law of Manu’ covers the topic of re-incarnation and recurrence in the light of the six-dimensional universe discussed in the previous chapter. These two chapters I cover but I ignore the final chapter, ‘Sex and Evolution’, a close reworking of the ideas of Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900).<sup>70</sup>

In a ‘prefatory note’ to the book written in 1930 Ouspensky says ‘each chapter is dated with the year in which it was begun and with the year in which it was revised or finished’. The book, though ‘begun and practically completed before 1914’ [prefatory note to the 1931 edition of the book, dated “London, 1930”] was nevertheless ‘revised and more closely connected together’ for its publication

---

<sup>69</sup> This word is variously spelled either ‘esoterism’ or ‘esotericism’; similarly ‘Hermetism’ and ‘Hermeticism’. I use the longer forms, but quote the shorter. There is no difference in meaning.

<sup>70</sup> Soloviev was an influential Russian idealist philosopher, poet, theologian and literary critic (Backhurst 2005:883).

(Ouspensky 1931: v) in 1931. We cannot know whether these revisions were affected by Gurdjieff's ideas; but since Ouspensky bothered to date the chapters with the earlier dates, I think that the substance of the earlier 'versions' is to be found in the final version, and the book presents substantially his ideas prior to his meeting Gurdjieff and the system of 'the Work'. Webb is, however, of the opinion that Ouspensky revised all his earlier publications to such an extent that it is impossible to draw biographical conclusions about the state of Ouspensky's thinking from them (Webb 1980:95). I suggest here that the corpus of ideas centred on what Ouspensky published in *Tertium Organum*, written in 1911, the whole array of his scientific ideas to do with time, the fourth dimension and recurrence, which I shall shortly address, and which make up the bulk of the ideas transmitted to Nicoll, does not show the influence of Gurdjieff, he never venturing an opinion on these things. As for the rest, there naturally must be some doubt as to whether, in his revision, Ouspensky could have withheld insights gained from his time with Gurdjieff.

What immediately strikes one about the relationship between Nicoll's and Ouspensky's books is Ouspensky's long Introduction, not really part of the book itself, which furnishes an account of a number of Ouspensky's experiences resembling Nicoll's early 'self-remembering' episodes. Ouspensky's says that these experiences drove him (in a similar way to Nicoll, it seems) to an intellectual quest to answer the questions posed by them. Impelled eventually – 'My way lay to the East' – to a physical journey, a trip in 1914 to India and Ceylon – 'with the idea of finding those Eastern schools of Yogis and Sufis' (Ouspensky 1931:7), in a similar way, I suggest, to Gurdjieff's mythical quest 'described' in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, Ouspensky then wrote this book as an attempt to answer, or at least to formulate these questions in a clearer form in the light of what he learned in the East. Though the 'answers' contained in the book influenced Nicoll because they accorded with the answers he himself was beginning to formulate, they also introduced him to new ideas.

In Ouspensky's earliest 'mystical' experience (aged twelve) he was captivated by a description in a physics book of the theory of mechanical levers. He says:

In this idea there is something terrifying and alluring. How is it that I have not known it? All that I am discovering is so wonderful and so miraculous that I become more and more enraptured. It is as though I already feel the *unity of all* and am overcome with awe at the sensation (Ouspensky 1931:2, his emphasis).

It is clear that this was an intense personal experience for Ouspensky:

I can no longer keep to myself all the emotions which thrill me. I want to try and share them with my neighbour, but I feel that my words do not convey anything and that I cannot express what I feel, my friend not hearing half of what I say. I feel hurt (Ouspensky 1931:2).

Later (1906 or 1907) Ouspensky, working as a journalist, is overcome with the futility, pretence and dishonesty of the normal world. Its constant lies, hypocrisy, the 'unintended consequences' of its 'noblest' acts, the lack of political good will, when compared with the fantastic world he finds in his 'books with strange titles' [mostly what might be described as esoteric or occult]<sup>71</sup> all make him wonder 'what is the use of attempting to expose lies when people love them and live by them?'

Why is it that people do not understand that they are only shadows, only silhouettes, of themselves, and that the whole of life is only a shadow, a silhouette, of some other life? (Ouspensky 1931:4)

He sees that he has been living in

a desiccated and sterilised world. Suddenly these strange books broke down the walls around me, and made me think and dream about things of which for a long time I had feared to think and dream. Suddenly I began to find a strange meaning in old fairy tales; a deep meaning and many subtle allegories appeared in what only yesterday seemed to be naïve. The greatest mystery and the greatest miracle were that the thought became possible that death may not exist, and that those who have gone may not have vanished altogether, but exist somewhere and somehow (Ouspensky 1931:4).

Thoughts of the 'fourth dimension' became

a reality which I dimly felt long ago, but it escaped me, then [helped me] see [my] way; I see my work, and I see where it may lead. I find ideas about the "fourth dimension" in ancient symbolism, in the Tarot, in the images of Indian Gods, in the branches of a tree, and in the lines of the human body (Ouspensky 1931:4).

Much reading and study of 'an extensive literature full of significance which had been quite unknown to me [and of which] so few have even heard about' led to a plan for a book, which, however, Ouspensky did not feel ready to write. He absorbed himself in

---

<sup>71</sup> Ouspensky gives as examples the following titles, without any further information: *The Occult World; Life after Death; Atlantis and Lemuria; Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie, Le temple de Satan, The Sincere Narrations of a Pilgrim.*

strange experiments [with drugs, and the 'psychic'] which carry me far beyond the limits of the known and the possible, [affording] frightening and fascinating sensations. Everything becomes alive! There is nothing dead or inanimate. I feel the beating of the pulse of life. I 'see' Infinity (Ouspensky 1931:6).

Yet this 'fleeting enlightenment' does not last.

Thought is too slow, too short. There are no words and no forms to convey what one sees in such moments. There is no possibility of remembering what has been found and understood and later repeating it to oneself, though, fearing that all is nothing but a dream (Ouspensky 1931:6).

Yet Ouspensky knows 'that this is not so. Unity exists, is infinite, orderly, animated and conscious' (Ouspensky 1931:6). Ouspensky asks how one connects 'what is above' with 'what is below'. There must be a living succession, in 'schools', of this esoteric tradition, even if broken. Where will he find it? Sitting in his armchair? Is it in 'memorials' (philosophies, religions, art, monuments)? He explores ways of actively investigating it, thinking that 'Yogis and Sufis' must have a method. Should he try to do something (like exercises and yoga), or wait for something to happen? If he makes a journey to 'the East' will he meet 'a secret society', a 'new race', 'some new category of men, for whom there exist different values than for other people?' (Ouspensky 1931:6)

Ouspensky's account gives the flavour of his 'mystical' experiences which are, I argue, Jamesian 'noetic' states as described in Chapter Three, in which Ouspensky sees the non-existence of death, the unity of all things, the infinity of this world and the illusory nature of the 'normal'. He knows with rapidity far in excess of normal thought, which cannot grasp and express what he has experienced. Yet though feeling that this experience and the fruits of the trip he made to the East in 1913-14 were lost to him, Ouspensky writes:

There remained only what I had established for myself. Nobody could take that from me. And it alone could lead me further (Ouspensky 1931:10).

It led him, I argue, to write *A New Model of the Universe*.

In the Preface to the 1934 edition of *A New Model* Ouspensky summarises the 'two ideas [that] presented particular difficulties for one of the American reviewers of the first edition' (printed in Ouspensky 1931: vii). These two ideas are, as already noted, *the ideas* of the book: 'the idea of esoterism', which 'is chiefly the idea of the higher mind'; and the idea of 'the psychological method', how a person may make contact with the esoteric (Ouspensky 1931: vii, viii). The logical mind is one

level of thought in ordinary life; most people neither know of others nor that 'higher mind' exists. The psychological method involves understanding the limitations of the logical mind, which must not be used on problems it is not equipped to solve. 'Proof' ordinarily understood applies only to the logical mind; ' "proof" ' for 'another, better, mind' is 'only for those with eyes to see and ears to hear'. To understand the 'esoteric' as Ouspensky describes it such a psychological mind is needed. (Ouspensky 1931: vii).

Ouspensky starts the first chapter in his book, 'Esotericism and Modern Thought', by saying that esoteric knowledge is 'a knowledge that surpasses all ordinary human knowledge' (Ouspensky 1951:11). Called also 'hidden knowledge', or 'ancient knowledge', it is like some hidden treasure, almost unknown, even the fact of it, to modern man. It is knowledge that 'goes beyond the five senses' (Ouspensky 1931:17). To apprehend it one needs access to a different state of consciousness from the ordinary.

All religions and myths consist of symbolic forms which represent attempts to transmit the idea of this hidden knowledge (Ouspensky 1931:12).

There have always been groups of people with access to this kind of knowledge and the ability to apprehend it. They form what Ouspensky calls 'an inner circle of humanity' (Ouspensky 1931:19) who, as initiates of some kind, have access to this 'esoteric' knowledge. The 'mystical and esoteric' mystery religions of Greece and Egypt, in which Ouspensky includes early Christianity, are historical examples of such groups (Ouspensky 1931:25). Such groups were made up of carefully selected initiates. But for this circle to be replenished 'ordinary people' had to be recruited. This was done through a process of selection. Those who wished to approach the mysteries, to acquire esoteric knowledge, had first to prove themselves proficient in forms of 'ordinary knowledge, gained from existing and known literature, easily accessible to all' (Ouspensky 1931:33). These forms of knowledge, though still esoteric in some degree, were accessible through the popular 'dogmatic and ceremonial' forms of religion, and through philosophy, art and science. Only if would-be initiates

passed this test could they join the 'schools' and receive the instruction needed to prepare for initiation. But

initiation was not an instantaneous miracle, rather a consecutive and gradual introduction [through instruction] to a new cycle of thought and feeling (Ouspensky 1931:26).

Initiation in such religions, early Christianity included, was merely the recognition of the completion of this process of instruction, which was a gruelling apprenticeship of psychological work on oneself. Initiation brought knowledge, however, or was the sign of the coming of such knowledge, 'religious' in nature, that concerned 'immortality', freedom from the 'kind of *life in death*' to which the uninitiated were subject. The ceremony of initiation re-enacted the 'journey of the soul, [its] birth in matter, its death and resurrection, that is, its return to its former life' (Ouspensky 1931:26).<sup>72</sup>

But in the course of time, and especially in our own time, these media, of which the Religions are one, that once carried this lowest level of esoteric knowledge have become degraded into what Ouspensky calls *pseudo-religion, pseudo-philosophy et al*, becoming thereby incapable of transmitting esoteric knowledge. As a result this knowledge, accessible to all, necessary to function as the bridge between the initiated and the uninitiated, has itself become degraded and is no longer effective (Ouspensky 1931:35). With the disappearance of the mystery religions the connection between the 'ordinary people' and the 'inner circle of humanity', and the means of opening this to

---

<sup>72</sup> In *New Age Religion and Western Culture* Wouter Hanegraaff argues that 'esotericism' is properly 'a technical term in the study of religion', 'a useful generic label for a large and complicated group of historical phenomena, long perceived as sharing an *air de famille*'. Criticising its narrower use for describing a "discipline of the arcane", or as 'the "spiritual center" or transcendent unity common to all religious traditions, as done in the "perennialist" school of Comparative Religion', Hanegraaff also warns that 'its popular usage in the current New Age context', 'a new meaning', as he sees it, does not primarily describe a cluster of historical traditions, but (quoting Christoph Bochinger) turns it into 'a concept of *Individualkultur*, a special type of "religion", the journey within. ['Esotericism' becomes] a surrogate word for "religion", which accentuates its subjective element focussed on inner experience' (Hanegraaff 1998:385-6). Nevertheless, for the purposes of my exposition of Ouspensky's ideas I consider that when Ouspensky uses the term 'esotericism' he is describing (to use Hanegraaff's terms) a tradition of a 'discipline of the arcane', which he takes to be the 'spiritual center' or transcendent unity common to all religious traditions and by implication the carrier of the true meaning of all Religions, and of 'religion', but religion as an inner path, of immense antiquity and perennial (Hanegraaff 1998:388 *passim*).

<sup>72</sup> Though saying that the life of Christ can be viewed as a mystery play 'played in real life', in a footnote Ouspensky draws attention to another possibility, argued in John Robertson's *Pagan Christs* (1903). Ouspensky says in his footnote that Robertson believes that the Passion narratives in 'the Gospels do not describe historical events, but a play which was performed for a special purpose. The legend of the historical Christ was based on precisely such a mystery-play' (Ouspensky 1931:27, footnote).

the world, has been lost (Ouspensky 1951:37). Ouspensky sees the progress of civilisation, including our own, as determined by the influence of the ideas of this 'inner circle of humanity', these ideas usually being forced on the rest of the population. In the balance between paternalistic enculturation and rebellious barbarism, the latter always wins, eventually, causing the civilisation's collapse. Its most cherished values are then rescued and preserved by a small group of people who keep the sacred flame alive until civilisation is re-born. Ouspensky says that modern civilisation is ripe for collapse because the fundamental esoteric truths that initially impelled it, derived from primitive Christianity, which exerted enormous power through its esoteric ideas but which is now degraded into a pseudo-religion, have little influence. 'A pale and sickly growth' (Ouspensky 1931:43), our civilisation suffers from the fact that while the power of esoteric thought to create is exercised through individuals, who are the only creative force in the world, the 'masses of humanity, peoples and races, lower beings as compared with individual man, [who] can never create anything, although they can destroy on their own account' (Ouspensky 1931:55), are in the ascendant. Our rescue from such collapse must lie in reconnecting ourselves with esoteric knowledge. In the absence of any formal organisations that might enable us to do this (though the church might once have been, and might still become one such) we have to do it through encouraging individual use of the 'psychological method which leads in a very definite direction, namely towards the *esoteric* method' (Ouspensky 1931:66). The rest of the book is concerned with the description of this esoteric method.

In assessing the influence of *A New Model* on Nicoll we cannot say when he might have read it. We know that he was a member of one of Ouspensky's classes in which the text in an incomplete state was discussed (Pogson 1961:114). He met Ouspensky before he went to Fontainebleau, so met the ideas of 'the Work' and Ouspensky's basic ideas on esotericism outlined above (whether he had read them in the form they appeared in *A New Model* or not) before experiencing Gurdjieff's teaching *viva voce*. He wrote *Living Time* in the years following his return from Fontainebleau and the severing of connections with Jung. In the light of this I assess the influence of Ouspensky's text on

Nicoll as follows: at the time Nicoll sat down to write *Living Time* he had experienced at first hand almost everything described in Ouspensky's opening chapter. He had understood the idea of hidden knowledge, had thought about things, especially the 'religious' in a completely different way from his father and his circle, and seen that Jung had done the same. He had experienced a noetic state, in Jamesian terms, and come to some preliminary conclusions regarding the significance of these for the idea of a higher mind. He has seen that such experience was inherently only for the few. He had experienced the closed group, the only purpose of which was to pursue esoteric knowledge and practice, at Fontainebleau. He had understood the necessity for psychological work on oneself in order to apprehend this truth, and, more important, to live it. Also, he saw the necessity for the safeguarding of this knowledge from all but the initiated. He has seen how both the church and Jung's analytical psychology, pseudo-religion and pseudo-science, had, for all their access to knowledge, failed to show how that knowledge might be put into practice. He was aware, as were all who had passed through the collapse of civilisation that the First World War and the Russian Revolution represented, of how fragile civilisation was. Therefore, even leaving out the idea that Nicoll may well have been familiar with Ouspensky's early history of mystical experience that so closely reflected his own, outlined in the introduction to *New Model*, and had seen that both Ouspensky and he were embarked on the same inner journey, Nicoll was predisposed to assent from personal experience to Ouspensky's ideas on esotericism laid out in his first chapter.

In his second chapter, 'The Fourth Dimension', Ouspensky says that the idea that this 'hidden knowledge, surpassing all the knowledge that humanity can attain by his own efforts' must exist comes from the insolubility of certain problems, particularly those of 'the invisible world' and death. Religion, philosophy and science have always understood that there exists an invisible world, in relation to which the visible world is like the tip of the iceberg above the water. This invisible world, from the ordinary point of view, or for ordinary means of cognition, incomprehensible, is a 'world of noumena', 'containing the causes of the phenomena of the visible world' (Ouspensky 1931:68-9). The idea that the invisible causes the visible also informed man's ideas about death:

the visible, earthly, observable life of man is only a small part of the life belonging to him (Ouspensky 1931:70).

But not understanding these echoes properly, man personified the idea of the invisible causing the visible as a creative 'god', adding the idea of an afterlife, of Heaven and Hell as places of reward or punishment for behaviour in the visible world, or else reincarnation, the wheel of lives and transmigration of souls (Ouspensky 1951:70). Or else he denied the existence of the invisible by making the 'obvious' unreality of the separate existence of man [from his environment] the basis for the 'scientific' view that, since existence after death cannot be investigated, it therefore does not exist. But, says Ouspensky, 'our basic conception of the world must be broadened' (Ouspensky 1931:72) and he offers such a broadening through his ideas on the fourth dimension.

In a survey of current (1912) thinking of the theory of the four-dimensional Ouspensky cites Einstein's view that

the world of physical phenomena is naturally four-dimensional in the space-time sense. It is composed of individual events each of which is described by four numbers, namely three space co-ordinates and one time co-ordinate (Einstein 1916:56-57 in Ouspensky 1931:411-2).

Nevertheless Ouspensky finds these ideas inadequate since they do not permit a visualisation of four-dimensional reality. He thinks a genuine geometry of four dimensions is impossible precisely because it is imperceptible by the sensory apparatus. Essentially unknowable, the fourth dimension, he says, has to be studied from the psychological angle. In the writings of Charles Hinton<sup>73</sup>

Ouspensky finds 'the first step towards the development of higher consciousness and towards the cognition of the fourth dimension' (Ouspensky 1951:77). Hinton's idea is that a figure in the three-dimensional world is the projection of a figure from a higher dimension into a lower; 'solid' objects viewed in three dimensions are 'cross-sections' of 'four-dimensional objects'.<sup>74</sup> 'In every four-dimensional body we shall see its three-dimensional projection or section' (Ouspensky 1951:80).

---

<sup>73</sup> C. H. Hinton (1853-1907), British mathematician and inventor. His crucial work in respect of this idea is *A New Era of Thought – 1888*. Also, 'What is the Fourth Dimension?' in Hinton 1886

<sup>74</sup> Hinton 1888: 45-46.

In order to visualise this at-first-sight theoretical and unperceivable idea of the cross-section of something in one world being projected into a lower-order world Ouspensky cites N. A. Morosoff,<sup>75</sup> who offers in an article in the journal *Sovremenny Mir* (1907), as an analogy, the vision of a two-dimensional world. He depicts this as similar to the surface of the lake that surrounds his prison, on which exist two-dimensional beings that move and perceive only on the plane in which their world lies. Morosoff asks us to imagine him going for a swim in the lake. He would be perceptible to these two-dimensional beings only as a cross-section in the plane of the lake, but would seem to these beings 'very astonishing and miraculous', coming from nowhere, changing shape in unaccountable ways, and disappearing as mysteriously as he appeared. He would appear to be an 'all-powerful being'. Morosoff suggests that, by analogy with his construct, there may 'exist a world of four dimensions, superior to ours', the 'inhabitants' of which would in relation to us be like three-dimensional beings are to two-dimensional beings (Morosoff in Ouspensky 1931:82).

Ouspensky comments on this by understanding that two-dimensional beings might try to explain the inexplicable (to them) movements of visitors to their world. They would understand that what appears as 'vital force', as a sort of mysterious life principle to the two-dimensional world, is merely 'a kind of motion' on a higher plane. Two-dimensional beings might imagine a three dimensional world, imperceptible to them, understood only by analogy (much in the way an object is 'imagined' from a drawing), but could not perceive it directly. In doing this the two-dimensional being will probably imagine that he is on the 'first step to the right understanding of the universe' (Ouspensky 1931:84). When two-dimensional beings understood the idea of a third dimension they would also understand that they had a very small existence in the third dimension (Ouspensky 1931:87).

Ouspensky draws from the analogy the idea that ' "the fourth dimension" promises to explain something of the two principal functions of [the] enigma that man is, [which lie in] the domain of the non-measurable, life and thought [consciousness]' (Ouspensky 1931:85). The analogy offers a clear idea of 'inhabitants' of a higher dimension in place of the imperceptibility to us of what lies in the

---

<sup>75</sup> N. A. Morosoff (1854-1946), Russian mathematician and revolutionary.

invisible world. If the two-dimensional beings could understand, even though not perceiving directly the three-dimensional world, they would understand the prosaic nature of what they take to be miraculous.

But who might these inhabitants of a higher dimension be? Put analogically, as two-dimensional 'beings' might themselves be projections of three dimensional beings into a two-dimensional world, so we might be Morosoff's mysterious all-powerful four-dimensional beings projected into our three-dimensional world. If so, our own four-dimensional nature would be imperceptible, and we would 'appear and disappear from [the] world [by] moving along the fourth or some higher dimension (Morosoff in Ouspensky 1931:82). We would be,

in our three-dimensional consciousness] conscious only of a small part of our being with only one of our sides, our body, the greater part of our lives being in the fourth dimension (Ouspensky 1931:96).

Ouspensky, saying that in the way that operations in the three-dimensional world, comprehensible to us, are incomprehensible to two-dimensional beings, so are operations in the fourth dimension incomprehensible to us. We can, however, because of this, find the solution to the comprehension of the fourth dimension by examining things that, though they are taken for granted by us because they are so familiar, are inexplicable. He gives as examples of such inexplicable things the psychic in general, life, growth and time, suggesting that all these are interconnected, and that the 'psychic'<sup>76</sup> 'is very similar to what should exist in the fourth dimension' (Ouspensky 1931:95).

Ouspensky makes comprehensible the idea of a four-dimensional body by describing Hinton's idea of the tesseract.<sup>77</sup> This Ouspensky describes as 'an infinite number of cubes as it were growing from one cube' (Ouspensky 1931:96), or a single cube eternally present in all its successive infinitely short

---

<sup>76</sup> Ouspensky's has his own understanding of this popular term, meaning 'mental or psychological phenomena, that is, those which constitute the subject of psychology'. In his usage it has nothing to do with the 'supernormal or super-physical phenomena' typical of popular use (Ouspensky 1931:93, footnote).

<sup>77</sup> Term invented by Hinton in *A New Era of Thought* (1888). A Tesseract is rather like Rubik's cube, but Hinton's idea is that although we cannot 'know' the cube 'in itself', our only real knowledge of it is merely of the physical arrangement of the cube shapes. Each small cube is considered as subdivided into a similar cube, so on, *ad infinitum*. Although at perceptible levels each cube has its own character or essence, at a small enough level the cubes are completely undifferentiated and can stand one for another. At this level one can 'know' the cubes in a four-dimensional sense. See also Hinton (1886) *Scientific Romances*: 205-229.

'momentary' manifestations. While such a figure conceived as a moving object leaving behind all its manifestations in time, these being 'eternally' present, is not imaginable, Ouspensky claims that the idea of a cube expanding thermally is conceivable as a tesseract. The cube in expansion remains a cube, some parts of it of necessity expanding at a greater rate than others to maintain its shape, this being an example of the kind of symmetrical motion found also in the growth of living organisms. Any 'expanded' body is the result of an input of energy, either through thermal expansion or living growth. An expanded body 'contain[s] as it were less substance and more motion', in other words converts matter into energy (Ouspensky 1931:105). Expansion and growth are also functions of time (as is any motion). 'If matter is opposed to time, we can say that each finer state contains more time than a coarser state' (Ouspensky 1931:105). It is in this way we can see tesseract and growing body as four-dimensional objects permanently present during successive 'moments'.

Ouspensky summarises by saying that the fourth dimension is therefore 'a direction unknown and unknowable to us. Quite close, side by side with us, there lies some other space which we are unable to see and into which we cannot pass'. Further, this dimension lies 'inside us; *not only inside us*, but we ourselves are inside it, that is, in the space of four dimensions' (Ouspensky 1931:108). Are we ourselves not immensely complicated tesseracts?

In his next chapter, 'Superman', Ouspensky says that the idea of hidden knowledge has always been connected with the idea of the superman (Ouspensky 1931:113). Dismissing earlier literal understanding of fabulous ideas of legendary giants, titans and suchlike figures who apocryphally taught men all they knew, and even of more realistic conceptions of Messiah-like figures who might come to earth to help mankind, but who too often were stoned or crucified, as misunderstandings of the metaphorical representation of an idea, Ouspensky offers an interpretation of the idea of the superman who, the product of a certain sort of evolution involving 'the creation of new forms of thinking and feeling, and the abandonment of the old forms', is ' "a higher type of man" ' (Ouspensky 1931:115-6).

Ouspensky cites Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* as a parable of such a higher type of man. He says that in a man there are, as it were, two beings, one of 'time and space', and the other 'belonging to some other world' (Ouspensky 1931:118). The evolution that the superman must undergo, described by Nietzsche, is the evolution of the second of these 'beings'. The second being in such a man is in an incomplete state, and the meaning of the man's existence is the transition of this part of him to an evolved state, which involves the development of his inner world, the evolution of his consciousness. This evolution also involves the unification of the personality, the subjugation of the part of a person that is of 'time and space' by the part of him that 'belongs to another world'. It seems that history offers examples of people, arising from time to time, who have undergone this inner evolution, and who are exemplars of this unified character. Ouspensky sees Jesus as a symbol for one aspect of a man who has realised the superman in himself. Contrasting that image with Pilate as that part of a man that sees the truth but will not follow it, and Judas as the part that does not understand the truth and therefore turns on it and destroys it, Ouspensky says that the ideal unity in superman is the necessary solution for the absence of unity in the inner world of man. The 'careers' both of Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Jesus show symbolically the ascent of a developmental path to this unity as one of incremental steps, each one an initiation that cannot be undertaken without being in a state of full preparedness and having undergone the previous one. This progress is possible only through addressing the problems of time and eternity, as the ancient teachings also make clear, but solution of them offers the 'infinite expansion of our consciousness'. A person undergoing this development of his inner nature 'belongs to the "inner circle" [of humanity]' (Ouspensky 1931:140-1).

Ouspensky says, however, that pictures of such people from ancient religions and in myths as supermen are not portraits of real people who have 'evolved', but a picture of 'the higher "I" of man, man's consciousness' (Ouspensky 1931:140). For superman is not some extraordinary evolved creature, but one of the possibilities that lie within the depths of the soul of man' (Ouspensky 1931:144). Ouspensky quotes Nietzsche:

I want to teach men the sense of their existence, which is the superman, the lightning out of the dark cloud – man (Nietzsche 1961:49).

In the idea of superman as an inner part of us that can evolve (though not in a Darwinian sense), we can recognise the presence of the seeds of something in us higher than that by which we ordinarily live and the possibility of its manifestation in forms at present incomprehensible to us. These possibilities involve being able to think differently, and to conceive the world in new categories. ‘The normal state of superman constitutes what we call *ecstasy* in all possible meanings’ (Ouspensky 1931:133).

What Ouspensky is describing in this chapter, I suggest, is the kind of person who, to use Ouspensky’s terms, uses the psychological method to gain access to esoteric knowledge. It will become clear how congruent Ouspensky’s portrait of superman is with ‘Work’ ideas: two sides of a person, the one, the ‘inner’, needing to be completed; a unification of the personality by the abandonment of usual ways of thinking in favour of a higher form in which the personality is subjugated to the real “I”; the graded steps of increasing consciousness in a form of initiation; the ‘membership’ of small groups of like-minded people devoted to this form of personal ‘evolution’. All these ideas would have long been familiar to Ouspensky in their ‘Work’ guise by the time his book assumed its final form, and he assuredly taught them to Nicoll. But whether they appeared in the original essay, dated 1911, well before Ouspensky met Gurdjieff, we cannot know, since we do not have a typescript from the time. My view is that Ouspensky understood these things before he met Gurdjieff, but that is supposition.

In the chapter ‘Experimental Mysticism’ Ouspensky reports on experiments he performed on himself by inducing ‘a change in the state of consciousness’ using narcotics. Attempting to verify empirically the possibility and nature of both the perception of the fourth dimension and the state of ecstasy mentioned in previous chapters, Ouspensky found what he saw in these altered states almost impossible to describe in detail, or even to remember. In this unknown state the world appeared to have an extraordinary unity and coherence quite unlike our usual perception of it (Ouspensky

1931:311). While he became aware that he was as it were divided into observer and observed, nevertheless there was confusion of the subjective and objective (Ouspensky 1931:314). He remarks that there seemed no longer to be things, but only relationships. Although there was an awareness of time, it was completely (from our point of view) distorted. He seemed to see the essence of things (he cites an ashtray and a horse) (Ouspensky 1931:326). He was in an intuitive way aware of the idea of the 'principle of three', that every phenomenon was the synthesis of two opposing forces through a third (as we shall see, a central 'Work' idea) (Ouspensky 1931:332). Although he was able only with difficulty to write while in this state, one day he wrote the sentence 'Think in other categories' (Ouspensky 1931:324). He had an enhanced feeling of himself, in which his ordinary 'I' seemed to be swallowed up in a supra-ordinate 'I' (Ouspensky 1931:334). At first this was frightening, but later it induced a feeling of ecstasy. Ouspensky also reports, but this not from induced states of altered consciousness, but from a 'dream in a waking state' that he was aware of people close to him who had died. He saw them invariably in two bodies, the first a small shadowy likeness of their earthly selves, the second 'bigger', 'longer', in the form of 'a road in the mountains which you see winding among the hills'. He seemed to see not a person as he appeared externally, but *the whole of his life*. He takes this to be an intuitive awareness (and proof) of the ' "Linga Sharia" of Indian philosophy, this "*long body of life*" '(Ouspensky 1931:338-340). But he believed that though his experiments 'established for me with indisputable clearness the possibility of coming into contact with the *real* world that lies behind the wavering mirage of the visible world', this required a different approach and a different preparation. It was impossible to convey in the language of the dead [us natural men, I hypothesise] the impressions of the living world. Without the help of those who knew another approach 'it was impossible to do anything' (Ouspensky 1931:343).

This report describes experiences, I argue, that bear a striking similarity to James' noetic experiences discussed in Chapter Three. Particularly significant, I suggest, is Ouspensky's realisation that he cannot go further by this means of experimentation. This suggests that Ouspensky realises that these self-induced experiences are by their very nature only temporary. What is needed is to make

them more permanent, more under the control of the experiment, affording more access during them to the ordinary state of consciousness. Ouspensky realises that some other method is needed to achieve this, but thinks that there are 'those who know' of it (Ouspensky 1931:343).

In his chapter 'A New Model of the Universe' Ouspensky discusses the inadequacies of the Newtonian view of the Universe, and how the advances in the 'New Physics', as he calls it, go some way to addressing those inadequacies, but at the cost of posing so many conceptual questions that in turn cannot be answered. Nevertheless, Ouspensky accepts that Einstein has demonstrated that 'the concept of space, taken separately, has no meaning whatsoever. Only co-existence of space and time makes reality' (Ouspensky 1931:410). But Herman Minkowsky,<sup>78</sup> who played an important role in the development of the theory of relativity, saw that though the fourth dimension was a time dimension, it had exactly the same formal and mathematical qualities as the space co-ordinates.

The discovery of Minkowsky which was of importance for the formal development of the theory of relativity is to be found in the fact of his recognition that the four-dimensional space-time continuum shows a pronounced relationship to the three-dimensional continuum of Euclidian geometrical space. The time co-ordinate plays exactly the same role as the three space co-ordinates (Einstein 1916:58).

From this Ouspensky arrives at the idea of yet higher dimension than the fourth, and these higher dimensions, lying above the three space dimensions form what he calls 'six-dimensional space' or 'higher space' (Ouspensky 1931:422). Ouspensky asks the reader to imagine that the succession of moments in time is the time line, which is the fourth dimension, and on which 'we live and think and exist' (Ouspensky 1931:431). At right angles to this line (which like any line is a very large number of points, and in this case a very large number of 'nows')<sup>79</sup> there can be a very large number of lines caused by moving each point on the line of the fourth dimension at right angles to this line. In passing time every moment is consequent on a previous moment, is the 'effect' of a previous 'cause'. But each moment is pregnant with a number (perhaps not large, certainly not infinite) of other possibilities, though when we perceive it in time only one 'effect' is actualised. But each other

---

<sup>78</sup> Herman Minkowsky (1864-1909), Polish mathematician and physicist.

<sup>79</sup> Modern thinking is suggesting that there is nothing infinitely large or small. Thus there would be only a very large number of 'nows', each of which, though very short, would nevertheless have a measurable length. There would not be an infinite number of possibilities, only a very large but finite number (Rovelli 2016:202-8).

possibility forms another dimension, at 'right angles' to the actualisations. The fourth dimension is all 'lived' moments in succession in one life; the fifth dimension is all 'lived moments' or 'actualised moments' in all lives lived in recurrence perpetually present. The sixth dimension is the 'actualisation of other possibilities which were contained in preceding moments but were not actualised in "time"; it is all possible actualisations perpetually present, an aggregation of ' "all times" ' (Ouspensky 1931:429). The 'solid' formed thus is Ouspensky's 'time solid'. But each dimension creates as it were its own 'solid'. Thus in the way that a point, line, surface, cube, tesseract are 'solids' of the various dimensions projected from the dimension above, so is a four-dimensional a five-dimensional body so projected, and a five-dimensional a six-dimensional body so projected. There is no higher dimension, since all possibilities are everything, outside of which there is nothing, and 'at this point we can understand the *limitedness of the infinite universe*' (Ouspensky 1931:431). The 'seventh' dimension is the Absolute, the nothing or 'abyss' that everything is created from.

That the time line in the fourth dimension curves, thus making it into a circle, is Ouspensky's theoretical justification for positing the idea of recurrence of a person's life, that is that they are born again in the same circumstances and re-live their life in a recurrence of the same time. In his chapter 'Eternal Recurrence' Ouspensky offers evidence of the prevalence of this idea in antiquity, and poems by A. Tolstoy and Rossetti that seem to endorse the idea, but no empirical evidence. He thinks that recurrence is a biblical idea, one of the meanings of *palingenesis* being recurrence. He imagines there to be three types of recurrence; absolute recurrence, where the person re-lives their life without any alteration; recurrence where the person changes himself and 'dies on one plane and passes to a higher plane of being' (Ouspensky 1931:483); and recurrence where the soul, becoming gradually reduced, eventually dies.

This fairly detailed survey of Ouspensky's ideas is presented because Nicoll includes almost all this material in *Living Time*. But Nicoll's book, for all that it incorporates so much of Ouspensky's book not only develops Ouspensky's ideas, as I shall show in due course, but places them in a different

context. Ouspensky's book offers an explanation of esotericism and the 'psychological method', but it is, I argue, only a theoretical discussion. Although Ouspensky says, for instance in the chapter 'Superman', that it is necessary to change your mind by building these ideas into your very self, he does not say how this is to be done. Nicoll's purpose in presenting these ideas, on the other hand, is to show how this esoteric knowledge applied to oneself can lead to a thoroughgoing transformation of the person. To anticipate, I argue that Nicoll is one of 'those who know' who sees that Ouspensky's understanding of the material, and his empirical verification of its ideas is not enough to bring conscious awareness of the 'world of the invisible'. Nicoll, I will argue, shows how this may be done, and describes the ecstatic state that such awareness brings.

### **'Living Time'**

I now turn to Nicoll's *Living Time*. In an introductory note to his book Nicoll says that the argument in it is anchored in the dichotomy of the 'visible and the invisible':

*life, before all other definitions of it is a drama of the visible and invisible* (Nicoll 1952:3 – italics in original).

As suggested above, I see this book as the description of how people may transform themselves, may find 'absolutely new standpoints', and may 'change their sense of reality' (Nicoll 1954: vii) so as to bring to consciousness the 'world of the invisible'. Nicoll means by the visible the physical world we live in, the world of the five senses, the reality of which is taken for granted, but which is actually constructed from our sensual perceptions. Therefore it is in our mind, and though it itself is not an illusion, our idea of it is. The only evidence we have for this *sensory* world is 'the evidence of things seen'.<sup>80</sup> But we imagine that this constant stream of sensory images is actually our life, that our perception of them is our real self. Our everyday psychology, our mundane consciousness and our rational mind are primarily adapted to living in this visible world, and make us think that it is the only reality. The invisible on the other hand is that which is imperceptible to the five senses. Nicoll says that he will treat 'the invisible nature of man and the invisible side of the world from the standpoint

---

<sup>80</sup> Hebrews 11:1 has 'the evidence of things not seen'.

of *dimensions* and *higher levels of consciousness*'. Pertinent to this, Nicoll maintains, is 'a new understanding of time, the possibility of a change in the time-sense, with a changed feeling of *oneself* [and] the meaning of *eternity* and the idea of *recurrence*' (Nicoll 1954: vii-viii).

Nicoll, in his chapter 'Invisibility of Oneself' starts his argument with a consideration of that part of the invisible world that is the inner world of a man, saying that the 'very real and solid existence', visible to others, of our body, is an illusion, our ordinary life one of *appearances*. The real self of a man is his psychological side, his inner and invisible life:

we think that the visible world has reality and structure and do not conceive the possibility that the psychological world, or inner world that we know as our thought, feeling and imagination may also have a real structure and exist in its own 'space', although not that space that we are in touch with through our sense-organs (Nicoll 1952:3).

Though this inner, invisible 'world of ideas' is just as significant as the visible, we do not ordinarily feel that this is so, nor have any contact with it. Instead, 'we take the external as real in itself, not as a matter connected with the nature of our senses', discounting what *is* real in us but invisible to the senses (Nicoll 1952:8). But 'the universe is not only sensory experience, but the inner experience as well'.

Part of the WORLD is outside, the remainder inside, where the visible leaves off, the invisible begins – individually for each one of us. The higher degrees of the world are in us; outside is outer truth, inside inner, *within* me, individually (Nicoll 1952:242).

Man's connection with the 'invisible', Nicol says, can be achieved through *understanding differently with ideas* (Nicoll 1952:4). Nicoll suggests that ancient teaching tells us that unless man gives meaning to his existence by changing himself under the influence of ideas from the 'invisible', he will never bring the discordant elements of his nature into harmony. This, which these writings say is his only *real* task, can be done only by relating the visible self that man is in the world to the invisible 'world of ideas'. To do this a change of everyday consciousness is needed. But man cannot do this by sensual thinking, 'the "materialistic" outlook of today', which believes only in the 'evidence of things seen' (Nicoll 1952:27). Giving no access to the 'invisible', it leaves a man '*dead* in regard to what is *himself*' (Nicoll 1952:25). Scientific thinking, no matter how 'advanced', will never give access to this

'invisible' realm: only things like 'ancient religion and philosophy, and great art' might provide 'the way to work on oneself through a gradual transformation', letting a man escape his psychological limitations and put him in touch with the invisible.

Nicoll suggests three ways by which the '*change of consciousness*' which he sees as necessary to make contact with the invisible can be achieved, and man be led into the 'invisible' in himself. Man needs to overcome and turn from the world by overcoming the constraints of his sensory psychology; he needs to change his feeling of himself which is derived from second-hand opinions; and he needs, to use Plato's phrase, to 'become a spectator of time'; that is, he needs to create a new attitude to time. Nicoll's book is a description of how these three desiderata might be accomplished.

Nicoll takes the term 'the invisible' from Ouspensky (Ouspensky 1931:67). The word is an antonym to the visible, which Nicoll also calls the sensory. Invisible is therefore everything that is not sensory. Although Nicoll calls the non-sensory a realm or world, 'the invisible world', as Ouspensky does, he is careful to confine himself to the term *invisible*. It becomes evident later in the book that terms such as 'hidden' and 'esoteric' are philosophical terms used to refer to the same idea. We have seen how in *Dream Psychology* Nicoll uses 'eschatological' for 'religious'. Although in *Living Time* the word 'spiritual' is used, and in Nicoll's later writings this, and terms such as 'heaven' which have specifically religious connotations are also used, in my discussion I shall confine myself to the term invisible and allow it to accumulate more philosophical or 'religious' meanings only as Nicoll does.

In describing the beginning of the drama of turning from the visible to the invisible, Nicoll has laid down a number of lines of progress that will be followed throughout the description of this move. The visible is described as the lowest level, man in the world, living in ordinary consciousness. In turning from the visible man is exhorted to turn inwards; he moves from a state of death to life, from the known to the unknown, from illusion to a greater degree of reality, from a lower level of consciousness to a higher and different level, from an illusory sense of his self to a real sense of

himself, and from a state of disintegration to a union or harmony. All these lines of progress appear from time to time in the argument.

In his chapter 'Quality of Consciousness' Nicoll says that to make the first move in this process of turning, or conversion, the overcoming of sensory thinking, is for a man to reach out to a higher level of consciousness. Nicoll mentions William James, who says that 'our normal waking, rational consciousness is but one special type of consciousness' (James in Nicoll 1952:22). Nicoll also mentions that Plato describes levels of consciousness in a man, the lower (images and dreams, opinions and beliefs) 'touching the world of the senses'; and the higher, (reason and intelligence [=nous, whence noetic], the noetic), which latter only touches the invisible world. Plato says that by aspiring to the higher levels which transcend normal consciousness a man has the possibility, instead of processing sensory input to create a world seen as external, to see the reality that is the world of the invisible in a man, and to know from 'within' as well as from 'without' (Nicoll 1952:25).

Nicoll says that what prevents us from escaping the 'constraints of our perceptions and our feeling of ourselves derived from second-hand opinions' and achieving such higher degrees of consciousness is our false idea of ourselves, our self-love. To illustrate this Nicoll holds up the image of the Pharisee as a metaphor for the ordinary person whose personality, outer and sensual, is assumed and a sham. He wears a mask, and is a *hypocrite* (Greek for actor – 'personality' comes from *persona*, the mask actors in antiquity wore). Doing things ' "to be seen of men" ', 'demanding a favourable reflection of himself in others' he has *no real I*' (Nicoll's italics for this 'Work' term – Nicoll 1952: 40-41). If he is no longer to be bound to the sensory a man needs to create a new sense of himself. The self-love that leaves him identified with his outer personality has to be overcome if a state of higher consciousness and contact with the invisible is to be achieved. The world of the invisible in a man, a 'higher order', is, in contrast to the illusory world of our own idea of ourselves, the real world, and someone having a higher consciousness lives in this real world:

The real world is within, and is only apprehensible within. A man whose soul has reached this position is no longer a natural or 'sensible' man (Nicoll 1952:37).

But the real world is also the world of a man's real self. Nicoll says that a noetic level of consciousness, 'knowledge apart from sense' (Nicoll 1952:53) changes the centre of gravity<sup>81</sup> in a man by creating in him his real self.

It thus emerges that Nicoll's first two desiderata are intimately connected. Overcoming sensory thinking and coming to a just assessment of the reality of your own person involve the moving to a higher level of consciousness. Unless a man is aware of the higher degrees of consciousness in him he cannot be aware of how full of pretence he is, and how illusory his idea of himself is, nor of what he could become. He cannot change himself, make contact with the reality that lies in him, or inhabit his own real self. These ideas owe something to Jung, but also anticipate core 'Work' concepts.

Also preventing us from overcoming our bondage to sensory perception, Nicoll says, is ignorance that a specific teaching, 'an actual science, a higher science of man', what Nicoll calls a *psychology*, that shows us how we could transcend both our sensual perception and our self-love, exists. But for this teaching to be effective in us we must be convinced of the existence and reality of a higher invisible world. Such a

positive psychological system, as that inherent in Christianity, the ideas of which will not be understandable in an ordinary way, teaches that man is capable of a very definite kind of development, that some definite transformation can take place in him (Nicoll 1952:48).<sup>82</sup>

Nicoll says that the conviction that a higher order of reality exists is an affirmation by an act of the mind of what the senses do not directly show. This is not mere belief, but faith, evidence of something that the ordinary senses cannot apprehend. Nicoll points out that Plato sees the advent of faith as the turning point<sup>83</sup> of a man's soul, and when it comes he is changed completely. Through it he sees that there are 'things of the spirit' and higher degrees of consciousness and reality within

---

<sup>81</sup> Ouspensky writes concerning this Gurdjieffian term: Right work on oneself begins with the creation of a *permanent centre of gravity*. When this happens everything else begins to be disposed and distributed in subordination to it. Only a man's attitude to the work, to school, his valuation of the work and his realisation of the mechanicalness and aimlessness of everything else can create in him a permanent centre of gravity (Ouspensky 1950: 259 in Thring 2002:45)

<sup>82</sup> This is the earliest example of the identification of psychology and Christianity in Nicoll's work.

<sup>83</sup> The word used here is *epistrepho* [ἐπιστρέφω] which means 'turn, turn again, turn towards, about face, come to oneself'.

him. Everything comes to have a new meaning (Nicoll 1952:29-30). But no logical or magical demonstration of things of the spirit or higher realities by appeal to the senses or logical proof can ever bring about this faith (Nicoll 1952:33). Instead, some way, some form of work upon oneself through a gradual transformation of oneself, must be found (Nicoll 1952:242-3).

I contend that this shows that Nicoll sees the acquisition of faith as an act of higher consciousness. Faith cannot be pretended, nor can it be forced on one, or proved to one. It can only come from a genuine insight into the possibility of a higher level in oneself, and a willingness to submit to that higher level. The acquisition of faith is a turning point, a conversion. Religions at their best describe and inculcate a psychology that shows us that this transformation is possible and how it may be accomplished. This idea of the need for a certain reverence for a body of knowledge beyond the reach of the ordinary mind and the need for preparation to approach it is also found in 'the Work', and this view of faith is a crucial part of Nicoll's argument in his final works treated in Chapter Six.

Nicoll broaches the third idea for approaching the invisible, a new attitude to time, by introducing another common image for the process of making contact with the invisible, found particularly in the Gospels, that of waking up, being awake or staying awake. He quotes William Law:

the Greatest Part of Mankind, nay, of all Christians, may be said to be asleep. Do but suppose a man know himself that he comes into this world on no other errand but to arise out of the vanity of time (Law 1950:113 in Nicoll 1954:67).

Though he will later use the idea of awakening as the key concept in the practical realisation of this process of transformation, both in his analysis of 'the Work' and in the Gospel narrative, Nicoll quotes Law here, I argue, because this quotation shows the conjunction between Nicoll's three desiderata for reaching the invisible. The conjunction of overcoming the sensory, changing the feeling of I, which may be seen as knowing yourself, and, as Law puts it, 'arising out of the vanity [illusion] of time' are all encapsulated in the idea of 'waking up'. Nicoll links Law's passage immediately to the gospel: 'Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and you will redeem the time [age]' [Ephesians 5:14]. Nicoll is implying by this that being awake (rising from the 'dead')

means being more conscious both in yourself and of yourself, while 'redeeming time' means thinking differently about time. This connects intimately the three desiderata that Nicoll started with:

If we are willing to admit the possibility that there is a higher level of consciousness, or a further degree of experience inherent in our nature, we have to suppose that another understanding of time is connected with it; noetic experience is beyond time-sequence on a higher level beyond our state of slumber; *a different view of time may open the way to the possibilities of new experience* (Nicoll 1952:71).

What emerges from this introduction of Nicoll's third desideratum into the argument, I maintain, is that each of Nicoll's three desiderata, overcoming the sensory, changing the feeling of self and taking a different attitude to time, is contained in the other two. It is not a question of three steps, but of three aspects of one process, each of which is intimately related to the others. One cannot overcome the sensory without changing the feeling of I, or vice versa; and taking a different attitude to time is integral to any attempt to change your feeling of 'I' and raise your level of consciousness.

In his chapter 'Passing-time and Time Itself', where Nicoll turns fully to the implication of our attitude to time in the search for the invisible, which the title of his book suggests is his real topic, he says that in seeing the world from a different understanding of time we need to see it four-dimensionally. Instead of understanding that we are three-dimensional bodies existing in the moment of time called the present we must conceive a person as a four-dimensional being in whom the time dimension is integral. Man and the universe cannot be taken separately. Because time is an integral part of our make-up we exist in *higher space* (Ouspensky's term, used by Nicoll – Nicoll 1952:77). Were we conscious of this 'a complete alteration in the feeling of *what one is*' (Nicoll 1952:77) would take place, because 'a different understanding of time and a different feeling of I are linked together'. But this idea cannot be grasped logically. It must, says Nicoll, be 'psychologically experienced'. Nicoll draws attention to Ouspensky's idea of a higher consciousness, above that of our usual reasoning, which Ouspensky calls *self-consciousness*, as the medium for this psychological experience. This also brings *another perception of time*, the understanding of two 'times', the one in which 'we feel ourselves ordinarily to exist', passing time, and 'a state of the spirit where time disappears', *a four-dimensional world of higher space, Time itself, the world stretched out in the*

*dimension of Time* (Nicoll 1952:76, 77, 81).<sup>84</sup> This psychological experience of the fourth dimension is yet a further step in overcoming the sensory, changing the feeling of I and taking a different view of time.

To make clearer the idea of what consciousness of existence in the fourth dimension means Nicoll first discusses Ouspensky's ideas of time by a consideration of Minkowsky's *world points*.

Ouspensky, it will be recalled, has said that Minkowsky sees any phenomenon as defined by three space co-ordinates and one of time. Each moment of existence of a phenomenon, defined thus in four dimensions, is the continuous intersection of the three-dimensional and the (invisible-to-us) four-dimensional worlds. Each of these intersections is a *world point*.<sup>85</sup> A continuous succession of these world points makes a *world line*, a four-dimensional *noumenon*. The moment-by-moment existence of an object in three-dimensional space is the projection into the cosmos at each passing moment of this four-dimensional *noumenon*, a *world line* consisting of all the points of intersection between the two dimensional worlds in the life of the object. Minkowsky says:

the whole universe is seen to resolve itself into similar world lines. Physical laws might find their most perfect expression as reciprocal relations between these world lines (Minkowsky in Nicoll 1952:75).

Our own lives in their totality are similarly extended events stretched out in this higher space (Nicoll 1952:81) and relate to each other both in the succession of points of passing time and *as world lines* in the four-dimensional world. This four-dimensional *noumenon* is thus all the moments of the life 'contained' together in one 'body' which is as it were projected a moment at a time from the fourth dimension into the three-dimensional world. This is exactly Hinton's idea (Hinton 1888: 45-46).

In his chapter 'The Life in Living Time' Nicoll cites empirical evidence for the awareness of the whole life together. The simultaneous presence and consciousness of all the moments of a man's life is evidenced, so Nicoll thinks, in the 'near-death' experiences in which people 'experience' their whole lives 'instantaneously' when drowning or asphyxiating. Nicoll cites the conclusion of an analysis of

---

<sup>84</sup> My understanding of Nicoll's use of Time capitalised is that this means *Time itself*.

<sup>85</sup> Though Nicoll is calling on Ouspensky's exposition here, Ouspensky, although citing Minkowsky, does not mention either world points or world lines in *New Model*.

near-death cases, that such experiences are not strictly speaking memory, since they are 'not recollection, but the experience of the *presence* of the past; the life is *restored*, as present. All the moments of our life can be regarded as present in a new synthesis' (Nicoll 1952:111). But Nicoll says that, if in the face of such consciousness, a 'memory' of a kind, 'higher space apprehended', *nothing could remain the same* (by which I take him to mean that a person experiencing this would be completely transformed), this would be so only if this consciousness 'entered into every moment of our existence' (Nicoll 1952:114). Therefore I say that while it is clear that such experiences happen and are real in the way described by the sources Nicoll quotes, these states are merely evidence for the apprehension of higher space, not a means to the realisation of this state of consciousness 'in every moment of our existence', and their value to the individual in the process of transformation is limited, in much the same way as Tennyson's noetic experience described in Chapter Three had no real effect on him as a person, but remained a curiosity in his life (as Nicoll will suggest later in *Living Time*).

In exploring other ways in which a consciousness of all our life as a body in the fourth dimension might be attainable in an effective way Nicoll says first that for our 'body' to be perceptible even in our own three-dimensional world it must have minimal extension in the fourth dimension. To clarify this by analogy Nicoll says that 'although a two-dimensional world is "ideally" possible, to be manifest even in its own dimensions it must have miniscule extension in the third dimension'; it must be 'one atom thick', as it were. Similarly, for our world to be manifest to us even in our own dimension it must have an extension in the fourth dimension. I posit that if each moment of time were of infinitely short duration it would be imperceptible. But modern scientific thinking suggests that there is no such thing as infinity. There is a limit to how short a 'moment' is. That means that a 'moment' is not passing time but real time stretched out in passing time, which is an abstraction. Our experience of time must be 'one moment thick': although

the rest [of time outside this moment] is invisible, non-existent: *not in [our] world, though in [the higher] world; not in [our] present moment, though certainly in the 'present moment' of the fourth*

*dimension*; only a cross section (which has no resemblance to [time as actually 'perceptible' in the fourth dimension]) can exist in [our] visible world, and all *the rest of it would be in our past or future*, we are able, no matter how minimally, to experience time in extension. In this lies the opportunity:

[to] touch the fourth dimension. We must widen our conception of the world. Can we not suppose that *mind* potentially opens on what is beyond this minimum [aspect of the fourth dimension that we see]? (Nicoll 1952:91).

As an example of an attempt to grasp the fourth dimension, 'to widen our conception of the world' Nicoll's cites a Hermetic exercise,<sup>86</sup> which had the purpose of making visible the whole life as a 'body' by 'forcing our thoughts beyond the limits of sense towards the realm of *idea*' (in other words, to raise our consciousness towards the invisible):

to reach another state, another level of understanding, we are told to "expand ourselves to the magnitude of all [our] existence"; in this way the life can be permanently unified ("changed into eternal substance") (Nicoll 1952:101).

But what exactly the practitioners of the Hermetic art did to 'expand themselves to the magnitude or their existence', or what one does now to reach another state of oneself of being changed into eternal substance, Nicoll does not at this point make clear, merely saying of this that 'the sense of [our] existence throughout all one's time is meant' (Nicoll 1952:101).

In his next chapter, 'Aeon', Nicoll further explores the theoretical understanding of the four-dimensional 'body' projected into the three dimensional world yet maintaining its existence throughout on the level of the fourth dimension by analysing the idea of 'eternal' life in the New Testament, arguing that the idea of the eternal has been totally misunderstood. Nicoll says that 'eternal', the Latin version of the Greek word *aionos* [αἰωνος], means 'of the age', not 'going on for ever'. Our eternal or 'aeonian' life is our time-length, the age of our life, all its moments together. This is its '*aeon*':

one possible meaning of Aion [αἰων - aeon] is that which determines the form and extent (in time) of *any* existence in time, or the higher-dimensional reality behind its expression in the world (Nicoll 1952:122).

Nicoll says that the equivalent Hebrew expression to *aionos* is *olam*. It is said in Ecclesiastes that when a man goes to his 'long home' (by dying physically) he 'inhabits' the completed structure of his

---

<sup>86</sup> *Hermetica* [ed. and trans. Walter Scott] Oxford; OUP, 1924, 1/221.

life, his aeon (Ecclesiastes 12:5-Nicoll 1952:126). But Nicoll says that the psychological idea connected with *eternal life* cannot be limited to this, but must refer to a change a man is capable of undergoing now, in this life. This 'long home', this *aeon*, is the 'complete and simultaneous possession of endless life *in a single whole*' (Boethius in Nicoll 1952:133). It is the four-dimensional body, a possible state of man in the here and now, psychologically speaking. But apart from saying that 'when glory is given to God in eternity' the imagination is lifted to another order of reality above time, perhaps implying by this that some sort of religious observance might bring one to this state in oneself of *holding the whole extent of endless life grasped together in one present* (Nicoll 1952:134), the nearest Nicoll gets to saying what actually must be done to realise this state in oneself is to cite Jacob Boehme.<sup>87</sup> Boehme says that man in his own self-will can only possess a minute particular 'but in the Resignation (*Gelassenheit*) he gets into the total – into the universal, into ALL; for ALL is'. Nicoll says that this means that 'a tremendous devaluation of the self-will of the ordinary I is demanded. The notion of *higher space* gives this' (Nicoll 1952:136-7). We see here the idea, fundamental both in the psychology of Jung and an overriding idea in 'the Work', and also, I will argue, in the psychology that I say Nicoll sees incorporated in the Gospels, of the surrender of the self-will, of the ego or ordinary personality in favour of consciousness of some higher unity. We see here also, again, I argue, the conjunction of the overcoming the worldly sense of self and a different understanding of time. That understanding of time is, Nicoll has argued, the apprehension of higher space. Nicoll now says that the nature of the world beyond sense, in higher space, is one of an infinite number of possible *psychological* directions, each direction representing a realisation of one of many possibilities, only one of which we know in this life in passing-time. All these possibilities are already there in higher space, awaiting realisation, but though we in passing time can follow only one, at each moment we make a choice of which track we follow, and could choose a different possibility. This perpetual possibility of choice represents the intrusion of eternity into our

---

<sup>87</sup> Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) was an uneducated German cobbler who became the foremost seventeenth-century protestant theosophist and mystic. He is considered the spiritual father of William Law (Weeks 1991).

world – eternity enters into now in this way at every moment. But in choosing a different path in an act of will rather than reacting passively to circumstances we have the possibility of transforming ourselves. In doing this, according to Nicoll, echoing Ouspensky's ideas presented earlier in this chapter, we are remembering the same choice presented in a previous recurrence of the life and choosing differently, and by so doing affecting the nature of our next recurrence. This is the key, Nicoll says, to how we stop being a spectator to time and, taking a different attitude to it, perfect ourselves. We must at each moment choose, through an act of will in the light of remembering. But before outlining the theoretical basis for this view Nicoll adduces empirical evidence for it.

As empirical evidence for recurrence Nicoll cites, in his chapter 'Eternity and the Recurrence of Life', experimental results on two self-experimenters, Ouspensky and Sir William Ramsay.<sup>88</sup> We have already seen Ouspensky's report in *New Model* of the results of experiments he had conducted on himself. Nicoll reports these in *Living Time*. According to Nicoll, both experimenters experienced the array of sensations that we have seen are usual in states of altered consciousness:

different cognitive levels, the perception of living time, the changed feeling of *I*, the increase of mental grasp, the sense of everlastingness, the feeling of self-existence.

But Ramsay also experienced

the direct perception of the *recurrence* of things (Nicoll 1952:157).

Nicoll evaluates Ramsay's thinking that his experiences under narcosis had taken place in a 'previous life' as empirical evidence for the validity of the idea of recurrence of the life in the same time.

Ramsay thought that at various points in life he faced choices. What he chose determined whether he would face the same choice again in recurrence. Nicoll quotes Ramsay's evaluation of these moments of choice as occasions for possible evolution,

stages in the evolution of the universe [that is] in man's mind or [is] man's mind, stages to be overcome, because one is confronted by an internal obstacle that only *I myself* can pass, as through my own gate, that will open to nobody else's key: my *individual* mark will be on the key (Ramsay in Nicoll 1952:150).

---

<sup>88</sup> Sir William Ramsay (1852-1916), Scottish chemist, Nobel prize-winner, was the discoverer (with Lord Rayleigh) of Argon and discovered and isolated all the other inert gases.

Nicoll suggests that these occasions for possible evolution are successive states or stages that have to be overcome. Unless man transcends these states they will re-appear in recurrence. But though saying that Ramsay saw that it is possible to live a life in recurrence differently, Nicoll also says that this can only be done through *inward change*. There are three types of people: those living a life of 'absolute recurrence', who, though seeming outwardly sovereign and successful, everything being easy because they have done it all 'before', make no 'advance' in a spiritual sense, still being bound to the wheel of life; those who are *descending* (but because Nicoll believes nothing in the more-dimensional world can be destroyed, he disagrees with Ouspensky over 'the absolute destruction of souls', seeing instead that everyone must eventually enter a spiral of ascent); and those who are *ascending*, 'improving' in each life, reaching Plato's ideal of all knowledge (Nicoll 1952:177). How does this happen?

As Ouspensky has, so Nicoll argues (in his chapter 'Recurrence in the Same Time') that the idea of the possibility of recurrence must rest on higher dimensions of time than the fourth (and vice-versa). Nicoll has already suggested that the possibility of experiencing all the moments of the life together suggests that the world line of the life might be circular. If the world line of the life lived in the fourth dimension does form a circle it must have a dimension accessible to it on either side, so that it can bend to the right or left on the *surface* (rather than line) of the fifth dimension that has length and breadth. Nicoll says that ideas of circling time and recurrence of time were common in ancient times and he cites many authors in support of this. He says that Plato suggests that there are other cycles than the cycle of time itself and that each phenomenon, including man, has its own time, its own cycle, its own aeon, which recurs but not commensurately with time's aeon itself (*Republic* 6.498D.). Interlocking cycles are, as it were, wheels within wheels, much as in the vision of Ezekiel, which 'rabbinical writers regarded as representative of the *whole* system of nature' (Nicoll 1952:161). Plato also draws the conclusion that 'the soul of man is immortal and at one time has an end which is termed dying, and at another time is born again, but is never destroyed (Nicoll 1952:170); during repeated incarnations a man may come to 'reach all knowledge'. This search for truth, which can

only take place in life, cannot be completed in one 'lifetime'. It is this cosmological model that Nicoll adopts to underpin his analysis of the experimental data and his assertion that 'the *idea of recurrence* is a very old one; [it] is a cognitive *fact* at a higher level of consciousness' (Nicoll 1952:142). He echoes Boehme's idea of the soul having nowhere to go at death by saying:

*beyond our life we meet – our life. We cannot turn in any other direction!* (Nicoll 1952:174 – italics in original).

The idea of recurrent or circling time also suggests to Nicoll that time is a pre-existent creation which the soul inhabits in each recurrence.

The moment itself is always in existence [but] all that belongs to it – all the thoughts, emotions, spoken words, actions, sensations – are re-experienced, re-lived, i.e. the moment is re-entered each time (Nicoll 1952:168).

We have seen that Ramsay understood that recurrence need not be absolute. But for this to be the case there must be a sixth dimension. If the circular fourth-dimensional *world line* curves into a *closed* circle in the fifth dimension this would be 'absolute recurrence', an incessant reliving of exactly the same life in perpetuity. But a life of ascent, of escape from the everlasting round is represented by the circle, seeming when viewed at right angles from the sixth dimension to be closed, in fact being opened by the motion in the sixth dimension to form a spiral. Each turn represents a recurrence, but at a higher level. This idea finds expression in the serpent wound in a spiral around the body of the lion-headed winged humanoid standing on a globe, holding a key in each hand, the Mithraic symbol of the god Aion.<sup>89</sup> Was it this that caused Nicoll to ask whether, in a religion where *boundless time* was deified, where, as Proclus says, people 'who celebrate time as god, eternal, boundless, young and old, and in spiral form', recurrence was a secret teaching of Mithraism? (Nicoll 1952:173) Did Time,

moving in a circle, and according to a right line [as a] spiral have its essence in eternity as abiding always the same, and as possessing infinite power, comprehend the infinity of apparent time, and circularly lead all things to their former condition, and renovate them, and also recall things which became old through it? (Proclus *Timaeus*, in Nicoll 1952:173).

Nicoll points out that Ouspensky's image of the time solid as a spiral is similar (Nicoll 1952:176).

---

<sup>89</sup> A statue of this god owned by the Vatican can be seen in Jung's book *Aion* (Jung CW 9 (ii), frontispiece).

Nicoll also utilises Ouspensky's image of lines branching in all directions from every point in the spiral to form the Time solid, these lines being every possibility. Ouspensky writes:

the *real world* is a world of infinite possibilities. All [*these possibilities*] are actualised, only we do not see it [since] our mind follows the development of possibilities in one direction only (Ouspensky in Nicoll 1952:138).

This image brings back the idea of choosing. All possibilities are 'already there', but we live a particular line through them, making choices at each step. The evolution of the person depends on the line chosen from each point on the spiral. It is in this way that I understand Nicoll's statement that 'we can only understand the evolution of man in terms of recurrence' (Nicoll 1952:180). I understand him to mean that it is the realisation in recurrence of different possibilities that brings evolution to perfection. Taking Ramsay's experience that he needed to make a different choice in this recurrence to escape facing the same conundrum in the next, and that each moment is a pre-existent state which we successively 'inhabit' but which we could transform by making a conscious choice, Nicoll comes to the conclusion that Proclus is right to see recurrent time as 'an invention or contrivance' 'to confer perfection on things imperfect in a return [of the universe] to perfection throughout its parts' (Nicoll 1952:162). Though many recurrences are needed to complete this work, only in this mundane life can we perfect ourselves. But, as Nicoll cites Nietzsche as saying, 'this life is thy eternal life' (Nicoll 1952:159). The need is to transform oneself so as to escape absolute recurrence.

Nicoll's final point in this chapter is that this escape that can only happen through choice *in this life* has to take place under the governance of a special kind of memory that Ouspensky calls *recollection*. The evolution of ourselves is to get beyond ourselves and this depends on *memory* of ourselves. Nicoll cites Ouspensky as saying that

every evolving individual *remembers* and that with this kind of remembering is connected a mysterious quality which distinguishes it from ordinary memory (Nicoll 1952:80).

Nicoll says that only by remembering can we make choice – the evolving man *remembers*. This idea, I contend, underpins the central 'Work' idea of 'self-remembering', though it was Ouspensky and Nicoll rather than Gurdjieff who were to develop it in the sense suggested here.

The last four chapters of Nicoll's book are in one sense a summing up. In another sense they are the culmination of an argument that demonstrates what Nicoll makes of Ouspensky's ideas. I have suggested that Ouspensky presents the world of the invisible as esoteric knowledge. He has shown how this knowledge was preserved and transmitted in the past; how it concerns time and the fourth dimension. He has described the world of the invisible as the time world of higher space; he has shown that man needs to turn himself into 'superman', to 'reveal the idea of superman in his soul' in order to apprehend this world of the invisible. And he has shown also how all this is connected to the idea of the recurrence of life. But I suggest that Ouspensky's book is a theoretical presentation, and does not show the practical significance of what he has written for the seeker of the invisible. Nicoll sees that for this material to be of use in individual transformation it has to be 'psychologically experienced'. In order to give an idea of this psychological understanding Nicoll thinks it necessary in his writing to 'produce a certain kind of effect'. To do this he uses 'the method of analogy, quotation and illustration' (Nicoll 1952:234). We have seen this in the foregoing material. In these final chapters Nicoll pulls together all these analogies and illustrations to present his understanding of the world of the invisible and its significance for man in a manner that illustrates this 'psychological experience'. He brings to fulfilment, I conclude, his account of the possibilities and the significance of Ouspensky's material which he has so abundantly borrowed.

In his chapter 'Two Psychological Systems in Man' Nicoll argues, I say, that the drama of the visible and the invisible, which his book describes, is the resolution of the paradox of there being two psychological systems in man. Nicoll says that the truest feeling of self-existence is connected with a form of consciousness in which the time sense is altered, but this form of consciousness, so completely different from ordinary consciousness is somehow hidden in a man. Citing both the experiences of Ramsay and Tennyson which we have examined above, and alluding to and citing 'literature which deals with the inner nature of man' (Nicoll 1952:183) Nicoll argues that these two psychological systems work in 'different directions; from *outer* and from *inner*', and that they are related to 'natural' man and 'to the three time dimensions of the "invisible world" ' respectively.

Nicoll says, in anticipation, that this situation is a paradox of which the natural man is ignorant, but that its resolution, which Nicoll describes as a union, can be achieved only through the arousal into activity of the hidden system. He says that the characteristics of the hidden or second system, as he calls it, a new sense of time, of *I*, of recurrence, must be related to life (Nicoll 1952:183 *passim*).

Nicoll cites a large number of sources in support of the idea of two psychological systems in man. He says that Plato's idea of the active and passive mind expressing different degrees of illumination in a man is the equivalent of the two systems he is positing. The awakening of the second system Nicoll sees as equivalent to the birth of active mind. This birth, Nicoll says, of which the attempt to grasp time differently is as it were the midwife, can only happen through thinking from the direction of *ideas* and a new conception of reality. But Nicoll thinks that neither Jung's system nor Ouspensky's theories about dimensions are by themselves adequate to the necessary task of building active mind that is capable of understanding time. For active mind is not an extension of ordinary reasoning, which Plato calls passive mind, but a psychological perception of the reality of the invisible.

Something must start in the mind apart from the evidence of the senses, some sense of something greater, a whole conception of a possible higher states, psychologically verifiable, if this different form of understanding, a change of mind or *metanoia*, faith as the evidence of things not seen ('as I believe was originally meant – the certain knowledge of things above passing time' [Nicoll 1952:223]) is to come to birth. The secret of a man's taking hold of his life is in himself, in his willingness to become something else. '*Yea lies in I, and I is to be*' (Nicoll 1952:186-214). Nicoll addresses how this may come about in the next chapter, 'The Creation of Now'.

Nicoll has argued that the first steps approaching the invisible were the overcoming of first the personal psychology, the 'grief, distress and dolour, envy, suspicion, anger etc.' that are the fuel of self-love, and then overcoming the obstacle of 'defects of the 'perceptual consciousness' (Nicoll 1952:217). The next stage is for a man no longer to be 'a spectator of time', but to enlarge his mind beyond the range of the senses and the body of three dimensions in passing time which he regards

as himself so as to sense that he is *all his life* in the fourth dimension. In doing this he becomes conscious of the fourth dimension in his life. Nicoll also says that a man would in doing this also unite himself, bringing together the many *I*'s that make up the ordinary person, by being conscious of them (a central 'Work' idea).

But Nicoll sees this state of consciousness of the four-dimensional *noumenon* of the life not as the final goal of this process, but only as 'a state of heightened consciousness intermediate between ordinary consciousness and the pure sense of *one* or eternal existence' (Nicoll 1952:218). Though he calls it aeon, he distinguishes two levels of this. This one, the lower, consciousness of the four-dimensional nature of the body, is 'Aeon in its time-sense referring to the life throughout time; in its other (higher) sense [it refers to] to something beyond time' (Nicoll 1952:218). The consciousness that perceives existence in the fourth dimension must be above it, and of another order. For the fourth dimension to be real and perceptible for us there must be extension into the fifth dimension, into 'eternity' where a new synthesis of life, an expression of the fullest sense of individual existence, can be created. The bridge between these two states of Aeon, which Nicoll calls respectively 'the living existence of all our life' and 'that fullness of consciousness [truly] called *aeonian*' (Nicoll 1952:218) is a new understanding of Living Time.

Nicoll says that what is needed in practical terms to cross this bridge is to bring the consciousness of the fourth dimension of his life into everything a man does, being active (using active mind), rather than being reactive (using passive mind). This can only happen through the effect of very powerful ideas and emotions. A man needs to act from himself through such ideas, something that natural man, who is *dead*, cannot. Nicoll says that such acts, trivial or not in worldly eyes, active and not reactive, have a quality that carries them past time into the now of eternity and makes them completely acceptable to God. They are moments of self-existence in which whatever is done is done 'to the glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10.21- Nicoll 1952:221). Done with a 'deliberately created sense of something greater entering into every moment', they let a man cross the bridge from time

to Living Time, bringing the sense of life into every moment. In this way a man can penetrate the eternal reality of his own being, making the world of his inward perception grow. He effects a real transformation of himself, and by so doing builds the world in himself. In this state a man is 'both a spectator of himself and really himself' (The 'Work' has the idea of 'observing "I"' turning into 'real I'). He is in 'higher space, a higher state of consciousness', in which he is aware of the eternal reality of his own being. He sees that the cause of his existence is internal to him, and that nothing is prior to him except the eternal order of real causes (Nicoll 1952:218ff).

The question of how to pass to this higher state can be framed, says Nicoll, as one of *the higher level of consciousness and what will awaken it*. He says at the beginning of the book that it is about *ideas*, meaning something that has the power to change our sense of things. The invisible world, where ideas play on our thought, feeling and imagination, has a real structure and exists in its own 'space'. The impact of ideas on this world is real. It is they that awaken this second system, this world of the invisible. Nicoll closes his chapter with a list of those ideas that he sees as effective in that awakening: higher space and higher levels of consciousness connected with it; the existence *in Time itself*; a sense of *I* unconnected with the consciousness of passing time; the awakening of and cognition of a higher space; the illusory nature of death, there being no destruction of anything, and its disappearance to us being merely its movement on to another dimension of existence; active and passive mind; orders of truth and reality and natural and spiritual interpretations of them; natural man being incomplete and having no real sense of *I* because the second system is un-awakened in him; and the idea that we need to know, not in the natural sense of the word, but by letting *ideas* touch our consciousness.

In his final chapter, 'The Integration of the life', Nicoll talks again about this moving from the lower aeonic state, that of 'the living existence of all our life' to the higher, that of 'that fullness of consciousness [truly] called *aeonian*', but in terms of the necessity of our lives being extended into the sixth dimension. Nicoll asks: 'is not this the key – that the universe is a series of possible mental

transformations?’ Nicoll 1952:229/235) By changing our attitude to the invisible in recurrence we achieve a recurrence that is not absolute and thereby build and evolve the universe in ourselves. Only from the sixth dimension can the circle of absolute recurrence (the fifth dimension) ‘where we walk around the same point again and again unable to escape from the circle of our associations and habitual reactions’ (Nicoll 1952:240) be opened. Only when recurrence is not absolute, only when we, as Ramsay saw, overcome those problems that, if avoided, present themselves to us again in recurrence, can we change our lives and *leave a trace of ourselves* (which, The Wisdom of Solomon tells us, the unrighteous man does not [Nicoll 1952:231]).<sup>90</sup> Only by understanding that at each moment of our lives Time enters, can we, by remembering ourselves, in that moment make a choice, and leave a trace; the universe evolves in or from our minds. We find the further stage of ourselves which is within us and above us in higher space, an *already-thereness*, a potential in us that, in the fact of its being unrealised gives us an unhappy feeling and a sense of incompleteness (Nicoll 1954:240). The achievement of recurrence that is not absolute is the crucial mechanism of regeneration.

This conscious act of connection with the entry of Time itself into our life is the creation of now in us, and is a realisation of time-dimensions. Meeting Time entering us in this way is to discern with the spirit the higher invisible degrees of the WORLD, the ‘All – the WORLD’ as inner truth that is within us. Regarding this act of knowing ourselves Nicoll quotes Eckhart: ‘to know himself a man must ever be on watch over himself, holding his outer faculties, *be awake*’. It is this waking up that the Gospel speaks of (as Nicoll notes here, saying also that they deal with higher states of consciousness possible for man). But apart from saying that such experiences as Ramsay’s (and by implication Ouspensky’s) ‘may briefly turn the soul in the direction of another order of things’, but that ‘some form of work on oneself to effect a gradual transformation of oneself, driven by a desire to hear and know another interpretation of things’, was necessary, Nicoll comes no closer than this in telling us

---

<sup>90</sup> Nicoll’s exposition of ‘the Work’ expounds the idea that ‘*Essence*’ will recur, but if there has been no real change to it, no trace of ourselves has been left on it, if we have had no real moments of genuine understanding, we will not remember, and will live exactly the same life again (*Commentaries*: 421).

what exactly we have to do to bring about this state in ourselves. Perhaps it is not possible to put this into words; only face-to-face teaching is possible for such things. As Pogson says: 'the real teaching is always oral and secret' (Pogson 1961: xiii).

Nicoll says that for the integration of our lives we need to understand how the mechanism of recurrence works in a higher cosmology. Saying that what he says regarding this is 'my personal view' (Nicoll 1952:229), he says that the diagram of Isis and Osiris holding the snake of Apophis between them in a series of four times seven coils that he places on the title page of his book represents the progress of a life through four cycles of recurrence, each of seven limbs (that is, the life recurs seven times). When 'the *momentum* [of a given recurring life] wanes and it is then possible to change the life' (Nicoll 1952:229) the person is reincarnated, that is born as 'someone else' in a different part of time. It is not clear whether this reincarnation is the result of recurrence that is not absolute, or whether that can take place also during the cycle of recurrences; Nicoll says that through recurrence that is not absolute 'another form of life may be entered upon' (Nicoll 1952:229). He also suggests that each reincarnation is a successive stage of life that must be passed through, but that progress is from *passive* mind (Isis) to the 'full awakening of the *active* mind' (Osiris), and that the four stages each of seven limbs, represent 'man as time, man as four-dimensional, five-dimensional, six-dimensional' (Nicoll 1952:244). Lest this be thought of in too concrete a way, Nicoll has already emphasised that this 'mystery of time is in ourselves' (Nicoll 1952:239). The mystic ocean of experience is not something outside ourselves which we must cross, but if we really touch *now* we will know that all our lives, lived and unlived, meet here, beyond time, in *now*, where we will find all we need to overcome any problem we may face. Nicoll quotes what he calls 'that strange phrase in the *Wisdom of Solomon*: 'He, perfected in a short time, fulfilled a long time' (Nicoll 1952:239). This perfection, the end of a process of transformation or evolution, is the goal of the participant in the drama of the visible and the invisible that is life.

When in 1952 Kenneth Walker, the surgeon then counselling Nicoll on his illness, read the book on its publication he thought it better than *The New Man*, which I discuss in Chapter Six, telling Nicoll that ‘this is your masterpiece, your *chef d’oeuvre*, [something at last] adequate to your genius’ (Letter to Nicoll in Pogson 1961:266). Reviewing the book for the *Sunday Times* (January, 1953) Walker described it as ‘one of those rare books which may have a lasting effect on the reader’s thinking’ (Pogson 1961:267). The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer referred to the ‘breath-taking vision that Dr Nicoll made possible to his readers’ (*Times Literary Supplement* in Pogson 1961:267). My estimation is that these reviews do justice to the originality of Nicoll’s thought. I argue that in *Living time* Nicoll

formulated his thoughts on the reality behind appearances, expressing Ouspensky’s ideas absorbed by him on dimensions, time, Eternity, recurrence in the light of his own philosophical and psychological knowledge (Pogson 1961:117).

In *Living Time* Nicoll explicitly adopts the most advanced position that he was ever to take on the fourth dimension, recurrence and Time. While there are a small number of references to recurrence in the *Commentaries*, from which it is clear that Nicoll holds absolutely to everything that he wrote in *Living Time*, and while Ouspensky adhered to his own ideas to the end of his life, the theories of higher space and Living Time play little part in ‘the Work’. They are completely absent from Nicoll’s Gospel exegesis in the *New Man* and *The Mark*. However, I mention a document in the recently discovered material now in the Edinburgh University archive<sup>91</sup> in which Nicoll gives an exegesis of two ideas he mentions in *Living Time*, *palingenesis* [παλιγγενεις] and *apokatastasis* [ἀποκαταστασις]. In this exegesis Nicoll interprets *palingenesis* (at Matthew 19:28) as absolute recurrence, and *apokatastasis* (at Acts 3:21) as recurrence for ‘they that are accounted worthy to attain to that Aeon’ (Luke 20:35), that is, the ‘next Aeon’ (Matthew 13:32) exactly in line with what he wrote in *Living Time* (though there they were considered as terms of pagan philosophy, and no biblical references were given). I contend that this shows that although time and the fourth dimension play no explicit part in Nicoll’s exegesis of the Gospels found in *The New Man* and *The*

---

<sup>91</sup> *Chapter V*, dated 10. May, 1930.

*Mark* (as I shall argue in Chapter Six) his ideas about them nevertheless remained central to his view of the Gospels.

Before passing on to Nicoll's description of 'the Work' (for I argue that is what the *Commentaries* are) I re-iterate what I claimed for Nicoll's re-working of Jung's psychology in *Dream Psychology*. Nicoll's chief concern in writing *Living Time*, which he will argue is also the chief, indeed the only concern of the Gospels, is the transformation of the individual, his 'evolution' into a state of perfection which, when Nicoll returns to his natal Christianity, he will call The Kingdom of Heaven. This seeming shift of emphasis from philosophy to psychology to religion might, however, be seen as determinative for the classification of Nicoll's thought in line with Antoine Faivre's idea of 'Western Esotericism' (Hanegraaff 2004:338).<sup>92</sup> It has been asserted that the *Leitmotiv* of Ouspensky's thinking in *New Model* is esotericism. While Nicoll's extension of Ouspensky's ideas in *Living Time* has been characterised as a transformation of a philosophy of esotericism into a psychology of the transformation of the person with considerable religious overtones, I suggest that in this process of taxonomical transformation Nicoll's thought nonetheless remains a form of esotericism. This shift of emphasis from the philosophical to the psychological/religious, and the supreme significance of the idea of the transformation of the individual is specifically illustrative of one of the six characteristics that Faivre cites as markers of the discipline of Western Esotericism; that is, as Faivre says, 'the belief in the process of spiritual transformation by which the inner man is regenerated and re-connected with the divine' (Hanegraaff 2004:340). But I think that Nicoll's psychological/religious re-working of Ouspensky's philosophical ideas on esotericism shows also all the other markers that Faivre lists as characteristic of the "form of thought" that is Western Esotericism (Hanegraaff 2004:340). For Nicoll

---

<sup>92</sup> Faivre sees the tradition of 'Western Esotericism' running from 'the Renaissance of Hermeticism and the so-called "occult philosophy", through Alchemy, Rosicrucianism, Paracelsianism, Christian kabbalah, Theosophy, Christian theosophy, and Illuminism' (Hanegraaff 2001: 338) through to the revival of much of this thought in the New Age movement, and a modern evaluation of its significance through the writings of religious anthropologists such as Joseph Campbell, Jung and Mircea Eliade. Frances Yates' studies of Rosicrucianism and 'hermetic philosophy' have been a formative influence in the modern revival of this tradition and have contributed significantly to its acceptance and recognition as a serious academic field of study in its own right, of its being, as Hanegraaff says, no longer 'dominated by apologists rather than scholars' (Hanegraaff: 2004:339).

holds as axiomatic, I suggest, not only what Faivre holds to be the four definitive 'intrinsic characteristics' of Western Esotericism; that is

a belief in invisible and non-causal "correspondences" between all visible and invisible dimensions of the cosmos; a perception of nature as permeated and animated by a divine presence or life-force; a concentration on the religious imagination as a power that provides access to world and levels of reality intermediate between the material world and God; and [already noted] the belief in the process of spiritual transformation by which the inner man is regenerated and re-connected with the divine (Faivre 1994, 10-15).

It is plain that Nicoll also presumes what Faivre calls the two 'non-intrinsic markers – frequently but not always present' in this form of thought, that is:

the belief in a fundamental concordance between several or all spiritual traditions, and the idea of a more-or-less secret transmission of spiritual knowledge (Faivre 1994, 10-15).

It seems clear, from what has been demonstrated earlier, that Nicoll's ideas as adumbrated in *Living Time* conform to Faivre's views of esotericism. Nicoll posits a correspondence between the visible and the invisible, between phenomenon and *noumenon*. The life-force, the impelling power behind the will to transformation and evolution is the ALL, Aeon, heaven, the universe, a higher order, the one or eternal existence. Connection with this life-force is through the exercise of spiritual imagination in the form of ideas, increased consciousness and faith in its real sense, and another understanding of time and of everything. The crown of the whole system is the necessity and possibility of transformation of the individual through inward change to reconcile him or her with the ALL. All philosophies or religions worthy of the name have the exposition of this possibility as their core evangel, and in essence they all say the same thing. They also say that only those who prepare themselves to receive this message will have the ears to hear it, and that it is to a great extent transmitted only through hidden, secret pathways to such people. It will emerge from what follows that both Nicoll's view of 'the Work', to be treated in the next chapter, and Nicoll's view of the Gospels, addressed in Chapter Six, also affirm Faivre's thesis and locates Nicoll's thought very firmly in the tradition of Western Esotericism as adumbrated by Faivre.

## **Chapter 5: Nicoll's view of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky's 'Work'**

When Nicoll was evacuated to Birdlip, a small village in Gloucestershire at the beginning of the Second World War, he had behind him ten years of experience leading his own independent groups (Pogson 1961: 135). Before the war Nicoll had organised his 'weekend' cottage at Tyeponds in Essex along the line of Gurdjieff's Institute, even to the extent of undertaking building works there (Pogson 1961:120ff). Evacuation to Gloucestershire, caused by the requisitioning of Tyeponds, changed radically the nature of the groups. Many pupils were unwilling to accompany Nicoll to Gloucestershire; others were called up for war service. Whereas Tyeponds had been a weekend residence, Nicoll continuing to work in London, residence in Gloucestershire was permanent, Nicoll having retired in 1939. He assumed total responsibility for the families of some group members who had been called up (Pogson 1961:141). Groups continued to meet in London, however. Fulford Bush, a retired businessman with Chinese connections, initially Nicoll's patient, later helper, by 1940 a seasoned group leader, remained in London, holding weekly meetings at his studio in Redcliffe Gardens. Bush sent questions to Nicoll in advance of these meetings, and Nicoll replied with extended commentaries (Pogson 1961:141). The letter in the *Commentaries* (8), in which Nicoll says 'I will try later on to write to you in more detail', is the first of these letters. In 1941 these replies became the subject matter for Nicoll's own meetings in Birdlip, this establishing the pattern, maintained until Nicoll's death, of writing a paper on a Friday evening – 'Many versions of each paper were written – in fact the paper seemed to evolve' (Pogson 1961:198). Pogson read the papers out on the Saturday evening, copies being sent to those unable to attend meetings, and to London, this making the teaching at Birdlip and London parallel (Pogson 1961:146).

When written these weekly commentaries remained within the confines of the System. Even when in 1948 Bush, forming a committee with Beryl Pogson and Catherine Nicoll, had what became the first three volumes of the *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky* printed by Vincent Stuart, a well-known publisher and proprietor of a London bookshop

that specialised in philosophical and religious subjects, this publication was for group members only. Although Pogson was tasked with editing the texts for publication, Bush's intention, noted in a letter to Pogson (Pogson 1961:257) was to leave them in their 'original' condition, and the finished printed texts match exactly the transcribed versions in Nicoll's notebooks, Pogson merely making the selection. These volumes appeared in 1949, when Gurdjieff announced that it was time for this teaching to be made known to the world (Pogson 1961:259), thus in effect granting permission for 'Work' ideas to be freely published. But though the first three volumes of the *Commentaries* appeared in a public edition in 1952, the complete set only went on the open market from 1957.<sup>93</sup>

The most striking reception of the volumes was that by Jeanne de Salzmänn, Gurdjieff's successor as leader of the movement, who, seeing that the books were a detailed description of 'the Work', praised them as showing the 'ideas-system, so clear and understandable for everyone, exposed in the genuine order in which they were given out with the exact formulation without any distortion, [going] side by side with Mr. Ouspensky's *Fragments*'<sup>94</sup> (Letter from de Salzmänn to Nicoll in Pogson 1961:263). The appearance of the volumes drew many people to Nicoll, making demands on him for interviews with strangers (Pogson 1961: 272), more so than with the other books, perhaps because in the *Commentaries* Nicoll's connection with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky is at its most explicit.

My procedure in the thesis hitherto has been to present the writings that 'inspired' Nicoll before giving an account of his work. The situation in this chapter is somewhat different, however. Gurdjieff was notorious for teaching 'the Work' in a haphazard manner, leaving his pupils to sink or swim in their efforts to draw together into a coherent view what he had said. The first of Gurdjieff's major works, setting out 'the Work' in a highly allegorical fashion, *Beelzebub's Tales*, only begun in 1924 (Wellbeloved 2002:28), was not printed until 1949. It seems unlikely that Nicoll would have had

---

<sup>93</sup> In the archive now at Edinburgh University there are a number of books containing papers of a similar type, dating from the beginning of the period of Nicoll's independent supervision of groups (1931) right up to 1940. These papers (none of which finds its way into the *Commentaries*) also have a record of the ensuing debate. So the idea of the weekly paper, and its usual layout were already well established by 1941.

<sup>94</sup> *Fragments [of an unknown teaching]* is the sub-title of *In Search of the Miraculous*, published at much the same time.

access to it before he started writing the *Commentaries*, though, since it was sometimes read out in Gurdjieff's meetings he may well have known of its existence. And although Ouspensky, in contrast to Gurdjieff, produced, in *In Search of the Miraculous* (the 'fragments' mentioned above) an extraordinarily complete and systematic account of 'the Work', this book, though started probably while Ouspensky was still in Russia, was not published until 1951. The typescripts for the chapters of this work are dated between 1926 and 1935 (Ouspensky Archive at Yale University). What access Nicoll had to them we do not know, though undoubtedly the contents of the book underpinned what Ouspensky taught. I argue therefore that Nicoll's account of 'the Work' in the *Commentaries* is not based on these writings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. I suggest instead that these *Commentaries* are a response to Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's face-to-face teaching, and there is no literary 'inspiration' for Nicoll's work.

But the situation here is different also for another reason. As Bart Ehrman says, to present what you read in your own words is already the second step of interpretation (the first being the actual process of reading). Nicoll's presentation of Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's teachings is in this way obviously Nicoll's comment, and cannot possibly be, *pace* de Salzman, 'without distortion', not least because as the title tells us, it is a *commentary* upon the teaching. But further, in this way everything I write that purports to be what I think Nicoll is saying is, even before I specifically comment on it, is a form of comment (Ehrman 2005:217- 218), a *de facto* analysis of the *Commentaries*. But the situation here is yet more extreme, because the exigencies of space, and the purpose in the structure of my thesis for which I marshal the material demand rigorous selection, the unsystematic nature of these writings meaning that my ordering of them accords with my own assessment of the relative importance of the various elements of the material.

Though printed as psychological commentaries on the teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, the *Commentaries* were originally presentations of 'Work' ideas for teaching and discussion. In the printed version the papers are arranged without exception chronologically. Though wide-ranging in

subject matter, each talk is focussed on the idea given in the title. Although there are continuous groups of papers (one has thirteen) on the same topic, the organisation of the talks overall is not on thematic lines. The content of the talks suggests that listeners were familiar with the overall structure of the system. Although overall the talks cover comprehensively Nicoll's ideas on 'the Work' they do not expound them in a structured manner. There is also very detailed discussion of what might be called the metaphysical, theological, anthropological, psychological and religious (mostly Christian) aspects of 'Work' ideas. In presenting Nicoll's view of 'the Work', which is the primary purpose of this chapter, my intention is primarily to describe it. Therefore my presentation of what I consider to be Nicoll's thought, even though highly selective, will entail considerable stretches of exposition of the theory and practice of 'the Work'. Though giving the impression of a précis of Nicoll's text, this will be false because what makes up the narrative comes from widely-spaced parts of this work. The narrative will be presented either: without comment; with comment that compares the presentation with Gurdjieff's and/or Ouspensky's presentation of it from other sources (normally presented in footnotes); with comment that compares the presentation with Gurdjieff's and/or Ouspensky's comment cited in Nicoll's text (of which there is a great deal); or with comment that relates what is being discussed to ideas discussed elsewhere in this thesis. I offer lengthy comment on the crucial concept of 'self-remembering'.

Though having dispensed with an introductory outline of the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky I supplement (as noted) Nicoll's commentary with footnotes quoting from Azize's compilation, *Gurdjieff's Early Talks 1914-1931* (Gurdjieff 2014 – an more comprehensive reworking of Gurdjieff's *Views from the Real World*, but without Jeanne de Salzman's preface). These lectures are a simulacrum of Gurdjieff's words (a 'transcription' of lectures he gave). I also quote in these footnotes from Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> In the main text of this chapter and in footnotes I cite page numbers from the *Commentaries* as numbers only in normal brackets – (90).

### **Nicoll's presentation of the teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky**

Nicoll's presentation of 'the Work' affirms Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's cosmological views of creation, which is seen as an emanation from the Absolute (the 'Work's' term for God as the fundamental creative principle). The 'Ray of Creation', 'a diagram of God' (1386), drawn by Ouspensky at Gurdjieff's behest, shows a hierarchical arrangement of seven cosmoses. Gurdjieff says that the creation proceeds according to the 'Law of Seven, or 'Law of Octaves' (119) and that this law also governs the anthropology of man, who has in himself a seven-fold hierarchy of possible states or conditions, and is therefore 'man number one' to seven according to the state of his inner development (496). This is 'the Work's' rendering of the idea of macrocosmos and microcosmos (1130, 1398). Every phenomenon is a manifestation of the Absolute, working through the 'Law of Three' (108), according to which nothing can be manifest except through a dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, which is rendered by Gurdjieff as 'Holy Affirming, Holy Denying and Holy Reconciling' (Waldberg 1981:97), and more usually in 'the Work' as active, passive and neutralising forces (506). The emanation of each cosmos is governed by this law of three, and each cosmos, increasingly multifarious, is therefore governed by an increasing number of laws (762-4). Man lives in his physical state in the lowest-but-one cosmos. 'The Work' sees his placement here as an experiment by God in self-evolution (238, 538, 1617). The purpose of man's life is to evolve himself psychologically so that he can live at a higher level, psychologically, aspiring to the highest level possible for him (1337), the level of the cosmos of the sun, which for him is God (1386-8). The world is a school, down into which man is sent to be tested (the true meaning of temptation-249). 'The Work' sees it as impossible for man to complete this evolution (this term being of spiritual or psychological significance only, having nothing to do with Darwin's idea) in one lifetime. Although Gurdjieff has no idea of recurrence, and Ouspensky concedes that the idea is not part of the doctrines of 'the Work', for Nicoll it is, as I have shown in my chapter on *Living Time*, the crucial mechanism for bringing about that perfection in a man that is the goal of this evolution.

Nicoll maintains that esoteric knowledge shows a man the cosmological situation as outlined above, and offers teaching enabling him to evolve himself. Called by both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky 'The Fourth Way' because it eschews the ways of the fakir, monk and yogi (the first three 'ways' to esoteric knowledge, according to Gurdjieff) (231, 242, 1030), this teaching reaches a man in his ordinary life. But this teaching is seen by 'the Work' as an example of 'C influences', that is esoteric knowledge revealed to certain gifted individuals [called by 'the Work' 'the inner circle of humanity', (67)] which, coming up against 'A influences', that is the welter of impressions coming from the world, by this collision turns into 'B influences' (73). Other examples of 'B influences' are scriptures, particularly, Nicoll says, the Gospels.

In the *Commentaries* Nicoll re-echoes his view set down in *Living Time* that the purpose of esotericism, and the teaching of 'the Work', is to show man how to experience psychologically the 'higher' world that Nicoll claims is in him, called in *Living Time* the world of the invisible. Calling this teaching 'an inner study' (890), Nicoll says that the world of the invisible is distinct from a man's body and the outer world (1297). According to Nicoll esotericism teaches (as do the Gospels, [530]) that a man can transform himself so as to be conscious of the world of the invisible in himself, which is a higher level of reality above the sensory, 'the reality that is really you' (48, 527). This process of self-realisation, called by Nicoll self-evolution (238, 538, 1917), is a struggle in the school of the world (249) against nature (1286) in which God does not intervene directly (1238). But though esoteric teaching shows a man how to evolve, it can only be understood using higher mental capacities that the teaching itself develops (1236).

'The Work', a 'second education', builds in man a mind which can understand and bring about self-evolution. To practise 'the Work' a man must become again a little child as when he started his first education, given by the world (1321, 1360) (unless ye become as little children [Matthew 18:3-1325]). To complete his evolution he must awaken from his mundane state of consciousness, which the Work calls 'sleep' (1253), and *think* in a new way about himself (1298-9). Through this 'new way

of thinking' (237), a 'right form of thinking' (1238), the thinking of 'Greater Mind' (1024), a mind withdrawn from the world of the senses is created (as Nicoll has described in *Living Time*). Nicoll says that by this kind of thinking, different from 'the wisdom that is foolishness with God' (1 Corinthians 3:19 -1224, 1253) a man creates the inner world of himself, 'the invisible world of your own thoughts and feelings' (1763) called 'heavenly' (1460) and 'spiritual' (1763). This non-sensual thinking is not a given in man, but the realisation of a latent capacity (100, 1303). The process of *conscious evolution* (237) produces the '*conscious man*' (1237) who is of a higher level of being (1297) and, by the creation of himself *by himself* [we must create ourselves'- 1332) realises in himself his 'Real "I"' (1348). The central symbol of 'the Work', which Gurdjieff calls 'Esoteric Christianity' (1239) is Christ, not the historical personage, but a psychological image called 'Christ' (1348). The 'realisation of the 'real "I"' is the equivalent of 'the Kingdom of Heaven [that] lies within you' (1348).

Self-evolution, the creation of a new mind and the realisation of the real I of a person, is also described by 'the Work' as the development of 'essence'. In this view a man at birth has no exterior personality (1611). What 'personality' he has is his 'essence', which develops in infancy to a certain extent until confrontation with the world through upbringing and education forms a personality around it like a crust, armour, or mask – Nicoll says that Ouspensky calls these layers overcoats (1325).<sup>96</sup> As personality grows 'essence' stops developing. A man then identifies with this personality, although it is made by confrontation with outside influences, often in contradiction to his real impulses. But even so the contradiction between 'essence' and personality remains, and personality can be kept in place and functioning only by repressing 'essence' and by lying, inwardly and outwardly, which destroys a person internally (1454). A man's personality is never really him; his 'essence' is what he really is (1265). Worse, he also forms a 'false personality', an imaginary idea of what his personality is like, his 'imaginary "I"', which conducts a wrong experience of himself to himself (1324), and from which, wearing it as a mask, he lives in the 'earth' of himself, his most

---

<sup>96</sup> 'the dictates of the inner voice [are] normally covered up with a kind of crust' [Gurdjieff 2014:368].

external side;<sup>97</sup> the formation of this 'false personality' is a 'fall' (894, 1363). And while his 'essence' is unified, his personality, to manage the contradictions in the situation, is multiple, or 'legion', fractured, infinitely adaptable to the exigencies of maintaining the lie that is his personality, a series of separate false 'I's', each 'caliph for an hour', each protected from awareness of the contradictory elements in all the others by a form of insulation called 'buffers' (755-761), which renders a man unconscious of or asleep to this situation.<sup>98</sup> In this state a man has no fixed will, cannot really do anything in the world except react mechanically to external stimuli (282),<sup>99</sup> and lives through his lower mental centres (1110-1111). Nicoll says that Gurdjieff said that such a man, having no psychology, is a machine (935, 1533). 'The Work' sees most people, who remain oblivious to this conflicted situation for the whole of their lives, as either in prison, or asleep (416-7). Those who wish to change this are escapees, people trying to wake up.<sup>100</sup>

No man can be compelled to cast off this bondage. Only those who *from themselves* wish to be transformed *for themselves* (942—italics in original) can do this. Nicoll says: 'there is no reason why you should do this Work. There is no external proof of it' (936, 250). 'Only you can develop you' (1259). Nicoll quotes Gurdjieff as saying: 'I have good leather to sell. But you have to make the shoes yourself' (1299). Some, either because they wish to know themselves, or are dissatisfied by life, gradually come to realise their situation, and seek to change it. How might this happen? Nicoll explains that the first step is threefold. First, a man must *observe himself uncritically*, without judging himself. Then he must see that he is *identified, and attempt to prevent this*. Thirdly he must kill 'negative emotions', 'the greatest filth in a man' (Gurdjieff quoted at 161) in himself. These three things taken together represent the central 'Work' concept of 'self-remembering'.

---

<sup>97</sup> As in the Lord's Prayer, thy will be done in earth... Also, our 'daily bread' is no such thing; the word is *epiousios*, (Lat. *supersubstantialis*) meaning super-substantial, from above [Gurdjieff 2014:941].

<sup>98</sup> Man, taken together as a whole [man no 3], is simply the lodging place of several independent individuals [Gurdjieff 2014:381].

<sup>99</sup> There are two kinds of doing. Automatic doing and according to wish [Gurdjieff 2014:405]. Normally forces that move the universe *do things to* people. Everything most men 'do' is pure 'mechanical' reaction to this [Gurdjieff 2014:38].

<sup>100</sup> A change is possible [but] many reasons may prevent this [Gurdjieff 2014:36]. The ordinary man can live all his life as he is, if he wishes [Gurdjieff 2014:36].

I shall shortly describe what 'self-remembering' means in practical terms. But first it needs to be said that for a person to be able to self-remember they need *sufficient energy to undertake this process of change* against nature; this energy comes from surplus force not needed for ordinary life (1133-italics in original). Only those who can learn to generate and conserve surplus energy can undertake self-remembering and build in themselves the real self (513, 1286). This energy is easily wasted by cultivating passions, by harbouring negative emotions, especially resentment, and by identifying with the personality. Nicoll reproduces Ouspensky's account of how a man generates energy in what 'the Work' calls the 'three-storey factory' of his 'moving, emotional and intellectual centres' (392) that processes the three types of 'food' that he ingests: these foods are the ordinary food he eats, the air he breathes and the impressions he receives both from outside and inside (1404). In the earlier stages of the process of generating energy by 'digesting' these foods, relatively coarse 'matter', normal food and air, is refined and turned into literal physical energy through the normal chemical processes in the body caused by the 'shock' of food being burnt using air breathed in (428-430). Nicoll maintains that in this process besides physical energy a more refined form of energy is also produced; this energy drives normal mental functioning, called by the Work 'formatory thinking' (195). Production of this lowest form of mental energy is a purely natural process requiring no conscious input. But Nicoll suggests, following Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, that it is possible for more refined forms of energy to be produced if what Gurdjieff calls 'impressions' are used as a 'food'. But this cannot happen unconsciously; a shock has to be administered to the system consciously. Nicoll maintains that this shock, called 'first conscious shock', while analogous to the natural shock that breathing represents, only takes place when, under the influence of certain kind of thinking incoming impressions are made to produce this shock (429). The kind of thinking needed for this, already alluded to, involves the heightened awareness of self through 'self-observation', the withdrawal of identification, and the killing of negative emotions (448ff). This thinking and the shock it produces has a physical impact on the system. Ouspensky:

[*Self-remembering*] has not only psychological meaning but also changes the subtlest part of our metabolism and produces definite chemical effects in our body related to the idea of the transformation of coarse elements into finer ones (Ouspensky 1953:17-18).

From this I argue that what is referred to in Nicoll's and Ouspensky's writings as 'coarse energy' is physical energy generated by chemical reactions in the body. More refined energy, such as the lowest sort that drives normal mental processes, has a physical basis; we get tired expending energy through mental work. But whether there is a line between physical and psychic energy, or whether the two are part of a seamless continuum is not for me to say. But I understand Nicoll to be implying that the more refined types of energy, which are psychic, not available except when generated by '*first conscious shock*', are the product of refinement of coarser physical energy, which, if this second shock is not administered, remains coarse physical energy.

Thus we can also say of this process that we do not save energy to be able to self-remember, nor self-remember to conserve surplus energy. Both self-remembering and the production of surplus energy are aspects of the same process, which proceeds in a kind of virtuous circle, energy saved leading to self-remembering leading to more energy saved.

I now turn to a closer examination of '*self-remembering*'. "Self-remembering", the most important thing of all has many degrees and stages' (457). Although for purposes of exposition the three facets of '*self-remembering*', uncritical self-observance, withdrawal of identification and the killing of negative emotions, are treated separately, they are in practice indivisible.<sup>101</sup>

Uncritical self-observance is the first step in '*self-remembering*' (1250). Nicoll says that 'with a little real *observation* a man can become freer from this personality', from 'what does not belong to him'

---

<sup>101</sup> Gurdjieff said that the central point of 'the Work' is '*self-remembering*' (Webb 1980: 148). 'Only by throwing off this slavery, [by moving] from the river [of life subject to] accident to impersonal fate, to mass hypnosis [Gurdjieff 2014:38], [from] the passive river [Gurdjieff 2014:351], to the active river [Gurdjieff 2014:351] [where life is determined by] a personal fate [Gurdjieff 2014:38], by dying to all the blessings of the world that are in the first river, and experiencing [in the second river] the resurrection, [this] while in life, [can this] first chief liberation of Man [be achieved] [Gurdjieff 2014:38-40]; by '*observing yourself*', the first step, 'sufficient for several years' [Gurdjieff 2014:378], by having 'sincerity with yourself, [you must] take off your mask, your 'ordinary, accidental, external, *Personality*' [Gurdjieff 2014:390], your ordinary self) the thick crust grown over essence' [Gurdjieff 2014:392] by '*considering*', '*remembering yourself*'.

but which he has acquired from false personality (1324). For this to happen a change of attitude, a change of mind, is needed; the mind has to be refashioned (1250), the attention *turned* inward. This turning inwards, an ‘entering into your chamber’ (Matthew 6:6-1238), is *metanoia*. Dividing himself into two parts, the inner and the outer (36, 218, 1236), a man observes himself uncritically (1247), changing his centre of gravity (1247).<sup>102</sup> We have seen these things from Nicoll’s account in *Living Time* of the transformation process he there describes. This starting point, enjoined by John the Baptist at the opening of the Gospel story (*metanoiēte!* [μετανοιετε]-1124-6), and, in Nicoll’s view the most important thing in ‘the Work’, but the least attempted (1250), the first step in awakening from sleep (1253/4), is a kind of mental gymnastics that means a man sees inwardly what he does, and sees himself seeing it. At first this self-observation is uncritical; without getting to know what he is really like he cannot advance, but if he is too critical he will be discouraged and repress what he discovers (335).

The second step in self-remembering is the withdrawal of identification from the personality and the world. Nicoll argues that when a man is identified with his personality he harbours the illusion he is a unity (1236). Gurdjieff said that *identifying* was the greatest enemy of ‘the Work’ (1444). The rich man who asks Christ about the Kingdom of Heaven is identified (Matthew 19:16-285). His riches consist in his being full of himself, rather than poor in spirit (1444), and he must sell all he has (give up his powerful personality – he is called at Luke 18:18 ‘a certain ruler’) by giving to the poor, that is the poor, ignorant and weak part of him that is his essence, from which his real self can grow (69, 295). ‘Self-remembering’ stops a man being unable to distinguish himself from life through identification (61, 1256) by giving him another feeling of himself, expanding his consciousness of himself at the expense of his usual feeling of himself (1522). It lifts himself above himself, above the inner clamour of the various “I”s that passes for consciousness in most men (1262). But this knowing himself, this hating of himself that Christ enjoined (297) is a painful way to follow, though, as Nicoll noted St. Paul says (Romans 8:18-1406), the results are out of proportion to the necessary but

---

<sup>102</sup> The first thing necessary is to separate inner things from outer [Gurdjieff 2014:369].

'conscious suffering' involved. A kind of detachment, an *inner separation*, is needed; then what is observed, even if it is 'inner', in the usual sense, becomes 'outer' to the observing part (1682). Eventually the whole of the 'inner' will become outer to the 'real I' in a state of complete consciousness, and a man will have forsaken his outer self, will have withdrawn his sense of I from everything except the 'real I'. This can be thought of as the destruction of the personality, the overcoming of the ego, a *depersonalisation* (1637), and is a kind of crucifixion in which 'the esoteric symbolic figure of *yourself* – called Christ' – has first to die to the self (1283) so a man can be reborn (399).

But Nicoll warns that a man can only die to himself if he has first awakened in himself; otherwise he will not be re-born (510, 1160). This dying to self is thus not only painful, but may be dangerous.

'Buffers', which ensure that man is not allowed to see more than he can bear usefully of the contradictions in his corrupt [in the proper sense of this word, meaning 'in bits'] personality (1237), of his contradictory pictures of himself (435), allow the formation of the personality around an axle, called 'chief feature' (1370).<sup>103</sup> This could be described as 'what you are really like' not from the point of view of a man's real self, his 'real I', but what his personality is like. Because he identifies with it, his 'chief feature' is one of the hardest things for a man to see (306). To see it involves 'a terrific fight' (460), but there can be no change in 'false personality' and personality if this central axle remains in place. But because 'chief feature' is so integral to the personality, a direct assault on it, whether by himself or by others, either hardens it ['if you were told your Chief Feature by someone it would prevent you from ever realising it for yourself by internal observation'-1371] or destroys the man completely. The buffers act as protection. If you are going to shift yourself from one place, you must prepare another place to stand. Before dying to himself a man must build something else to hold him together, otherwise the removal of this axle (by, for instance, asceticism without understanding, without having worked on himself) may leave him what Nicoll says Gurdjieff

---

<sup>103</sup> 'Every man has a certain feature in his character which is central. It is like an axle around which all his "false personality" revolves. Every man's personal work must consist in struggling against this chief fault' (Ouspensky 1950:226).

called an 'immortal thing' (64, 140, 511). This is the gravamen of the story of Lot (Genesis 19:15-19; Nicoll 1954:42); it was a terrible thing for him to leave the level of Sodom, because he was not ready for it. He had not built somewhere else to go, and had to put up with Zoar (meaning 'little' - 515).

The third step in self-remembering, the killing of negative emotions, amounts to a cleansing of the emotional life. Nicoll has argued that 'the Work' must enter a man first in the 'intellectual centre' as new knowledge that comes through the personality (957). The tree of 'the Work' has first to be planted in the intellectual centre, upon which the emotional centre begins to recover itself (577). But with the withdrawal of identification from attitudes, opinions and thoughts, treated in the previous section, the 'real work' of bringing the "emotional centre" (893, 287) into line with what has been learned begins (961). The destruction of negative emotions, allowing the influence of higher centres to reach lower (1236, 1412), purifies the 'emotional centre' (1287) of the envy, spite, jealousy, anger, fear, depression and resentment that make it useless (878), of long strings of unpleasant memories (904) and of 'internal considering', a perpetual thinking of oneself (1243). Using 'inner stop', that is allowing himself a little time before reacting to incoming impressions with a kind of 'inner silence [a person may] stop inside himself the fire that is going to ignite the train of association' that has been built into a passion (a negative emotion that will master the person), and can prevent identification with this feeling (1286, 1308, 1328, 1518), thus conserving force.

Practising inner stop, which is in practical terms the 'transformation of impressions' is characterised by Nicoll as 'fundamental in the practical side of the work. If no *consciousness* intervenes between the reception of impressions and the effect they have on us we are technically asleep' (1400). The technique of inner stop is 'giving oneself the "first conscious shock" ' (1400). If this fails, identification turns the feelings that assail a person into passions or emotions which become part of their outer personality, what is not him (1309). These rule a person, wasting their force and preventing them waking up or being transformed (1309-11, 1330, 1254). To succeed with inner stop one must abjure unnecessary emotions (1330), face unpleasant events and duties by going with them, even willing them (251, 1315; Ecclesiastes 9:10-1389), and not fight them and thereby identify

with them. One must become passive not to the people and situations that cause negative emotions, but *to the reactions of [his] personality* (275). One must seek to change himself in the face of life, not to change life, or other people (339, 1115, 1317). ‘You cannot do away with the waves and storms of life, nor the mud, stones and pebbles on its way; you must instead have a good ship and seamanship, or make yourself good shoes’ (368,370); ‘the Work is for those who wish to change themselves, not for those who wish to change the world’ (254). I will argue in Chapter Six that this ‘passivity’ in the face of incoming unpleasant impression is what is meant by ‘turning the other cheek’ and ‘going the extra mile’ (Matthew 5: 39, 41). Nicoll says that by purifying his emotions (1237), focussing them and making them single and unmixed – no emotion is impure *per se*, but becomes so when it turns into a passion – a man awakens ‘emotional centre’ (1288). An important aspect of this is giving up suffering, useless mechanical suffering (256, 1241, 1242); for ‘the sorrow of this world worketh death’ (2 Corinthians 7:10-1241). Yet another aspect of this is ‘external considering’, whereby a man examines negative emotions towards others to see which elements in them are applicable to himself. Seeing that the faults we see in others are often what we project on to them (1093) increases our knowledge of ourselves, resulting in love of enemies and compassion for the trespasser against ourselves (1351). A man must *see through himself*; the shadow, as Jung would say, needs to be made conscious (1729). The parable of the mote and beam illustrates this (1325).

**Nicoll’s further comment on ‘self-remembering’; my comment**

I have tried thus far to present as close a representation of Nicoll’s representation of Gurdjieff’s and Ouspensky’s teaching as I can. I have been careful, however, to note where Nicoll refers to scripture, suggesting that this is a form of comment by Nicoll on Gurdjieff’s and Ouspensky’s teaching that demonstrates Nicoll’s own particular view of ‘the Work’. This idea will be taken up in the conclusion to this chapter, and developed *à outrance* in the one following. For now I turn to comment on what I have already indicated is acknowledged by Nicoll, Gurdjieff and Ouspensky to be the central concept of ‘the Work’, ‘self-remembering’. This concept is very difficult to grasp. What I now offer is a

number of views of it, some culled from texts of Nicoll's other than the *Commentaries*, some from his further comment in the *Commentaries*, some my own comment, some material from other commentators. These little commentaries do not form together a connected argument, but offer what I argue are pictures each with a different emphasis.

In commenting on 'self-remembering' Nicoll gives this concept a more immediate and personal feeling than the somewhat analytical exposition above. He shows that it is a practical exercise in personal psychology, a working on one's own psyche. In 'Notes on Self-remembering' in Pogson 1985 Nicoll says that in trying to produce voluntarily and make permanent what he calls this altered state of 'self-remembering', a number of conditions are necessary, among which are: to desire to undertake this work and feel able to do it; at first 'to imitate what belongs to this higher state of ourselves' but which is not yet available to one; and to believe in the reality and desirability of this higher state of consciousness at a rational and emotional level. But only when a man realizes 'something in his actual daily condition and observes how he forgets himself' can he attain this state. The most powerful weapon for the achieving this 'purification of the emotional life', the achievement of 'a real state in ourselves', which involves 'placing the consciousness in a new way, a direction we have never known or conceived', and is therefore 'a new sort of action', a 'new way of doing things', is 'attention' (Pogson 1995:295). Few people, however, Nicoll says, can achieve the necessary direction of 'attention', or 'lifting of consciousness' that is needed, since 'in order to remember oneself everything must be made quiet, quite still, one must give up one's ordinary sense of oneself, become nobody, nothing, as it were'. This direction of attention comes from stilling "wrong 'inner talking'".<sup>104</sup> Nicoll clearly sees this as hard work, especially in the circumstances of daily life. It has to be repeated 'for all one's life' (1098). But you have to understand that the real you is not doing the feeling or thinking that make up your inner talking (Pogson 1995:291-8).

---

<sup>104</sup> Defined in Pogson 2000:355, as: 'A silent, mechanical conversation in one's brain that bolsters identification and is inclined to be negative and recurrent, a repetitiveness, a refrain, indicated in 'the Work' by "singing one's own song".

But what does a person have to do practically to self-remember? How does he, if not visited by a 'mystic' state, like Nicoll's early experience described in Chapter Two, bring about a change of mind or *metanoia* that is not a mere rational re-orientation, and therefore an exercise of the formatory mind? I argue that the fulcrum in the process, according to Nicoll's teaching anchored not in any meditation exercise, or religious or psychological routine, but in real life, the 'attention' referred to in the previous paragraph, is 'inner stop', performed in everyday life. In what Nicoll calls '*that moment of consciousness* intervening between the reception of impressions and the effect they have on us' (1400), the moment of inner stop, the act that transforms formatory knowledge of 'the Work' into practice that changes a man, it is possible to struggle against activation of the emotions and stirring up passions. In a subtle internal location where the necessarily often repeated moment of *metanoia* takes place, during a cessation of reaction to incoming impulses before reacting to them in a 'considered' way the basic course of the feelings that work on the person is controlled. Their direction is changed by some form of prevention which stops impulses turning into emotions or passions that drive the person. This, I argue is what Nicoll means when he says that 'you are not responsible for your thoughts unless you think them' (1430); only what comes out of a man defiles him, not what goes into him (Matthew 23:26-290). Thoughts assail a man; but every moment he has the choice whether to go with them. Jacob Needleman, a noted Gurdjieffian, characterises this resistance as preventing feelings from turning into emotions (Needleman 1980:137). If a man successfully resists, if he 'breaks free from the sufferings and illusions brought to man by the emotions' (Needleman 1980:137) this struggle becomes a moment of *metanoia* when he builds something in himself, when he changes both his psychological and physical make-up. Such momentary events can be seen from the point of view of inner psychological dynamics as representing 'a new-born thing in a man which is the beginning of his own re-birth' (437). This 'child' can easily die if the man goes back to sleep, and this often happens at first (438). The experience has to be repeated, for 'those in my Branch of this Work' (1099) 'for all one's life' (1098) until the child survives. But though this wrestling with incoming feelings always presents the danger of falling into

passion, by this alone is provided the only source of 'food', impressions, more important than either of the other two 'foods', air and ordinary food, and the opportunity to grow by successfully assimilating this food. But to digest this food of impressions a new metaphysical 'stomach' is needed, or the impressions as it were go foetid (95) and destroy a person, submitting him to passion. The 'right stomach' that can digest these impressions (336) is formed by 'the Work', a transformation of the mind that allows a man to take things not in the ordinary way, but with a "transformation of the mind" (337).<sup>105</sup>

While this moment of *metanoia* seems to concern only *negative* feelings, 'evil' and 'passionate' thoughts that have such a *negative* power over us, the problem is with feelings of any sort turning into emotions. Even with 'pure emotions', negative or positive, the motive is all (1288). 'It is not that we identify merely with our negative emotions, but with all such emotions we have' (493); nothing, not only evil and passionate thoughts, must turn into emotions impossible to destroy, that will fire up the passions – we then become these passions (1110). Ouspensky said: 'moralists who divide arbitrarily emotions into 'moral' and 'immoral' make a mistake' (1288), and, echoing the interpolated verse at Luke 6:4, 'Man, if indeed thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed; but if thou knowest not, thou art a transgressor of the law', says: You can do what you like so long as you remember yourself' (532). Even a 'legitimate' feeling can be turned into an emotion that controls the person, boosts their false personality and wastes force.<sup>106</sup>

The painful killing of negative emotions and withdrawal of identification from personality that the successful battle with incipient emotions in the stop exercise represents can have the feeling of repentance in the standard Christian sense of the word, but it is not primarily concerned with morality, nor is it emotional, Nicoll says (1173). It is to be understood as a change of mind, *metanoia*

---

<sup>105</sup> Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859), English writer, famed for writing about his addiction to opium, is cited by Nicoll here. He says that de Quincey's suggested translation of *metanoia* is 'transformation of the mind'.

<sup>106</sup> 'Spirituality is a fusion of intellect with superior emotions. The purity of sentiment is not confined to goodness and gentleness. Hate can be a pure feeling. But it must have nothing to personal attached to it' (Gurdjieff 2014:236).

in the sense of a new way of thinking, finding a new truth to live by (1172, 1432), called in the parable of the prodigal son, Nicoll suggests, [Luke 15:11] “coming to oneself”. A psychological view of this process sees the increase in consciousness and development of one’s own thought and understanding that take place when ordinary conscious associative paths are challenged as a change of association pathways in the brain (1413-14); it is as if the brain is being ‘rewired’. In this state the purified network of associations allows what Nicoll calls ‘*buried conscience*’ to awaken completely. ‘*Buried conscience*’, meaning ‘to feel everything together’ (966), is not the Freudian socially conditioned superego, called by Nicoll ‘*acquired conscience*’, but the connection of the pathways of association without the barriers provided by the ‘*buffers*’ (40),<sup>107</sup> and is achieved when negative aspects of a man’s character have been faced and consciously assimilated. Thinking without the normal associations created by worldly impressions, but made conscious by *transformation of impressions* (302) a man sees things and people as they really are (296). Impressions then fall directly on ‘*essence*’ (1152) which then grows (295).

Nicoll described his first experience of self-remembering by saying: ‘I began to think for myself, or I knew I could’ (8). He later analysed this experience as becoming aware of a new state not connected with the usual personality or of ‘*false personality*’<sup>108</sup>, as ‘a change in the whole *feeling and sense* of “I” ’ (Pogson 1995:296). Nicoll says that we are what we are from our mind, from our understanding; undergoing this change of I we transform ourselves completely. But he was concerned with the problem of how this change of mind needs to be more than an intellectual exercise. Nicoll, always sensitive to the difference between those who dabbled in ‘the Work’ without letting it change them, and those who embraced it whole-heartedly, stressed that ‘a man must *live*

---

<sup>107</sup> ‘The human machine has something [Kundabuffer] that does not allow it to remain impartial, that is to reason calmly and objectively, without being touched on the raw. At times it is possible to free oneself from this feature by special efforts (*Views from the Real World* 207 in Thring 2002: 165). ‘Kundabuffer prevents our seeing things as they are’ [Gurdjieff 2014:388]. ‘Man absorbs impressions from the outside world on what Gurdjieff calls “reels”...From these impressions man gradually develops his habits and inclinations...tastes [and] longings’ (Butkovsky-Hewitt 1978:79).

<sup>108</sup> Defined in Pogson 2000:353, as: ‘A distortion of *Personality* that usurps the role of protecting and assisting *Essence* and instead diverts energies to satisfy selfish desires. It can be eliminated by withdrawing force from *negative emotions* and *imagination*’.

this Work' (935). He describes a situation in which few people assimilate the teachings of 'the Work' to the extent that it changes them, they not understanding the new language and the new way of thinking (939, 1439). Having knowledge of 'the Work' that 'remains only laid up in [their] memory like the unused talent [they] will never *understand* it' (1630). The result is that they become pillars of salt, like Lot's wife (Genesis 19:26-897); they have a lamp (have seen or heard the Word) but have no oil in it (they do not do the Word, though they may think they do (Matthew 25:1-8-1502). Nicoll also cites the man having no wedding garment cast into outer darkness at the wedding feast in Matthew 22:11-13 (1640) He says that the man wears a garment [meaning his mind is configured in a certain way] but he has not as it were 'married' what he thinks, has not conformed his life in the light of it. Such people, Nicoll says, are like those who, dissatisfied with life and themselves, start 'the Work' (966), seeking in it something new. They hear it, perhaps understanding it intellectually. Nicoll likens this to the parable of the fig tree (Luke 13:6-9-129). These people as it were 'grow leaves', like the other fig tree that Christ cursed (Matthew 21:21) because its leaves told people, falsely, that it was bearing fruit. If these people feel the beauty of 'the Work' it is as though the tree blossoms; that is, the teaching touches their emotions. But often they go no farther. Fruit comes only after work on a person's being. Only when with each stage of insight the inner develops in us, when what we took as ourselves becomes less and less valuable, only then do we figuratively or psychologically rise from the dead. This is impossible for someone with a rigid, literal, formatory mind (966, 1454). The fig tree will be cut down if it produces only leaves.

It will be recalled that in Chapter Four I suggested that for Nicoll and Ouspensky viewed self-remembering as remembering the self in a former life. There I suggested that this meaning of the phrase was not developed in 'the Work'. This might cause us to ask, why is the term 'self-remembering' used in 'the Work'? What has to be remembered? One answer to the second question is 'essence'. But 'essence' lies so far back in a person's biography that for most (though not

for some, as Nicoll's poems show)<sup>109</sup> it is beyond childhood memory. But I argue that 'remember' can mean merely 'hold in the mind', 'be aware of', or 'mind' in the sense of 'pay attention to' without any reference to memory. Ouspensky says: 'you do not remember yourself, that is, you are not aware of yourself when you try to observe yourself' (Ouspensky1953:16). Taken in this sense, does the self remember itself, or is it remembered by something else, like 'observing I'? Petsche writes:

'Self-remembering' means remembering to be aware of oneself in the present moment by 'dividing attention' so that one is simultaneously aware of the self and also the current exterior or interior event or situation experienced (Petsche 2013a:97).

This might be seen as a call to develop 'observing I'. Nicoll represents the idea along similar lines, I argue (737) by imagining that in life we are actors playing a role, masked like the ancients. Ordinarily so identified with this mask and role that we forget the person inside [go to sleep], our emotions and actions on the world's stage are therefore not real ['hypocritical'], coming not from the real person inside but from the artificial person as represented by the mask worn and the role played. As a result we have in reality, though unconscious of it when 'asleep', a completely different inner life from the character we play. If we knew this we would behave totally differently, or at least understand that we could act consciously, not identifying. In this theatrical analogy we could think for ourselves, and communicate from our real selves [authentically] with others in a similar situation. In this simple analogy I argue that Nicoll offers a cogent illustration of an otherwise potentially obscure idea.

### **Realising 'Real "I" after self-remembering**

I argue that the act of self-remembering, the oft repeated moment of *metanoia*, the facing down of negative feelings to prevent being possessed by passions, the repeated bringing to birth in oneself of 'a new-born thing in a man which is the beginning of his own re-birth' (437) which, as we have seen, often dies and one has to try and try again, this piece of the psychological gymnastics which is encapsulated in the Sermon on the Mount's exhortation to turn the other cheek, the practice of

---

<sup>109</sup> ...the old feelings of freedom/That I have forgotten.../Before I committed the sin.../And pretended I knew.../My very life, and not pretense... (Nicoll in Pogson 1961:1)

which has to become an integral part of one's attitude to life, is the fulcrum of the whole process of realising the complete person that 'the Work' calls realising Real I. I have discussed how one must undergo preparation for this act, and also something of the nature of it, its psychological lineaments and the practical aspects of it, what it feels like and what one has to do to bring it about. What I now turn to is the consequences of the successful practice of self-remembering.

In describing the realisation of 'real "I"' Nicoll uses the language of what might be called psychological anthropology. 'Real "I"' is seen as a part of the anatomy of the psyche, a latent informing principle that, when realised, will express the totality of the unified psyche. In Nicoll's view the task of 'the Work' is so to organise the dynamics of the developing psyche as to bring this realisation about. As we have seen, continuing to describe this process in terms of what I have called psychological anthropology, 'the Work' sees man as born under the hegemony of 'essence'. But as he matures 'essence' is submerged by emerging personality. This personality is split into many I's, each protected from contradiction by 'buffers', the whole *persona* coming under the domination of 'chief feature', 'the axle on which your personality turns' (89). A man may experience this personality as 'false personality'. All this I have already described. This at-base intolerable fissiparous egoistical chaos is only brought under control with the formation of 'observing "I"' from 'magnetic centre'. The latter is a concatenation of "I"s on a higher-than-average level open to higher influences (1318), formed in a man through intellectual effort and practical learning as he becomes what 'the Work' calls a 'good householder', someone who has developed 'a good working responsible personality' (1265,1318). If 'good householder' perceives through the lens of 'magnetic centre' that life cannot offer him what he wants, he can develop, inwardly, to meet the work internally (1539). Nicoll's system requires that to do this his personality, pride and imagination must be made passive through 'self-remembering', though what he has learned from contact with life through the developed personality need not be abandoned (1361, 1644). Through self-remembering a man sees through his 'false personality', and can withdraw his identification from his personality, as it were overcoming it (1260). What was then previously 'observing I', a provisional alternative centre of the personality

formed to act as a point of view separate from the 'personality', grows into what 'the Work' calls 'deputy steward', 'an enhanced "observing I" ' (37). 'Deputy steward' has the task of managing personality and 'essence' as the first becomes passive and the second active. As the power of personality dissipates 'essence' begins to grow, fed by personality (219, 224, 1267). But it is only through 'essence' that contact can be made with 'real I' (1266). The development of 'essence' first puts us in touch with 'steward', a part of 'real I' 'coming down from above to help for you' (897). When 'essence' has grown sufficiently, however, it coalesces with 'real I' (1647). The development of 'essence', originally part of 'real I' sent down, is a return journey which Nicoll likens to that of the Prodigal Son. 'Real I' is always there and 'essence' on this return journey develops to the level of 'real I' and the two become identical (1647). Another view is that developed 'essence' 'becomes I in you and you become it' (1646).

This description of the process in psychological terms uses what Nicoll calls formatory language. But, says Nicoll, to understand 'anything of this ladder of the work takes a very long time and very deep reflection' (535); all this is the description of a mystery that cannot be explained in any formatory language (1647). As if to fill out his description of 'real I' Nicoll uses a number of symbolic images for the unified and completed psyche taken from other psychological traditions and from the Christian religion. He mentions 'the SELF' (capitalised thus but without saying that this is Jung's archetype - 1533). He invokes Gurdjieff's assertion that 'behind Real I stands God' (cited at 1647), saying that ' "Christ" born in us' means that 'the Kingdom of Heaven lies in us and that means the realisation of Real I' in us (1348). 'Real I' or 'Master', he says, (this Master referring quite specifically to 'Christ crucified') comes from ' "above" ' (330). I argue that all these psychological and Christian religious images are the culmination points of a number of different depictions of the process of personal inner transformation that Nicoll sees 'the Work' as also exemplifying. But this using symbolic Christian images to amplify the image of Real I is not a necessity forced on Nicoll by the poverty of imagery in 'Work' vocabulary; rather it is part of an argument that will quite specifically underpin his

thesis, argued, I say, in *The New Man* and *The Mark*, the two books an analysis of which will be the subject of my next chapter.

Another image 'the Work' uses to view this process of realising Real I that Nicoll discusses is to see a man's inner progress as the ascent of a ladder of consciousness. Again Nicoll associates this image with Christian dogma by asserting that 'The Work' aligns itself with call in St. John's Gospel for the increase in consciousness symbolised by the light that conquers darkness (1003, 1302, 1345, 1664); 'this light is called in the Work consciousness' (453). In line with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky Nicoll argues that there are four possible levels of consciousness in man (156, 1481). The first two are sleep (in bed) and waking consciousness, and men called by 'the Work' men numbers one, two or three have at their disposal only these two levels of consciousness. The third level of consciousness is 'self-remembering' or 'self-consciousness', and is found in man number four, who is 'balanced man' (34, 1246). The highest state of consciousness, called 'objective consciousness', is found only in men numbers five to seven (103). I shall in my next chapter be equating these specific levels of consciousness with what I argue Nicoll implies is their description in the words of chapter one of St. John's Gospel. Nicoll sees the ascension of this ladder of consciousness as another way of describing a man making contact with his higher centres. This conversation with higher centres, Nicoll argues, is only possible when lower centres have been prepared by self-remembering. 'The Work' sees a man as having lower centres, which are called intellectual, emotional and moving [this last sub-divided into instinctive, moving and sex] centres. He has also higher centres ('higher emotional and intellectual centres'). But although a man's higher centres are always active, he normally uses only his ordinary centres (1244, 1377), and is therefore deaf to the higher until he raises his level of consciousness and being by self-remembering (1337). Man numbers one, two or three is dominated by moving, emotional or intellectual centres respectively. In Man number four, 'balanced man', man at the level of consciousness represented by self-remembering, all the lower centres are in balance (1319), and he can receive influence from higher centres. Influences from higher centres cannot go lower than the level of being of man number four. Only Man numbers five, six and seven have

opened themselves to higher centres. This opening of the channels with the higher part of a man brings understanding as opposed to knowledge. Since understanding is the product of the interaction of two centres, only men numbers four and higher have it (1268) and the unity that comes with it.

Yet another way of seeing this inner post-self-remembering development is to see it as the gradual displacement of the controlling element in a man from the physical body, 'the most external degree of ourselves' (1449), on to the 'psychological body', a process which Nicoll also likens to spiritual rebirth (221). In this view the opening of channels to higher centres to receive understanding, the building of 'essence' so that 'steward' comes down from 'real I' is tantamount to building a 'psychological body', a second body, distinct from the physical body, based on 'essence'. This growth demands more refined energy than is available to ordinary centres (223), since second body consists of finer substances (227). This would imply a view of reality where physical energy is transcended and transformed into psychic energy, as, it will be recalled, has already been discussed earlier in this chapter. From this 'second body', which is founded psychologically speaking on the emotional centre, a third, founded on the intellectual centre, and a fourth, the embodiment of real will, a fusion of the previous three, formed of yet finer substances, can be created (228, 934). Called in the terminology of 'the Work' first, second, third and fourth bodies, in Christian parlance carnal, natural, spiritual and divine, these bodies form a series that parallels the 'Work' categories of personality, 'observing I', 'deputy steward', and 'steward/master/Real I' (869). This process of formation is seen as a reversal, in that in normal man the personality 'controls' the embryonic emotional, intellectual and higher centres. In developed man who has all these further bodies the authentic will of the fourth body controls the other three. The ways of fakir, monk and yogi, Nicoll argues, seek to develop in isolation personality, emotional centre or intellectual centre respectively (231-4). Such ways, though having 'a shew of wisdom in will-worship and severity to the body' (Colossians 2:23), lead nowhere (1515). 'The Work', however, develops all centres, balancing them and creating the highest as a fusion of the others (231-235). When this is achieved a man finds another order of

meaning, inner and secret, coming from himself (1291); he makes himself '*a new psychology, a new person*', becomes a NEW MAN (938).

### **Building the Soul**

Nicoll reports Gurdjieff, in answer to the question 'Can it be that Man possesses immortality?' propounding the parable of the coachman, his carriage, horse and master (464) (226). At one level the parable tells the story of the building of the four bodies discussed in the previous paragraph. The parable likens the life of an ordinary man to a broken-down carriage, its horse spavined and thrwn, and the reins either absent or completely deficient. The coachman is in the pub either drunk (on his own imagination) or asleep. The master whom the coach is intended to carry to the destination of his choice is nowhere to be seen. The interpretation of this is that the carriage is the carnal or physical body. When the coachman (the third body, mind), the rational, wakes up (98), gets on the box, and by repairing the reins [opening and cleansing the '*emotional centre*', learning to speak to the horse, (the second body, natural body), now fed and watered, in a language it can understand, the horse can then pull the refurbished coach (the physical). Then, when the higher, the '*real I*', the master of the coach (the fourth body, spiritual body) is at last present, speaking the non-sensual language of higher centres (1032), he can direct the travel of the coach. When this reversal, whereby the whole is commanded by the master, not the broken-down coach, the horse or the coachman, has taken place (464, 1035, 1384) the divine body then controlling the others in a hierarchy, a man is in right order internally (225). He is conscious to the highest degree, has '*Full Will*' and '*real I*', and can do good rightly (1543). In this view of the parable it can be seen as another view of the realisation of real I, the ascent of the ladder of consciousness, the development of higher centres, and the formation of second, third and fourth bodies. But Nicoll says that this spiritual body is something transcendental, formed so that, 'at a level higher than Earth...we may 'become stronger "than the angels" ' (1267). In the earlier religious traditions from which this parable comes (Nicoll is not more specific about this) man is seen in a similar fashion also as a house of four rooms (the four bodies). Most men live only in one room. Only the man who lives in all four, 'who possesses four

fully-developed bodies can be called a “man” in the full sense of the word’, possessing properties of which one is *immortality* (italics in original-230). Nicoll says that all religious teachings strive to show the way to it.

The building of the ‘*psychological body*’, described above, when viewed transcendently is the building of the soul. Gurdjieff says: ‘a soul – this is the aim of all religions...of all schools. It is only an aim, a possibility; it is not a fact’ [Gurdjieff 2014:315]. ‘Man must get up and make one. But he who has immortal soul never dies’ [Gurdjieff 2014:389]. Nicoll, echoing the sense of Gurdjieff’s statement says that the soul is not a psychological entity, but ‘the function of relationship with the seat of the inner senses’ (1656), a function of relationship to the inner world, ultimately to God. To become immortal the soul must be turned inwards to ‘things unseen’, to realities invisible and intangible, but perceptible as inflows of new meaning. In turning to Higher Centres, which open into higher cosmoses, a man forms a spiritual relationship with something ‘uncreate’, builds the soul and cleaves to the spirit, *in this life*, worshipping God, who is a spirit, in spirit (1697). ‘The Work’ teaches how to build your soul, how to win eternal life, how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. ‘Never think death ends life’ (1383).<sup>110</sup>

The question arises from these considerations of realising ‘Real “I”’ after self-remembering of whether, and to what degree ‘the Work’ is an *ordo salutis* conceived in religious terms. In my summing up of Nicoll’s view of the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky at the end of this chapter I shall suggest that Nicoll’s use of biblical references and his utilisation of his particular view of the Gospels, and Scripture in general in his presentation of that teaching give his point of view a

---

<sup>110</sup> Ouspensky wrote: What is it that becomes immortal, essence or physical body or soul? Only memory. Body, essence, personality are born or created again (Ouspensky 1953:41). Gurdjieff, talking of spiritual work leading to immortality, said: ‘man has the possibility of transforming coarse energies into very fine ones. By means of work these energies can reach saturation and crystallisation...If a man were able to withdraw himself from the devouring influences of life, the substance he consciously forms by his work could crystallise...and remain on a higher level from the one on which he lives his ordinary life’ (Tchekhovitch 2006:54,55). But perhaps Ouspensky has put it most succinctly: ‘Unity is the psychological attribute of immortality’. As one commentator (Azize) puts it: ‘...immortality comes with internal unity, and unity makes possible immortality’.

particularly Christian twist. Here, however, I wish to explore the idea that Gurdjieff's teaching was seen by him as religious in nature.

### **How religious is 'the Work'?**

Apart from Nicoll's use of the quotations from the Gospels in his presentation of Gurdjieff's teaching there is one particular chapter in the commentaries that stands apart, and addresses directly the question of the religious nature of 'the Work'. This is the 'Teaching about Prayer in the Work' (155-9). It is instructive, I suggest, that in the index to the *Commentaries* the references in the entry on 'Prayer' almost all come from this short chapter, and the entry in bold type, THE TEACHING ABOUT PRAYER IN THE WORK gives the first page of this chapter. In a very short preliminary chapter to this chapter, 'Note on Prayer' Nicoll takes a position that he will re-iterate in *The Mark* by suggesting that all life is a prayer, in that 'the Universe is a *response to request*. Man requests, and the Universe in all its fullness and total reality responds according to the request' (154). But Nicoll presents in the main chapter, 'Teaching about Prayer', a higher idea than this of prayer as taught by 'the Work'. He says that a person cannot pray unless they self-remember (155). Prayer from our ordinary state of sleep cannot reach anything and is useless. Communication is only possible from the third state of consciousness, self-awareness or self-remembering, a state which, Nicoll re-iterates, is only to be established 'by long practice, trial and error' (155). Only thus can a person be put in touch with the higher functions; only in this way can 'help' come to them, and only if the person is aware of something higher than herself which is being contacted by 'what is really "I" ' (156). Nicoll says that praying from self-remembering a person prays for self-awareness, but while praying from objective consciousness, the fourth level of consciousness, a person is '*praying for enlightenment*' (156). There is a certain circularity here, in the sense that praying for self-awareness can only be done in a self-aware state, and that in praying from a state of objective consciousness one is praying for objective consciousness. But Nicoll squares this circle by quoting Mark 11:24: 'All things whatsoever ye pray for and ask for, have faith that ye *have* [Nicoll's emphasis] received them, and ye *shall have* them' (158). Nicoll is saying that 'a man must pray for a thing and have faith that he has it, and he will get

it' (158). He must not wait until he has the strength and understanding to do something but must act, if it is his aim, as if he had it already, and then he will *attract* it. Nicoll adds that all work is prayer, and that real prayer is communication between a person and heaven; for prayer to be effective one must work on oneself to 'purify lower centres and make right order in the mind through being taught right knowledge, so that the influence of higher centres can be heard' (159). Prayer is about three things: for Enlightenment or Understanding; about Temptation; and for oneself and others. Temptation is about being tested in a spiritual sense; prayer for others is only possible if one understands their difficulties, and this is only possible if you understand your own. The three types of prayer correspond to the 'three levels of Work – Work for the Work, Work with others, [and] Work on oneself' (159). Force for the three levels of prayer is to be found in the Lord's Prayer (159). But prayer can never be a substitute for work; 'to pray when you should work, to expect help when you should make effort, is idle' (159).

But lest this encomium to prayer might seem an example of Nicoll taking his own religious view of 'the Work' in contradiction to Gurdjieff I draw attention to an article by Joseph Azize, ' "The Four Ideals": A Contemplative Exercise by Gurdjieff' (Azize 2013). Azize presents research on some notes taken by Gurdjieff's pupil George Adie (1901-1989) concerning a contemplative exercise taught by Gurdjieff to only a very few of his pupils in the year before his death. The objects of contemplation in this mental 'exercise' performed in a quiescent sitting posture are the four ideals of Christ, Buddha, Muhammad and Lama. The exercise is a form of prayer in which the 'exercitant' taps 'higher substances' made from the prayers of those who have lived and live on the earth. These prayers have accumulated 'at a certain level above the atmosphere of the earth as a sort of foyer or reservoir of substances' (Azize 2013:179, 180) in relation to these four ideals. The exercitant is able to ingest these substances by a 'temporary thread', which it is the purpose of the exercise to put in place, but is in so doing 'stealing' the prayers of others (Azize 2013: 180, 183, 188). For these prayers normally, according to Gurdjieff, have no chance of reaching God (Azize 2013:183).

This form of prayer is seen by Azize as an enhanced method of ingesting food in the 'Work' sense. We have seen how the types of food, ordinary food, air and impressions are ingested and turned into higher Hydrogens. As I understand Azize, the 'emanations' that the kind of contemplative prayer he is discussing is designed to draw in are a higher form of food than the three mentioned above (Azize 2013:186, 193-5). While normally the higher centres (higher emotional and higher intellectual centres) lie dormant because there is no Hydrogen of sufficient refinement to run them, nor do most people produce this from themselves, by this form of prayer the necessary Hydrogen can be ingested ready-made, as it were, to 'make possible a connection between higher and lower centres, and thus for the states which are experienced as "mystical" to become "natural" for the exercitant' (Azize 2013:195).

Azize points out that the activation of the higher emotional centre and the higher intellectual centre mediate the mental operations concomitant with the two highest states of consciousness, self-remembering (self-awareness) and objective consciousness respectively (Azize 2013: 1910). While the usual methods of 'the Work' are dedicated to realising these higher states in a person, this usually happens only by hard work or temporarily through involuntarily supervening ecstatic states (Azize 2013:192). The 'four ideals exercises', however, Azize seems to suggest, offer a way of short-circuiting these laborious or uncertain processes in order to achieve certain access to these desired states. But we need to be careful here. While accepting what Nicoll says, that one should not pray when one should work, and that though all work may well be prayer, all prayer is not necessarily work, Azize says that 'the significant point is that the exercises are aimed at conscious development' (Azize 2013:195). So the exercises are not a short cut, and Gurdjieff was very careful to teach them only to a very few, perhaps realising that they could be misunderstood as such. But what I think this shows is that Gurdjieff was conversant with and open to mysticism and prayer in their strictly religious sense as a possible means of bringing about that psychological transformation that is the crucial idea of 'the Work', of equal validity and efficacy, if understood correctly, to his more usual

approach. As Azize says, 'this paper relates the "Four Ideals Exercise" to Gurdjieff's own system' (Azize 2013: 197).

Azize's article also treats another aspect of the religious nature of 'the Work'. Suggesting that the idea that 'religiosity is not normally associated with Gurdjieff' is superficial (Azize 2013:195), and that his music often has an obviously and deeply religious character, Azize compares parallel teachings on prayer by Gurdjieff with Adie's record. Citing de Salzmänn concerning 'an ideal, an aspiration for something higher' that each person has (de Salzmänn *The Reality of Being* [2010] – Azize 2013: 185), Azize discusses de Salzmänn's view that this ideal is a literal reality somewhere in space that calls to a person with the call as it were of his own being, and that in this state a person 'produces an energy, a special emanation which religious feelings alone can bring' (Azize 2013:185). Such emanations form a body which is then accessible to 'true prayer', and receipt of this 'nourishment' is equated by de Salzmänn with grace. Being nourished by this grace establishes a 'current' or 'magnetism' between the person and 'higher influences' (Azize 2013:186). But this ideal can become even more 'real'. Azize cites Gurdjieff, as remembered by Louise March (1900-1987, translator of *All and Everything*) to the effect that Christ exists 'somewhere in space', that one must 'imagine Christ, make contact, but outside [allow him to] settle in you, wish to become Christ. Become. Be.' (Azize 2013: 187) Azize also cites Frank Sinclair (co-president of the Gurdjieff foundation of New York, pupil of de Salzmänn) as saying that 'Gurdjieff claimed to speak "as a Christ"' (Azize 2013:188). This material give us a richer and more expanded view of the idea of making contact through prayer with literally real figures in space outside the psyche. These figures are formed from energies emanated during prayer, including the Christ figure whom we are exhorted to ingest, and to become. This accords particularly with some more mystical interpretations found in orthodox Christianity. But while Azize is careful to include in his summation of the Four Ideals Exercises in Part Two of his article only what he derives from Adie's notes, we can draw conclusions from this peripheral material just cited as to Gurdjieff's view of Christ not only as a psychic figure to be apprehended psychologically, but as an external metaphysical reality who can be

prayed to, invoked, assimilated, imitated, ingested and so forth. The point I make here is not that Nicoll sees Christ in the same way, although in some respects he does. What I say is that a religious and mystical but as-it-were concretely metaphysical view is consistent with Gurdjieff's own system, and that when he thought it appropriate he taught 'the Work' through this view.

In this chapter I have attempted to present in a coherent summary Nicoll's vision of the complex teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. I have emphasised connections between their formulations of the system and Nicoll's view of it. I have made connections to Nicoll's earlier ideas through explicit and implicit reference to earlier chapters. For example there is obvious congruence between core ideas in 'the system' and Jung's ideas. Both systems, which are psychologically based, have at their centre the revelation of the 'essential man', the unfolding and realisation of a deeper, or higher, or more real personality that stands behind the outward persona or ego. The 'death' of this exterior personality in the second half of life through a confrontation with the 'shadow' (in Jungian terms) or a disavowal of the illusory multiple 'personality' (in 'Work' terms) is followed, through some form of psychologically understood re-birth or *metanoia*, by a re-treading of the path of early development via a 'second education'. Connection with a previously unrealised supra-personal 'being' and the world in which that being lives brings an access of authentic 'will', a higher consciousness, and the realisation of the higher self (individuation' in Jungian terms). This developmental process is mediated through understanding the symbolic contents of the unconscious, which reveals an 'entelechy', a goal-orientated philosophical, 'eschatological' or spiritual path of fulfilment. This brings both personal healing and confrontation with the supra-personal, archetypal foundation of the human mind that has transcendental dimensions. Both systems enjoin in Jungian terms

revolution, inner division, overthrow of the existing order, renewal, return of the individual to the ground of human nature, to his own deepest being (Jung CW7: p5).

Similarly, much of what Nicoll learned in his research for *Living Time*, and many of Ouspensky's pre-Gurdjieffian ideas, discussed in Chapter Four re-surface in 'the Work'. For example, the unbroken esoteric tradition, its figurative and symbolical expression, its inaccessibility without a

transformation of the mind, and the increase in consciousness and being are ideas Nicoll later found in the 'system'.

In my view, however, Jeanne de Salzmann is flattering Nicoll when she says that he presents Gurdjieff's ideas 'undistorted' in the *Commentaries*. Nicoll added, in an obvious way, a new dimension to 'the Work'. A raft of ideas found in *Living Time*, ideas initially peculiar to Ouspensky, though Nicoll made them his own, ideas on time that are not found in Gurdjieff's teaching, is present in the *Commentaries*. These ideas centre on the intimate connection between the inner person and a new understanding of different levels of time and the fourth dimension; a higher realm in which the 'eternal' body lives in its 'long home' in an eternal now; and also the ideas of recurrence and reincarnation. It is clear that all the assumptions Nicoll made in *Living Time* on the centrality of a new relationship to Time for the apprehension of what he there calls the world of the invisible are carried into the *Commentaries*. Nicoll, I argue, gives thereby the central idea of 'the Work', self-remembering, a nuance that it does not have in Ouspensky's and Gurdjieff's writings. This added element connects self-remembering with time and eternity, and makes this connection its most significant aspect. As I have argued in my discussion of *Living Time*, recurrence is for Nicoll a crucial aspect of the process of transformation and perfection he is there describing. In the *Commentaries* Nicoll writes on the connection between time and self-remembering:

All esoteric teaching must have the quality of Eternity about it. Man is both in Time and in Eternity. Eternity is vertical to Time – and this is the direction of self-remembering. To remember oneself the feeling of oneself now must enter – *I here now – I myself now – I distinct from past and future – the oneness of myself – I now* (943 – italics in original).

I argued in Chapter Four that when in *Living Time* Nicoll says that at each moment of our lives eternity enters time, and that we can, by remembering ourselves, in that moment make a choice, and by so doing leave a trace, thereby evolving the universe in or from our minds, he affirms what he sees as the profoundest meaning of what even in *Living Time* he calls self-remembering, and emphasises the centrality of a new relationship to Time for apprehending the invisible. I argue that

Nicoll confirms these ideas in the *Commentaries* first by emphasising the connection between an awareness of Time and both self-remembering and the realisation of Real I:

You will know that Eternity is always in now; the feeling of Eternity enters into self-remembering'. [Real "I" is in Eternity, not in time. Self-remembering is out of Time and Personality (943). Eternity enters every moment of Time, but in a direction which we can never find while we are identified with personality (947).

Then, second, when in the *Commentaries* Nicoll says that 'to reach an existing higher level of ourselves we have to be re-born outside time and space' (951) he is further emphasising the connection between self-remembering and the apprehension of eternity by showing that the act of self-remembering as described in the *Commentaries* is the taking of a new attitude to Time that allows us to be reborn into eternity in the way described in *Living Time*. Nicoll has translated the central idea of *Living Time* into his depiction of 'the Work' where, in its original form, it had no place. This is not an 'undistorted' transmission.

In a more subtle yet all-pervasive way, however, Nicoll gave his own particular slant to what Gurdjieff and Ouspensky said. By introducing quotations from the New Testament and allusions and citations from other religious traditions as an integral part of the argument in a way not found in either Ouspensky's writings or Gurdjieff's early lectures, Nicoll alters the emphasis of the whole discourse. Though at first sight the quotation of scripture might seem simply to be a move towards a more religious, more particularly Christian view of 'the Work', Nicoll's distinctive contribution is to interpret and apply these quotations *psychologically*. When Nicoll uses New-Testament passages in support of points about or descriptions of Gurdjieff's or Ouspensky's ideas where they do not, or where it seems egregious, he is moving the description decisively from Gurdjieff's practical mysticism and Ouspensky's cerebral philosophy into the area of *personal psychology* just as he altered the centre of gravity of Ouspensky's ideas when incorporating them in *Living Time*. More than being merely a 'psychological commentary', the *Commentaries* narrative is transformed into a demonstration of the psychological nature of the 'system'. Further, Nicoll, by reinforcing his descriptions using the psychological resonance of the scriptural quotations infers and implies that

these quotations and the whole of Scripture *are* psychological in import. Nicoll's vision of the psychological basis of scripture issues in his assessment of the Gospels in the two books we are about to analyse in the next chapter, *The New Man* and *The Mark*, where, I will show, Nicoll both demonstrates that he himself understands that the Gospels are psychology (and only psychology), and presents a cogent argument both that this is so, and in what way it is so.

The elevated theoretical nature of the teaching presented in the *Commentaries* should not blind us to the fact that Nicoll ran weekend classes at Great Amwell in the practical, hands-on way he had experienced in Fontainebleau. Though at Tyeponds there had been the same frenetic building programme as at Fontainebleau, at Great Amwell this was not appropriate; accommodation there was adequate and further building unnecessary. But residents there played a full practical part in the running of these establishments, this work undertaken as 'material for psychological work', so that 'they entered a community which was organised as an Institute' (Pogson 1961:232-3). Nevertheless, despite the practical nature of this regime Nicoll was much more concerned than Gurdjieff to encourage self-induced and self-controlled psychological work on oneself in 'everyday life', saying 'all these ideas must be connected in your minds by private thinking about them' (639). Though trying to further the same psychological transformation in his pupils as Gurdjieff had attempted, Nicoll was offering a different approach. There was no equivalent at Fontainebleau to the week-end group meeting in which a closely argued text was discussed. And informing the regime at Great Amwell there was, already mostly written down by the time Nicoll went there in 1946, a deeply thought-out religious, even Christian, philosophy, distilled from the experience of running groups and from the theoretical deposit of that experience, the *Commentaries*. However, in the two books now to be discussed, *The New Man* and *The Mark*, that philosophy presented in the *Commentaries* in the form of a psychological commentary on 'the Work' is presented exclusively in terms of the Christian scriptures, chiefly the Gospels. To these books we now turn.

## **Chapter 6: 'The New Man' and 'The Mark': Nicoll 'comes home' to Christianity**

We have seen what a large part the Gospels played in Nicoll's exposition of 'the Work'. I have argued that Nicoll used scriptural citations in that exposition for their psychological meaning. I now argue that in the two books we are about to examine, *The New Man* and *The Mark* Nicoll, presenting his view of the Christianity to which I suggest he returns in the writing of these books, interprets the Gospels as psychological documents that convey esoteric knowledge in the sense Ouspensky understood this. For Ouspensky, in the chapter 'Christianity and the New Testament' in *A New Model of the Universe*, interprets the Gospels as illuminating 'the journey within' (Hanegraaff 1998:386). The search for esoteric knowledge takes the form of that type of Christianity which is 'a religion of the inner path' (Needleman 1980:18). Though such views had little direct influence on Nicoll's argument in *Living Time*, I contend that Ouspensky's view of the Gospels and their relationship to esotericism evinced in that chapter of *A New Model* lies at the root of Nicoll's thought as articulated in his two exegetical works.

### **Ouspensky's view of the Gospels**

Ouspensky, whose chief concern in *New Model* is esotericism, argues that the

Gospels tell us in a direct and exact way of the existence of esoteric thought they are one of the chief literary evidences of this thought (Ouspensky 1931:151).

In distinction to the Epistles, the 'founding documents' for the 'building of [Paul's Christian] Church' (Ouspensky 1931:149) which contain advice on the application of esoteric thought, the Gospels

are written for the very few, for pupils of esoteric schools, [not] the simple and humble [but] those [with] a certain degree of understanding who possess a key. Every phrase, every word, contains hidden ideas, and it is only when one begins to bring these to light that the power and influence of this book which has lasted two thousand years, become clear (Ouspensky 1931:150).

Ouspensky says that 'Christian teaching cannot be taken as one whole'; the Gospels exemplify ideas that contradicted the ideas of Paul's 'Church':

in its true meaning the Christian teaching is a very stern religion, infinitely far removed from the sentimental Christianity created by modern preachers (Ouspensky 1931:151).

That "salvation" will come to so few, and only with such difficulty, is so definitely and frequently emphasised in the Gospels that only the 'lies and hypocrisy of modern Christianity', involving the 'far-from-true' idea of Christ being some sort of social reformer, and 'narrow sectarian' ideas of

post-mortem rewards and punishment of 'the religion of "Hell-and-Sin" ' can convince people that the Gospels offer 'general salvation' (Ouspensky 1931:152, his emphasis). The purpose of the Gospel, however, is to

show men that there is only *one way* to hidden knowledge...to show this to those who can follow it, and to make a selection of those fit for it, to divide people into suitable and unsuitable, from this point of view (Ouspensky 1931:148 *passim*).

Ouspensky says that the text of the Gospels has been corrupted 'by theologians for their own purposes' both in the direction of sensory intelligibility, and to down-play pagan influence. There is no evidence apart from the Gospels of the events of 'the Drama of Christ'. The 'events' of this 'drama', the virgin birth, Christ's being the Son of God, the Mystery drama of the crucifixion and Christ's voluntary sacrifice are Indian, Buddhist, Old-Testament or Greek myths, incorporated into and developed in the texts after these were 'originally' written (Ouspensky 1931:157).

Ouspensky offers his own esoterically-informed exegesis to show that only those '*poor in spirit*', that is, 'those who practise "the Buddhist idea of *non-attachment to things*" ' (Ouspensky 1931:166 – italics original) will be able to embrace the Kingdom of Heaven. In addition the change of attitude demanded, *metanoia*, makes such people hated by the world and persecuted, particularly by 'pseudo-Christians' for their 'endeavours to preserve esoteric truths in the midst of a church Christianity...become more and more distorted' (Ouspensky 1931:167). They should not cast their pearls before swine, but keep silence, knowing they will always be in that small minority who, not expecting earthly blessings, earnestly seek esotericism, which is ' "life" ' (Ouspensky 1931:168). The parable of the sower 'refers to esoteric ideas understood only by very few', framed to exclude those without 'ears to hear', this being the purpose of this way of teaching. Standing in the way of this development is 'riches', meaning not money, but the opposite of poverty of spirit, that is identification and self-satisfaction with the worldly personality. Unless a person dies to the world and self, the seed in him or her, symbolised by either the mustard seed or the seed the sower sows, cannot grow.

Though all are ‘ “called” ’, most are ‘ “held” ’ by life, these latter, considered from the point of view of esotericism ‘ “dead” ’, renouncing the chance to be born again and thereby sacrificing ‘great possibilities for the sake of the little present’ (Ouspensky 1931:180). They are Pharisees, not the historical doctors of the law, but people, or parts of us ‘without the idea of esotericism’, who, their life ‘regarded as death’, are ‘in graves’ (Ouspensky 1931:181). Pharisees, called in the Gospels tombs and the blind, are ‘whitened sepulchres’ (Matthew 23:27), their morality outward pretence. Unless the seed of our life dies by our abandoning that life ‘which indeed appears beautiful outwardly, but is within full of dead men’s bones’, it cannot grow into the great tree of our eternal life (Ouspensky 1931:174 - Matthew 13:31- 4; 23, 27).

To heed the call and become disciples requires a special ‘*watchfulness*’. One aspect of this watchfulness, which Ouspensky [his italics] says came from Buddhism (Ouspensky 1931:184) is encapsulated in the command to the cleansed leper to ‘*tell no man*’ (Matthew 8:4). ‘Initiated’ converts must not boast to non-initiates about things esoteric: ‘do not your alms before men’ (Ouspensky 1931:187- Matthew 6:1). Though the sacrifice will be worth it, disciples must in general obey the law, being even more meticulous towards their brother (fellow convert), becoming ‘perfect’ in the way described in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (Matthew 5:48). This ‘Sermon’ is

a special, complex and practical teaching, which, taken together, constitutes an occult or esoteric system of self-training based on principles unknown outside occult schools (Ouspensky 1931:192).

Similarly the Lord’s Prayer, a petition for purely spiritual things, not a general prayer, is only for those disciples who, achieving the level of awareness that makes the commands of the ‘Sermon’ a practical possibility (Christ ‘did not preach impracticable things’) ‘*are able to carry them out*’ (Ouspensky 1931:194 – his italics).

Though there is a hierarchy in the Kingdom of Heaven, no one must think himself superior, but be the servant of all. This does not mean servant in a worldly way of ‘*any man*’, as in ‘sentimental Christianity’, but of his ‘neighbour’, who is, from Ouspensky’s ‘esoteric point of view [one] who may help him in his striving either to know esoteric truths or approach esoteric work’ (Ouspensky

1931:196-7). Pharisees, the opposite of neighbours, are guilty of thwarting this striving of the 'little ones' (that is, those seeking esoteric understanding), causing them 'offence' [which means 'the distortion of esoteric truths'] (Ouspensky 1931:200). Distorting and adapting everything into a pseudo-religion they lead people astray, preventing them entering the Kingdom of Heaven [Ouspensky 1931:197-199 – Luke 11:52].

The parable of the Steward of Unrighteousness (Luke 16:1-8) is for Ouspensky an exhortation to disciples to forgive all men their sins and to see the good in them. 'If ye forgive not men their trespass, neither will your Father forgive your trespass' means that the disciples' own possibility of forgiveness depends on such forgiveness, whether or not the sin is committed against the forgiver (Ouspensky 1931:201- Matthew 6:15). The converse, the cynical dismissal of the possibility of the good in things or people, is the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost. All slander falls into this category; even the most trivial can lead to the destruction of a person (Ouspensky 1931:203). Ouspensky finishes by saying that the esoteric knowledge contained in the Gospel is for *this life*, so that people may be able to live it more abundantly. Such knowledge is not beyond people's capabilities. But though 'not for all, it is strictly practical in all its details: *it is practical first of all because it is not for all*' (Ouspensky 1931:206).

To summarise Ouspensky's view of the Gospels: they are esoteric documents intended for members of Paul's church who wish to proceed further with the process of inner transformation described in them. The Gospels are neither historical narrative nor a biography of a particular individual, but mythology. The process of inner transformation which they describe, while not for everybody and only voluntary, is nevertheless practical training for reaching a goal that is perfectly possible of realisation in this world. Those who undergo this training are initiates into a small group of people who are separate from the mass of humanity. They possess knowledge that is not accessible by ordinary thinking. They may be said to have the Kingdom of Heaven, or eternal life.

Nicoll's exegetical approach in the two works about to be examined, accepts, I will suggest, Ouspensky's idea that the Gospels show how to follow the inner path to salvation, but argues that they also describe how following this inner path must be practical psychology, the practice of what Wayne Rollins calls, in *Soul and Psyche* 'biblical psychology'. Rollins sees this term denoting 'strategies for studying the Bible' as psychology (Rollins 1999:v) which involve 'Psychological exegesis' (Gerd Theissen's term quoted in Rollins 1999:61) or 'a hermeneutically oriented psychology of religion'. Rollins considers the term 'biblical psychology' a kind of shorthand for the study of biblical ideas about the human soul or psyche. I contend that this view of understanding the bible as psychology, the history of which I shall be referring to in my conclusion when I locate Nicoll in a tradition or even a movement that might be called 'biblical psychology', is precisely what Nicoll is practising with his 'psychological exegesis' in the two books we are about to examine.

### **The 'New Man' and 'The Mark': genesis and reception**

Although I treat *The New Man* and *The Mark* after the *Commentaries*, they were for the most part written at the same time. Nicoll was still contributing to the *Commentaries* and working on *The Mark* up to his death. Pogson gives detailed information on the genesis of both *The New Man* and *The Mark*, both of which are essentially compilations of originally self-standing essays. Pogson says that the 'first gospel interpretation', the exegesis of the Lord's Prayer, later printed as the chapter 'Faith' in *The Mark*, was written in 1939 (Pogson 1961:134). It became the first of a series of four essays. The other three, essays on *metanoia*, Nicodemus, and Truth, 'completed' in 1941 (Pogson 1961:198)<sup>111</sup> together formed the heart of *The Mark*, which was thus written before any of *the New Man* (Pogson 1961:201). Pogson says also that at this time (1941) one of 'Nicoll's main occupations' was 'his Gospel studies' (Pogson 1961:198), this meaning 'chapters' of *The New Man*. The first part of *The New Man* to be written, the chapter on Peter, was compiled in 1941 from specific New-Testament research Pogson had done and offered to Nicoll (Pogson 1961:198-9). 'The Idea of

---

<sup>111</sup> The four exist as a 'manuscript' unit which, along with typescripts of almost all the chapters in both *The New Man* and *The Mark* are in the Archive recently set up by Edinburgh University.

Wisdom in the Gospels' was initially one of a number of studies on certain Greek words (in this case *phronimos* – wise).<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, though, as Pogson says, 'Dr. Nicoll began to think of these writings [the *New Man*] as material for a book on the interpretation of the parables and miracles in the Gospels' (Pogson 1961:2005), when the book came to be prepared for publication in 1949 following the affirmative reception of the private printing of the *Commentaries* it was Vincent Stuart, London publisher of esoteric literature and Nicoll group member who was the driving force behind the project, he even recommending the order of the chapters. Nicoll, we are told, showed 'humble amazement' (Pogson 1961:261-2).

The material in the *The New Man* is organised thematically. After an introduction, the 'Language of Parables', a general discussion of Nicoll's hermeneutic approach to the parable texts, Nicoll treats, in chapters entitled 'The Idea of Temptation in the Gospels', 'The Marriage at Cana', 'The Idea of Good being above Truth', 'The Idea of Righteousness in the Gospels', 'Simon Peter in the Gospels', 'The Idea of Prayer', the 'Sermon on the Mount' and 'Faith', what might be called preparatory ideas to his main theme, which is (in the chapter so entitled) 'The Kingdom of Heaven', as described in the parables in Matthew's Gospel. Very loosely, each chapter analyses one parable<sup>113</sup> to describe a stage in the process of transformation which Nicoll argues is described in the Gospels. Christ, viewed as an 'ideal man', is a symbol both for the goal and process of psychological development in everyone. The story of His temptation suggests He was not born 'perfect' [completed], but needed to undergo psychological development (Nicoll 1950:17). Nicoll, thinking the parables illustrate stages in this development, shows how their symbolism and that of the New Testament generally is to be read as

---

<sup>112</sup> Nicoll learned Ancient Greek at Aldenham. But whether his competence extended much beyond a clear idea of the significance and nuanced meanings of a number of frequently used *koine* Greek New-Testament terms is not discernible from the sources. Ouspensky was known to possess the New Testament in sundry translations. Whether Nicoll extended his command of Greek under Ouspensky's tutelage again cannot be established.

<sup>113</sup> 'Parable' is properly applied to any *perikope* so designated in the Synoptic Gospels. Nicoll also analyses a number of passages in John's Gospel, which contains no parables of this sort. But part of Nicoll's thesis is that what are normally thought of as miracles, and descriptions of such 'events' as the Wedding at Cana and the Samaritan Woman at the Well of Jacob that occur in John are in fact parables. He treats them and some of the miracles in the synoptic Gospels on the same basis as he does the parables in the Synoptic Gospels.

a description of this development. The chapter 'Simon Peter in the Gospels' describes a person at the beginning of the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, while 'The Sermon on the Mount' is advice to those who after 'long inner psychological work on themselves...begin to *desire*...what is beyond self-love' (Nicoll 1952:101, his emphasis). This leads to that change of state called 'Faith', which Nicoll claims is necessary for understanding the parables. Only in the chapter 'The Kingdom of Heaven' does Nicoll comment on the nature and structure of Matthew's parabolic discourse, supposedly the subject of his book. The final chapter, 'Judas Iscariot', is something of a postscript. My argument is that in *The New Man* Nicoll uses 'psychological exegesis'<sup>114</sup> to argue that the personal transformation exhorted by 'the Work' is represented in the Gospels in the language of the parables interpreted esoterically. The book, however, is not an overt commentary on 'the Work'. Nicoll makes no mention of this, or of Ouspensky or Gurdjieff, or uses any psychological or 'Work' technical language, using only Christian images found in Scripture.

*The Mark* remained incomplete. Starting, in the chapter called 'Physical and Spiritual Man', from his views on the visible and the invisible in man, Nicoll, in the chapter entitled 'Transformation', explores the expression of this idea in the Scriptures. After discussion of 'The Parable of the Sower' and 'The Grain of Mustard Seed' comes, in chapters entitled 'Metanoia', 'Nicodemus', and 'Truth', a more general argument in which detailed exegesis of a number of parables is given. Most of this material had been corrected and prepared for printing at Nicoll's death (Pogson 1961:275). Jane Mounsey says that Nicoll wished to include in the book also the chapters 'The New Will', 'War in Heaven' and 'The Telos' (Nicoll 1954: vii). It is not clear whether these were complete or not. But the book had not taken its final shape when Nicoll died, and even the order of the completed chapters was editorially determined (by Jane Mounsey) (Nicoll 1954: vii). The remainder of the text that follows these completed chapters consists of fragments, only some of which, Jane Mounsey says, may have been intended for the book.

---

<sup>114</sup> Theissen's term – see page 215.

The publication of *The New Man* launched Nicoll's career as a writer, the book finding a wide public both in Britain and in America, north and (translated into Spanish by Rodney Collin-Smith, one of Ouspensky's pupils who lived in Mexico City) south (Pogson 1961:262). Rom Landau, leading journalist on alternative religion, author of *God is my Adventure* [1935], reviewed it immediately (in the *Nineteenth Century* magazine) along with Gurdjieff's *All and Everything* and Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*, thus bringing to notice simultaneously three works that encapsulated the ideas of this Gurdjieffian 'trinity' in a 'perestroika' of openness after decades of self-imposed secrecy (Pogson 1961:260). Nicoll's book was also noticed by 'Diogenes', pseudonymous reviewer for *Time and Tide*, who, until his death in 1960 wrote frequently on 'Work' ideas, and especially on Nicoll. Diogenes says that Nicoll 'writes with splendid clarity and lucidity' that 'the purpose of the teaching is to show men how they could awake from the full dream of material life, how they could transcend themselves and achieve a new birth of consciousness [and] become New Men' (*Time and Tide* 1950:487). Nicoll received much post and many enquiries about this book, and also the *Commentaries*, which the publication of *The New Man* had brought to general attention (Pogson 1961:262, 272). Landau wrote in his review that 'the Churches would be likely to criticise *The New Man* and Science would disregard it, whereas the other two books [Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's] would be dismissed by Church and Science alike'. The *British Weekly*, though 'claiming' Nicoll as a 'stepchild of the paper', found his 'portrait of Christ [had he written one?] far from satisfactory' (Pogson 1961:263). But R. H. Ward,<sup>115</sup> reviewing (after Nicoll's death) *The New Man* and *The Mark* in a broadcast talk finds unerringly, I argue, the essence of what Nicoll says. Ward sets his review in the context of the

rise of many unorthodox 'movements' in the last hundred years [caused by the fact that] the exoteric religious bodies no longer provide the mystic [with] true mysticism and esotericism (Ward 1955:242).

---

<sup>115</sup> The similarity between Diogenes' critique and Ward's may lend some credence to the idea that they were the same person, an idea represented to me personally by James Connell. I have no further evidence for this claim. A pencilled note to a reproduction of one of Diogenes' columns in the Ouspensky Archive at Yale offers the information that Diogenes was a pupil of Ouspensky, W. R. Brown, MP, sometime independent member for Rugby.

Saying there are 'two kinds of men in the world, those "who have ears to hear" and those who do not', Ward argues that Nicoll speaks of 'the liberation of the soul', a phrase that 'has no meaning other than an esoteric one', and means the same as ' "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you" ':

The essential purpose of Christ's teaching, as the Gospels record it, understood in strictly psychological terms [is] the soul's liberation by evolution within the individual [that is] redemption in two phases, *metanoia* and rebirth (Ward 1955:243).

Ward says that *Metanoia*, hardly a new doctrine, is a hard road involving the death of what you are in favour of what you might be:

This change of mind [*metanoia*], thinking in a new way about ourselves – but "new", of course, only in so far as it was old long before the Christian era dawned – is not a thing that can be done without effort. 'Thinking differently' implies being differently, being dead to what one is and alive to what one might be. There is no resurrection without a death. The hard doctrine is that we shall not change our world except by changing ourselves; for [as Nicoll says] 'it is not from life than a man suffers, but from himself' (Ward 1955:243).

Neither Nicoll nor the language he uses has anything of the otherworldly mystic about them:

There is nothing in these exact and clearly reasoned books which is in the slightest degree 'mystical' in the pejorative sense. The theme is expounded in a curiously simple, lucid and faithful English (Ward 1955:243).

Ward thinks Nicoll speaks as one who has authority, the authority of living what he enjoins:

these books about a different kind of man have been written by a different kind of man; and this is what gives them their authority, [an authority that means that] they will be responded to by the man who has ears to hear with the simple awareness that they speak the truth. They convey what in a certain sense such a man has always known, but never understood, exposing something which was hidden and needs no proof (Ward 1955:243).

### **Nicoll's esoteric reading of the New Testament: basic methodology**

In the *Commentaries* Nicoll says that in the view of 'the Work' the form esoteric knowledge assumes, the 'physical imagery [in which the Gospels are cast] of which the meaning is not literal, but symbolical', is an example of 'C influences'; that is, revelation from higher centres, knowledge from the 'Conscious Circle of Humanity' (*Commentaries*: 31ff, 1297). Though this might seem an unlikely idea, I contend that something similar can be argued about other biblical literature, such as the 'Wisdom Books' of the Old Testament. Job, and the 'great prophets', Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah, were on this understanding not historical characters, but 'ideal men' whose ideal experience of psychological transformation is rendered pseudonymously in poetic form in these prophetic books, and is open to an esoteric exegesis. Jung's *Red Book* is, I suggest, a contemporary example of a

product of the same process. Jung, it will be remembered, noted dreams and visions experienced during the First World War in a diary called the 'Black Book', later refining this material into a connected account and commentary on these experiences, both in writing and pictures, published in the 'Red Book' (2009). The experience that lies behind the 'Wisdom Books' of the Bible and what Jung experienced and describes as 'the unconscious viewed as a source of higher wisdom' (Jung 2009:57) shows, I suggest, the influence from '“higher centres”' of which Nicoll talks (*Commentaries*: 1297). But just as the text of Jung's *Red Book* presents both the substance of his visions and an interpretative commentary, Nicoll and Jung both suggest, as I shall show, that a similar hermeneutical argument might be made in respect of Scripture, that it contains both the substance of revelation and pointers to its interpretation.

Whatever view they might take of the nature of the New-Testament narrative, most people will concede that however 'true' the basic elements of the history and biography of the narrative might be, they have been reworked into theology:

the Gospel is not primarily an historical text in the usual sense of the word. The subject matter is not exclusively or exhaustively the historical Jesus. Rather, the historical Jesus is the symbolic medium for the presentation of the proclaimed Jesus [who is] not coextensive with the historical Jesus but is a construction of the Christian theological/spiritual imagination (Schneiders in Rollins 1999:151).

Nicoll certainly thinks that the New-Testament narrative is not to be understood literally as morality, history or dogma, but he goes much further than Sandra Schneiders. Though seeing Jesus as a historical person, the 'events' of the Gospels are for him not the real events of the life of the man Jesus at all (Nicoll 1950:4).<sup>116</sup> In this he concurs with G. R. S. Mead, who, though equally affirmative of the historical reality of Jesus, sees that person whose life, he says, forms the basis of the Gospel narrative as living a century before the 'Jesus of the Gospels'. The Gospels are therefore for Mead and, I say, also for Nicoll

the sketch of an ideal life intended for purposes of propaganda which could be further explained to those who were ready for more definite instructions in the true nature of the Christ mystery. To a

---

<sup>116</sup> One of many similar comments that Nicoll made suggests that he understood Christ to be a real person. He says that 'no one knows [the] utterly new kind of man "Born of the Spirit"; no one has ever seen anyone so reborn, or could probably endure such a man, just as so many could not endure Christ and were offended or outraged, or furious with Him' (Diary entry, July 24<sup>th</sup> 1940, in Pogson 1961:150).

certain extent it was based on some traditions of the actual doings of the historical Jesus, but the historical details were often transformed in the light of mystery-teaching, and allegories, parables and actual mystery-doings were added in changed form (Mead 1903:422).

Mead posits a putative ‘“common document”’ lying behind the Gospels as being a

modest effort at simplifying the spiritual truths of the inner life in the form of a ‘historical romance’ (Mead 1903:422).

He sees the placing of the ‘Gospel events’ equidistant between the time of writing and the actual time of the death of the real Jesus (*circa* 70BC, in his view) as an intentional move to ensure that although sayings and perhaps some doings of the Master might have been woven into his work, it was never to be understood as a factual account of this person’s life. The writer never imagined that anyone would ever take his work as anything other than a ‘historical romance’ designed to elucidate the ‘true nature of the Christ mystery’ (Mead 1903:423).

This idea was not new. For Friedrich David Strauss (1801-1874), towering figure of German ‘Higher Criticism’

Christ was only incidentally an individual person. He stood for an idea; the idea of humanity, moving towards the perfection in which the process of history was to be fulfilled. It is inconceivable that its end should be reached at some point by a transcendent incursion, or that the infinite should be embodied in the finite (Vidler on Strauss in Vidler 1961: 101-2).

Mead says that

the main secret of Christian dogmatics is [thus] almost entirely hidden in the mysteries of inner experience. [This view is] almost entirely repugnant to most minds engaged [today] in the study of Christian origins who instead adhere to the rigid uniformity of a view of history and dogma that would have been unrecognisable as the view of any circle or group of immediate disciples of the Master in the days when the leaven was most actively working (Mead 1903:426).

Mead says that ‘Nicene Christianity’ has made the ‘actual objective history of Jesus himself’, in so far as it understands this, the basis for its dogma, and on this misunderstanding and misinterpretation fails to understand and affirm the

subjective activity, the vision and spiritual experience, the energising from within, the divine leaven working in the hearts and minds of disciples that is the essence of the religion it professes (Mead 1903:425).

Despite our uncertainty as to how well Nicoll knew Mead, it is clear that both understood themselves to be working within a tradition of ‘esoteric exegesis’, broadly concerned with non-

historical, symbolic and esoteric hermeneutic interpretation of the Gospels, and their symbolic presentation of what Mead calls

the anthropogenesis or spiritual birth of man [and] the mystic tradition of the true nature of the 'Son of God' and the 'Virgin Birth' (Mead 1903: 434, 426).

Nicoll argues that this symbolical knowledge, coming from 'higher centres', or from what Jung calls 'the unconscious as a source of higher wisdom' is such that the quotidian part of our mind normally distorts, misunderstands and rejects it (Nicoll 1950:3). But we do have powers of understanding of this knowledge:

there is no doubt that we have – and sometimes realise - powers of reception very much finer than those we [usually] employ. And if we seek to define what this can mean we can say that it consists in the far more conscious reception of daily life through the use of these powers – a far finer perception whose direction is towards both the inner and outer (Nicoll 1954:24).

Those powers of perception use the language of 'inner things':

One truth is that which comes to us from outer things. The truth of your priests [however] is that which comes to us from inner things (Jung 2009:280).

This language of 'inner things' is symbolic. Symbols, often constructed of everyday words and images, convey their truth through ambivalence:

a succession of words does not have only one meaning. But men strive to assign only a single meaning to the sequence of words. This striving is worldly and constricted. On the higher levels of insight into divine thoughts you recognise that the sequence of words has more than one valid meaning. We try to grasp a few more meanings (Jung 2009:244).

Nicoll's hermeneutical approach, used, I suggest, to 'grasp a few more meanings', supposes that we need to use the 'powers of perception far finer than we usually employ' to interpret the Gospels by understanding the symbolical language Nicoll maintains the authors used to encrypt '*ancient meaning*' (Nicoll 1950:6). Nicoll says that certain words and terms were used deliberately, in an understood double sense in 'a language of parable, allegory and miracle, once well known, but lost to the humanity of today' (Nicoll 1950:6). Nicoll's understanding of this 'encryption' of psychological truth in symbolical language is the nub of my argument that the Gospels are an esoteric symbolic representation of the process of psychological transformation found in 'the Work'.

Nicoll argues that the seeming problem of interpreting the symbolic language of the gospels is in fact an opportunity. The apparently 'realistic' surface of the New Testament is a 'shell' around esoteric content:

all sacred writings contain an outer and an inner meaning. Behind the literal words lies another range of meaning, another form of knowledge (Nicoll 1950:1).

This 'encryption' of the inner meaning, though a protective barrier, also provides the interpretative key. Robert Segal says that Jung and Bultmann agree with this:

the obstacles that modernity poses to a literal rendition of Christ's life offer an opportunity to make clear for the first time the meaning intended from the outset (Segal 2000:74).

But the hermeneutical process is much more than a simple decipherment of symbols. Rollins says that the result of this style of symbolic interpretation is to construct an inner world cast in the form of the reader's own organising systems. The hermeneutic process used to achieve this is

not simply a task of making a meaning from the text that suits the needs of the reader, or simply a task of unlocking some point of meaning ensconced in the text, rather a process in which unique relationship between text and reader evolves where there is no complete dominance of either objectivity or subjectivity (Rollins 1999:166)

Schneiders, speaking of the Gospels, says that at this profound level of interpretation

the text creates a new world into which the reader is invited. This world is variously named in the text itself: John speaks of being 'born from above', and the synoptic gospels present Jesus as inviting his hearers into an alternative sphere called 'the Kingdom of Heaven' (Schneiders 1991:168).

I argue that the construction of this inner world 'in the form of the reader's own organising systems' is the discovery of something already sleeping in our unconscious that is manifesting itself through the symbols which we must interpret. As Oswald Wirth observes:

[Symbols] arouse a thought by means of suggestion and thus cause the truth which lies hidden in the depths of our spirit to reveal itself. In order that symbols could speak, it is essential that we should have in ourselves the germs of the ideas, the revelation of which constitutes the mission of the symbols. No revelation whatever is possible if the mind is empty, sterile and inert (in Ouspensky 1931:219).

These symbols come from inside us. Jung writes:

If the word is a sign, it means nothing. But if a symbol it means everything. Our freedom does not lie outside but within us. One creates inner freedom only through the symbol (Jung 2009:391-2).

Ouspensky further quotes Oswald Wirth in support of this idea:

when it is necessary to express transcendental ideas one is forced to have recourse to figurative language. It is impossible to do without allegories and symbols. Symbols are precisely intended to awaken ideas sleeping in our consciousness (Ouspensky 1931:219).

Interpreting symbols is not a natural activity, but needs to be developed, and is prevented by an excess of rationalism. Wirth again:

Symbols do not appeal to everyone, especially eluding 'positive' minds which base their reasoning only on [the] inert scientific and dogmatic formulae [that] represent only frozen thought dead in comparison with living thought, which, indefinite, complex and mobile, is reflected in symbols, [which] by their very nature must remain elastic, vague and ambiguous. Only symbols can deliver man from the slavery of words and formulae, allowing him to think freely. It is impossible to avoid the use of symbols if one desires to penetrate into the secrets (mysteries) (Ouspensky 1931:219)

Nicoll's aim is to 'deliver a man from the slavery of words and formulae' by fostering understanding of the symbols found in scripture that form its myths. As he writes in the *Commentaries*:

It is more than interesting to read again the scattered fragments of Christ's teaching present in the Four Gospels and pick out what was really meant, in the light of the Work. Nothing is more releasing for the fast-bound religious mind that holds many in prison – yes – now – at this moment (*Commentaries*: 1223).

Jung says that a religion that does retain its connection with its myths is dead, it being necessary either to update of the myth or to replace it.

Our myth [in the gospel account of Christ's life] has become mute, which is our fault for not having made the effort to understand it, indeed to have suppressed any attempt to explicate the symbolic meaning intended by the gospel all along (Jung 1995:364).

Nicoll's hermeneutic programme is an attempt to save a religion by seeing its myths, in a scientific spirit, as psychological entities rather than literally understood stories.

Religion can only be saved by extracting the mythology from it and then psychologising the mythology [which is] the stories of the lives of gods and heroes. Belief gives information, mythology offers experience (Segal 2000: 71, 74).

In *The New Man* and *The Mark* Nicoll shows, I will argue, how the Gospels, and particularly those parables and miracles he has selected describe through Christian '*religious*' symbols the process of *psychological* transformation called 'this possible evolution' and how it may be put in train.

At the beginning of *The New Man* Nicoll writes:

The Gospels speak of a *real* psychology based on the teaching that man on earth is capable of a definite inner evolution in understanding. They are from beginning to end all about this possible self-evolution; they are psychological documents, their central idea [being] about what a man must think, feel, and do in order to reach a new level of understanding; they are not about the affairs of life (Nicoll 1952:4).

My thesis is that in reading the Gospels as myth Nicoll understands that the New Testament is knowledge from higher centres couched in esoteric symbolic terms that describes this self-evolution

that he argues is 'rebirth' and the 'The Kingdom of Heaven' just as he understands 'the Work' to be knowledge from higher centres couched in its own formulations that can be used to describe the realisation of 'real' in Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's teaching. If this thesis is tenable, the two final books by Nicoll, *The New Man* and *The Mark* form an alternative description of and a commentary on Nicoll's system as set down in a more hybrid form in the *Commentaries*. It is my task to demonstrate this. Before setting out how I will go about this I just quote this *bon mot* of Nicoll: 'Every parable in the Gospels is about something in this Work' (*Commentaries*: 880).

### **Nicoll's argument**

In the remaining sections of this chapter I present an argument as to the Nature of the 'Kingdom of Heaven' largely derived from my understanding of Nicoll's treatment of those parables presented in the *New Man* and *The Mark*. It would be an exaggeration to say that Nicoll presents a unified argument in either book. The various chapters of both books were written mostly as separate items, and their placement in each book was the work of Vincent Stuart and Jane Mounsey, as we have seen. I construct my argument following mostly *The New Man*, but I use material from both books as appropriate for purposes of exposition. More detailed analysis of parables presented in *The Mark* gives insights not vouchsafed by *The New Man*.

Nicoll said that the essence of what the Gospels say concerns a process of psychological transformation, the *raising the level of the psyche* in man. I present Nicoll's material to show the various metaphorical mythological forms that the description of this transformation process takes in the Gospels. While each treatment of a miracle, sign, teaching, parable, or group of parables might focus on a particular aspect of this process of transformation, the series of treatments is also cumulative, showing successive stages of the process. However, some aspects are pertinent to the whole process. So, for instance, reversal, a principle that the first shall be last, of which the marriage of Truth and Good is an example, is relevant to all stages of the process, even if I describe it chiefly

with respect to that example. Also, some parables describe the whole process of transformation rather than one stage of it.

I argue that Nicoll's individual treatment of each 'parable' is of interest in itself, quite apart from the argument, both in showing how Nicoll reads the Bible, and in assessing his understanding of the meaning of these metaphorical constructions. So while in no sense is this chapter to be read as a *résumé* of Nicoll's books, I present much of this material in detail. The exegesis is Nicoll's own, and any comment I make is noted as such. Nevertheless, the overall argument is that Nicoll's exegesis is an exposition of 'the Work' distinctively couched in images from the New Testament. Significantly, since Nicoll does not mention 'the Work' or Gurdjieff in these books, and only mentions Ouspensky *en passant* in *The Mark*, any references to, comparisons with or comments on it are my own comment. This confirms my argument that it is in these two final texts that Nicoll realises his own system of esoteric interpretation which finally resolves the anxieties occasioned by his rejection of his natal Christianity in a manner that WRN might have recognised.

I start my description of Nicoll's use of parable to describe the stages of the psychological transformation that he claims is the chief concern of the Gospels by presenting his exegesis of the Wedding at Cana. I do this because Nicoll's analysis of this parable/miracle shows clearly how he understands and uses parable. Showing that the parable/miracle is not to be understood as a description of a historical event, the exegesis demonstrates, I argue, how Nicoll views the drama of the 'event' as a representation of the interaction of parts of the psyche in one individual, and how (Jewish/Christian) religious symbols, in this case stone, water and wine, represent aspects of this psychological drama. The parable is also paradigmatic in two further ways. It is paradigmatic in the context of John's Gospel in the same way as I treat it as paradigmatic in my argument; it is as it were a template for how 'John' will present his descriptions of each stage of the process of transformation, which is, I argue, what his Gospel is. It is paradigmatic also in that although it shows an early stage of the process of transformation – that Christ says 'my hour has not yet come' shows

that what is being symbolised is not yet fulfilled – by its use of the symbols of stone, water, wine and marriage it summarises the whole process of transformation.

And upon the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus was also bidden, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when the wine failed, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. And Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. Now there were six waterpots of stone set there after the Jews' manner of purifying, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the ruler of the feast. And they bare it. And when the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast calleth the bridegroom and saith unto him, Every man setteth on first the good wine; and when men have drunk freely, that that which is worse: thou has kept the good wine until now. This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed on him (John 2: 1-12- Nicoll 1950: 30-31).

Nicoll argues that the story makes no sense as a miracle. Why at the end of a wedding 'in a small village transform about one hundred and twenty gallons of water into [high-quality] wine?' (Nicoll 1950:34) The story, 'this beginning of [Christ's] signs' is rather a 'psychological portrait' of an inner event, the achievement in a man of a stage of maturation (Nicoll 1950:30ff). That the wedding takes place 'on the third day' has no meaning for the story other than symbolising the *completion* of a stage, a 'fulfilment' (Nicoll 1950:30). Nicoll argues that since Christ and his mother are both present, yet there is no mention of the bride and the bridegroom only appears at the end, this shows that the 'marriage' is of two principles, symbolised by Christ and his mother. The marriage represents 'the internal union of the spiritual and the natural in Jesus' (Nicoll 1950:28). Jesus, the ' "*new master*" ', replaces the ' "*old master*" ' [Nicoll's italics], the 'master of the feast', to whom Jesus says nothing. Nicoll sees this silence towards the old master, who remains (this is said specifically) in ignorance of what Nicoll calls 'a profound change of his whole psychology in which the former master is now no longer in control because another and greater master has appeared' (Nicoll 1950:31), as a metaphor for the necessary silence between parts of the personality and between it and the world during this process of transformation; this will be discussed further in due course. Nevertheless, this non-violent change of authority leaves the old master with some authority. He, representing the 'natural side' of a man, who has to 'go behind', or obey, as do the servants, appreciates that the new wine is good. The actual miracle is seen by Nicoll as the symbol for a change of level of knowledge of esoteric truth

in Christ. Stone, water and wine are, Nicoll says, symbols for esoteric truth. This truth at the worldly level in Him, symbolised by his mother and the six empty *stone* jars (the literal external Jewish law, written on tablets of stone, six signifying the period of preparation for a Sabbath or a jubilee), a level with which he has nothing more to do, called by Nicoll the *literal*, is first transformed to the next level by Christ ordering the jars to be filled with water. This next level of truth, called the *psychological* by Nicoll, is that of *water*, symbolising 'the psychological understanding of literal esoteric Truth'. This level of truth is in turn transformed into 'Truth at a higher level', called by Nicoll the *transformed*, through the water being turned into *wine* (Nicoll 1950:33).

The *perikope* being discussed is not a parable, but a miracle. The sub-title of *The New Man* is *An interpretation of some parables and miracles of Christ*. But Nicoll in no way seeks to investigate the miraculous, and treats miracles in the same way as he treats parables, that is as metaphorical representations of truth. While no one takes parables literally, many would still regard the *perikopes* of St John's Gospel as prosaic descriptions of events, the literally miraculous nature of which shows that Jesus was divine. But Nicoll's treatment of the miracle of the Wedding at Cana indicates, I suggest, that he views miracles as parables. Indeed, I argue that Nicoll sees the Gospels in general as one enormous parable: 'There is not a sentence, not a single word, in the Gospels, that has not meaning totally beyond the literal meaning' (Nicoll 1950:73-4). Every element in the parable has besides its usual meaning some esoteric meaning. Its significance in the drama of the parable depends on this esoteric meaning (Nicoll 1954:10).

A superficial assessment of Nicoll's exegesis of the Wedding at Cana might lead one to take him at his word that he sees this narrative as the symbolical representation of steps of psychological transformation of a particular individual called Jesus. But though indeed 'the conception of human personality which the New Testament reflects is both an actuality and an ideal of manhood' (Fletcher 1912:250), I argue that this 'actuality and ideal manhood', even if it might have been reflected in a human Jesus (though I do not think it was) is not *in this portrayal* a picture of a discrete

male human being. The picture is rather a symbolic representation of a drama of the actual and ideal *psyche*. Though Nicoll talks of the psychological maturation of Jesus as though he were a person, by saying that the marriage is the 'internal union of [the] natural [his mother] and the spiritual [himself] in Jesus' (Nicoll 1950:32), he shows that he understands that the figures and images *in the story* are 'all about *one* person, in his internal life and development' (Nicoll 1954:37). Though this type of depiction of the psyche of the individual may not be an appropriate interpretation for all parables, I contend that in those chosen to advance his argument in his two books everything Nicoll argues concerns individual psychological dynamics.

I suggest that the symbol of marriage used in this parable throws an important light on the raising of the level of understanding of esoteric truth in an individual through 'three stages of man's relation to esoteric truth' which Nicoll calls *literal*, *psychological* and *transformed*, symbolised, he says by stone, water and wine, as we have seen (Nicoll 1950:14). But the process of psychological transformation is more than just an increase in understanding esoteric truth. It is necessary to marry this truth. What does this mean? Though the Wedding at Cana is not overtly Christ's wedding, when seen in esoteric exegesis it is. The increase in understanding of esoteric knowledge is a kind of marriage. Marriage viewed as an esoteric symbol means transformation to a higher level of being, putting a person in a permanent, irrevocable, transformative relationship that unites him in something that transcends him. He does not merely know more, he knows differently, and finally knows with his whole being rather than merely with his rational mind. An image for the culmination of this process, which is one of union of knowledge and being, is the marriage of Truth and Good.

Nicoll quotes Plato as saying:

the true lover of knowledge is always striving for being. The union of these imparts truth to what is known and power of knowing to the knower, and is what I would have you term the good (Nicoll 1950:35).

Nicoll says quite clearly that 'Christ united his knowledge with the good of his being' (Nicoll 1950:37). We shall discuss this aspect of the process in due course.

Having dealt in some measure with how Nicoll uses the parable and outlined some of the principles that I argue underpin the process of psychological transformation that Nicoll says is the one and only concern of the Gospels, I now build a picture of the various stages of this process. I start by presenting Nicoll's treatment of the first steps in obeying the injunction 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand'. Nicoll treats this topic in his portrait of Peter, the first 'chapter' of either of these books to be written. This first step is fraught with difficulty. Nicoll says that 'very few were found who could understand a single thing of all that was being taught' by Christ (Nicoll 1950:123). With his ordinary level of consciousness, at the place where he finds himself in ordinary life, a man has no ears to hear what this call means. To understand it he has to 'start *beyond himself* – and *faith* is the starting point' (Nicoll 1950:117).

Peter, described in the Gospels as *having no faith*, is seen by Nicoll as just such a man who, at the beginning of his spiritual journey, has difficulty in leaving behind the lower part of himself and building faith in himself to make contact with the higher in him. Like the seed that falls on rocky ground, Peter, whose name Simon, Nicoll says, means 'one who hears' (Nicoll 1950:12), though enthusiastic about the teaching of inner evolution, has no understanding about it, *no root in himself*, only 'belief' through the external image of Jesus (Nicoll 1950:75). He understands from knowledge, since he is given the 'keys of the Kingdom' (Matthew 16:19-Nicoll 1950:74), but his emotional development is weak. Peter is at the level of rock or stone (his name Peter means 'rock'), the lowest, most external *literal* level of esoteric knowledge. He cannot understand that Christ has to die. Admonished by Christ as minding the things of men, not of God (Matthew 16:23-Nicoll 1950:75) for so thinking, he does not understand *psychologically* that teaching based on the external image of Christ is only a stage, and that to move to a higher level this external image, and the dependent literal teaching, must die. He has no faith, no vision of anything higher. Being only at the level of the world (of rock, the *literal*) he cannot walk on the level of water (the *psychological*) without the immediate help of Christ (Matthew 14:28-9 - Nicoll 1950:80). Unable to forgive, prone to violence, only the shock of Christ's death enables him to move to a higher level. Eventually, 'once thou hast

turned' [that is, when he has experienced *metanoia*], he will 'stablish thy brethren' (Nicoll 1950:76-9 - Luke 22:32). In 'Work' terms, his intellectual centre has to control his emotional centre, so that he becomes a New Man; he has to bridge the gap between 'what he knew and what he was. In place of merely knowing he [has to] *understand*' (Nicoll 1954:72). Peter's story shows what is needed from those who would start on the bottom rung of the ladder of psychological transformation.

In Nicoll's next chapter, 'The Idea of Righteousness in the Gospels' he discusses 'Christ's teaching about what is necessary to approach a higher level in Man' (Nicoll1950:57). To approach the 'more internal or relatively spiritual side' of himself (Nicoll 1950:29) a man needs 'righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees'. Exceed means to be of a different order. Righteousness is not a question of doing Good. That kind of righteousness, which the Pharisees practised, is a form of self-love that can be and usually is a means of justifying oneself in the eyes of the world. But to practise the kind of righteousness exhorted by Christ, which demands the renunciation of self-love, a man must 'do alms in secret' [doing alms, Nicoll says means 'an act of inner cancelling of debts against [both yourself and] others' (Nicoll 1950:59)], while letting not the left hand know what the right hand is doing (Matthew 6:3- Nicoll 1950:29/59). This means, Nicoll says, that the renunciation of self-love that Christ demands is an inner act, justifying a man with respect of the higher level in him ('the right hand') that needs to be separated from the lower level ('the left hand'). That the Righteous is obliged to 'keep silence - *in himself*' (Nicoll 1950:60) means that, when practising this higher form of righteousness a man must, besides keeping silence to the world by 'sounding not a trumpet before him, as the hypocrites do' (Matthew 6:2 at Nicoll 1950:58), in other words not letting people see that he is working on himself, also in some way not use the lower mind, the 'left hand', either to let this act become a matter of praise in his own secret estimation, or even to evaluate what he is doing in a rational way. Nicoll says that in 'doing alms at this higher level for no reward' in this secret way the righteous enters the Kingdom of Heaven, 'and thy father, which seeth in secret, shall recompense thee' (Matthew 6:4 - Nicoll 1950:61). If this is achieved a man lives from the inner, the higher, the Kingdom of Heaven in himself. But it is

impossible to live both from the inner and from the outer; a man cannot serve God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24), though the Pharisee tries to do this. He mixes the levels in himself, and cannot keep silence either in himself or towards the world. He mistakes the Kingdom of Heaven for some post-mortem state or some millenarian future on earth, whereas, as Nicoll argues, it is 'within you'<sup>117</sup> (Luke 17:21- Nicoll 1950:124). It is a state 'attainable *in this life on earth*' at a higher level of *oneself* (Nicoll 1950:61).

Another image Nicoll uses for this changing of the whole man in an act of *metanoia*, of *new thinking*, of 'meta-righteousness' (Nicoll 1952:63) is of him laying down his soul (*psyche* [ψυχη] – **not** 'life'), which is 'the supreme definition of *conscious love*' (John 15:13 - Nicoll 1950:64). Nicoll says that this laying down of the soul is not a dying in the ordinary sense for the benefit of your friend, but means to cease to live as before (to lose your life – the soul must die, otherwise it cannot be transformed) and to begin to live as one should. It is a passing from a lower level in a person to a higher, a change in the soul of a person, and a turning inwards.

'In your patience you shall win your souls' [(Luke 21:19) means that by] 'staying behind', not going with one's own desires, not going with oneself {patience is *parakemai* [παρακειμαι] I rest with} [a man's] soul must change [enabling him] to pass from a lower to a higher level in himself (Nicoll 1950:66).

In his chapter 'The Idea of Wisdom in the Gospels' Nicoll says that in turning inwards a man finds wisdom in the only place it can be found, in himself. But the sort of wisdom found is not what this word normally calls to mind. 'Wise', *phronimos* [φρονιμος], means in this context practically intelligent, having your wits about you, cunning and sly (in the original non-pejorative meaning of these last two words [as given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*]). Those who are wise in this sense,

---

<sup>117</sup> The Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon, citing this passage, says that '*entos humon*' [έντος ύμων] may mean *within you, in your hearts*, suggesting that *entos mou*, [έντος μου] 'within me', used in a number of passages from the Psalms is congruent with this translation. The lexicon goes on to say 'though many may prefer to transl. *among you, in your midst*'. This is the only passage where this conundrum is cited, and is the only use of *entos humon* anywhere in the New Testament. Nicoll bases his exegesis on the understanding that the Greek word *entos*, meaning 'inside', 'the inside', is used here to mean within you, **not** among you. Some biblical translations affirm this, some not: Tyndale gives – with in; KJV – within; RSV – among; NIV – within; Douai Rheims – within; Jerusalem – among. [*entos* can mean amongst in the sense of 'one amongst you', 'one from out of your company']. Nicoll also remarks on the translation of *metanoia*, *pistis*, *phronimos*, and *psyche* at Nicoll 1954:29.

the *phronimos*, are those who, hearing the word, do it, building their house on rock, not sand (Matthew 7:24-Nicoll 1950:68). To clarify that this sort of wisdom concerns knowledge from a higher level in oneself Nicoll cites the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, which uses the term *phronimos*, and the opposite, *moros* [μωρος].

Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered to them and said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh (Matthew 25:1-13 - Nicoll 1950:68).

Nicoll says that five refers to the five senses; the souls of two people rising above the sensual are being compared. The *phronimos* is exactly like the *moros* in that both have heard the word (Matthew 7:26 - Nicoll 1950:70); but the *phronimos* has oil, so her lamp gives light. This light is 'the light of new understanding coming from the Word' (Nicoll 1950:69). She sees the truth of Christ, who is the light and the *Word*, which is

a new understanding about herself and what she has to do, the real meaning of her creation, about the way to reach a new level where this light is shed, which lies over and above a woman, but comes from within her (Nicoll 1950:69).

She is shining a light from within herself which gives a higher form of consciousness. Putting oil in her lamp she lives this truth by seeing the Good of it. The *moros* on the other hand buys oil from those who sell, that is from the world; therefore her lamp gives no light at this higher level. Though hearing the word too, she does not do it, or see the Good of it, but continues to live by worldly oil, something outside herself giving no light. She becomes no more conscious, and has the door shut in her face (Nicoll 1950:68).

In comment on the story of Peter, the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, and the parable of the wise and foolish virgins I would say that the images of the Pharisee and of Peter in his initial state shows man in his normal worldly state, living through self-love. If he wants to enter the

Kingdom of Heaven, he has to renounce this self-love. This process is one of both overcoming the sensory and finding a new feeling of himself that does not depend on the approbation of others, as Nicoll pointed out in *Living Time*. But Pharisee, Peter and the virgins are also religious images. Nicoll sees stone, the lowest level of esoteric knowledge, as the *literal* 'rules and regulations' of churches and Religions generally, 'the knowledge of the truth that Christ taught', as symbolised particularly by Peter holding the keys (Nicoll 1950:74). The Pharisee also, though learned in a religious sense, does not understand his learning in a *psychological* way. Neither does the foolish virgin, who also has heard the word. Peter, Pharisee and foolish virgin all think about internal things, like those who for instance understand 'the Work' but do not practise it, or who understand Christianity merely as something intellectual or social or moral. They are as it were waiting on the bridegroom, are aspiring to that level in themselves that he represents, but although they perceive the Truth, they do not embrace the Good of it. So the 'oil in their lamps', their consciousness, though of spiritual things, is still sensory (which is what the idea that they bought their oil from those who sell means); this is why the door is not opened to them. But the higher-level consciousness of the wise virgins, of wine rather than water, of Peter when he is eventually made a 'fisher of men', is wisdom of a *transformed* quality from within them. Only by destroying one's dependence on the approbation of others and renouncing self-love and hypocrisy can a person raise the level of his inner life and come into contact with higher (and inner) wisdom. Only then can the light of one's own lamp, fuelled by wisdom from within, not from the world, light oneself and others. Nicoll has said much the same in *Living Time*, and 'the Work' teaches this too. This contact with a higher level in a man is the bliss described in the Sermon on the Mount, a detailed analysis of which follows in *The New Man*.

In his chapter 'The Sermon on the Mount' Nicoll describes his view of the practical measures needed to raise the level of ourselves from that of 'ordinary man' to that of disciple of Christ (Matthew 5&6), which he sees as the next step in the search for faith. Nicoll introduces his discussion of the sermon in the *New Man* with a portrait of the 'ideal' ordinary man, the greatest of those not in the Kingdom, John the Baptist (Matthew 11:11). Though John preached *metanoia* and the Kingdom of Heaven, he

(like Moses) could not enter. His clothing, made from skins, symbolises his entirely external concerns. His food (wild [that is, naturally occurring, of the world] honey and locusts), his adherence to the law, his insistence on morality and good works, despite his saying that these could not save a man, are symbols for the sort of man, (or else that part of a man at this level) who, however 'good' in an ordinary sense, is unable to see things in any other than a literal way. John could only baptise with water, not with the Holy Ghost and fire (Luke 3:16 - Nicoll 1950:94). Whereas John insisted on the literal outward observance of the law, Christ showed that this was not enough. It was not enough to *do*, one had to *be* something different to gain the Kingdom of Heaven (Nicoll 1950:95). Nevertheless John realised (though he doubted towards the end of his life) that Christ was higher than him, and that he had to become less so Christ could become greater. His anguish is that of the personality (all of us) who, understanding the Word of God but in a literal way that destroys both its beauty and its meaning, is faced with internal or higher meaning that points to his own extinction and that of all he holds dear in favour of something not understood (Nicoll 1950:96).

To those, however, who, now understanding *psychologically*, can endure this extinction, the Kingdom of Heaven beckons; 'force or *bliss*<sup>118</sup> from this higher level can reach them' (Nicoll 1950:63). The Sermon on the Mount shows how to reach the stage of hearing or understanding what is said about it. The sermon was preached only to Christ's disciples 'on the Mount', that is, only to those initiated into a higher order of teaching symbolised by 'the Mount' who could understand and put into practice what was being preached. Like 'the Work', the sermon advocates a particular inner path for those with a specific spiritual goal in mind. The Beatitudes show that a man must first of all understand that he is in the realm of the spirit but a beggar, and must make himself poor, not in worldly goods, but in his sense of himself and his idea of his worth; *blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven* (Beatitudes, italicised below, at Matthew 5:1-10 - Nicoll 1950:97-103). This impoverishment is painful; the outer personality must die. A man will mourn this death; *blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted*. Faced with the pain of this a man will

---

<sup>118</sup> 'blessed' [blissed], *μακαριος* means 'in receipt of divine favour'.

resent; but he must be meek (*praos* [πραος]), meaning ‘lacking in resentment’, or ‘tamed’); *blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*. He will be empty, hungry and thirsting for something to replace what he has lost; *blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*. If he resents, cannot forgive himself and others and show mercy, he cannot be shown mercy; *blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*. He must be pure of heart, his emotions purged, so that, freed from the negative feelings of hatred, self-pity and self-love that make up most people’s emotional life he can see clearly what lies above him; *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*. This gives peace within. If he engages with similar people acting, like him, from the Good of things, peace will reign; *blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God*. But peace more significantly has an inner or esoteric meaning; inner peace is the result of the process of transformation being advocated in the Sermon on the Mount. Nicoll writes:

Esoterically, peace is not the opposite of war, but a state in which the whole being is filled with an uncritical tolerance. Whatever one sees does not strike inwardly unpleasantly where it did previously, so that there goes with it a surprising freedom, as if escaping from a prison (Nicoll in Pogson 1961:226).

But if the initiated is confronted with those still enmeshed with Truth without Goodness, the unmerciful, he will be ‘*persecuted for my name’s sake*’ by others seeking the Kingdom of Heaven, pseudo-Christians Ouspensky calls them, who think they do God’s will. Nicoll concludes his survey with the idea that the reference (at the end of the Beatitudes) to being ‘the salt of the earth’ (Matthew 5:13-Nicoll 1950-102) symbolises the marriage in a man of Truth and Good (salt being a compound of sodium and chlorine), the whole process being the *desire* for this inner ‘marriage of the two things in a man which constitute the whole of his inner life’ (Nicoll 1950:102). If a man has too much ‘chlorine’ [‘higher knowledge he receives from outside him’] for the amount of ‘sodium’ in him [‘good ground, of which the Gospels so often speak’], the ‘chlorine’ will poison him; ‘the poisonous power of knowledge alone without good ground to receive it may simply produce world-poison’ (Nicoll 1950:36). Christ’s warning, that ‘the salt that has lost its savour [those who seek knowledge but not the good] will be trodden under the foot of men’ (Matthew 5:13), reiterates this warning, combining, I contend, two aspects of Nicoll’s interpretation of the parable of the Sower.

Those who were 'sown by the way' are trodden under foot by passers-by (Luke 8:5; Nicoll 1954:41) [which means that sensuous thought will destroy the seed of esotericism in their heart]. Those 'sown on rocky ground' are those who, when the sun rising turns what should be nourishing knowledge from higher centres into 'rocks, stones [which] in the language of parables stand for knowledge of truth alone' Nicoll 1954:71), the equivalent, in my view, of the poisonous knowledge that chlorine becomes when not sown in the sodium of good soil, burn because they have no root in good ground. This all accords also with the 'Work' idea that esoteric knowledge, dangerous in the hands of those not fitted to understand it, should be denied them.

This chapter is the combination of the presentation of Nicoll's exegesis of the Gospels and my comment on that that takes the form of a comparison between the psychology that I understand Nicoll to read from 'the Work' and the psychology he sees as being encapsulated in the Gospels. Offering the next section I seek, as I see it, to complete Nicoll's exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount, demonstrating the practical application of his hermeneutical ideas. I do this not from any *folie de grandeur*, but to point out and emphasise something that I suggest Nicoll fails to, but which, it seems to me, would show that the paramountcy of 'self-remembering' in Gurdjieff's own system is mirrored in Nicoll's interpretation of the Gospel in the light of that system. For I understand the Sermon on the Mount, the first half of which has already been treated, not to be a code of general morality for all and sundry, but to be a set of specific psychological exercises for people at a certain stage of their spiritual journey. The crux of these exercises, I maintain, is the 'inner stop' that was analysed in Chapter Five as the making of a choice not to go with the incoming thoughts and feelings that assail a person, but rather to struggle against the all-too-possible resultant activation of the emotions and the stirring up of the passions with a stop, which allows a moment of consciousness to intervene before reacting to these incoming feelings in a considered and dispassionate, apathetic in the proper sense, fashion. My argument is that the particular exhortations to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile have nothing to do with pacifism, and are not congruent with the counsel that we resist not evil, but concern the in-most part of our soul, the place, the only place where egoism

can be defeated, and where the act that transforms formatory knowledge of 'the Work' into practice that changes a person, the act of *metanoia*, can take place.

After exhorting the disciples to be 'the salt of the earth' Christ enjoins that they not hide their light under a bushel, but rather be the light of the world (Luke 11:33). Further, they must understand that their insight does not entitle them to break the law; they have to be more righteous than the Pharisees. How might this be? The nub of the matter is in the realm of the inner. An outward infringement of rules like not killing, not quarrelling with your brother, not committing adultery, not perjuring yourself, not telling lies to yourself or others, loving your enemy (all matters dealt with in the Sermon) involves the emotions that go with committing these acts, may even be the result of these emotions. But Christ says these emotions may arise even when the acts themselves are committed only 'in his heart' (Matthew 5:28). Indulging these feelings in this way is just as damaging, if not more so, than when the actual offence is committed. As in '*self-remembering*', non-identification, the killing of negative feelings and purity of heart are needed. No negative emotions, mercy to yourself and your enemy, taking no offence, no resentment, and the expectation of ridicule and persecution for your attitude are demanded, all to purge your heart, to subjugate the ego so that 'you may be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). I argue strongly that the Sermon on the Mount is in this respect an exact description of the discipline of '*self-remembering*'. The ego is attacked at exactly the point where feelings, coming from the world, might turn into emotions and passions (Needleman 1980:137-8). Christ enjoins a purity of heart that prevents this. As 'the Work' teaches, a man confronted by thoughts and feelings that challenge him, needs to practice '*inner stop*',<sup>119</sup> not reacting immediately, but *turning the other cheek*. He must see that he may well merit criticism, that his 'being has attracted his life', as 'the Work' would say, but that criticism of the other that he may return is often the expression of something in himself that he has projected, and that if he loves his enemy in an act of '*external consideration*' he will increase his

---

<sup>119</sup> 'Stopping thought' is a first step to intentional thought. It is one of the benefits of the 'stop exercise' (Ouspensky 1950: 117-118, 353)

consciousness of himself. By seeing the mote in his brother's eye he may perceive the beam in his own. His reward is to 'see God', to become aware of the Kingdom of Heaven that lies above him. Only those with a pure heart forged in the cut and thrust of living the Beatitudes have ears to hear the parables that preach the Kingdom of Heaven, just as only those who have experienced 'self-remembering' can experience higher centres and build a soul in themselves. Further, I would suggest that the fact that the Lord's Prayer appears here (Matthew 6: 9 -13 – Nicoll 1954:89ff), as how *you should pray* (*you* meaning those being taught 'on the Mount' – Nicoll's italics) means that this prayer (and indeed any prayer) can be prayed only by those who have reached this level of development.

We understand from this, I argue, that the Sermon on the Mount, not, as already suggested, a universally applicable moral code, but a series of technically precise psychological exercises for the achievement of a particular purpose, should be kept secret from those not psychologically equipped to be able to take advantage of what is being taught. In this it is similar to 'Work' exercises which no 'Work' practitioner would dream of giving out to someone not in 'the Work'. It is also, as I have maintained above, a precise description of the exercise of 'self-remembering'. Initiation to this level means passing through the crucial point in this process of psychological transformation, *metanoia*. The transformed person has passed a point where, as a disciple of Christ, she becomes a completely different person, having cast off and left behind the world of 'men numbers one to three'. Initiated into a new higher state of themselves such people are now agents, no longer patients subject to the passions. Able to see the levels above themselves and receive power from them, they now no longer resent or have negative feelings, and are aware of themselves in a new way. As 'men number four' they are prepared for the next level of transformation, where they will encounter the teaching of the parables.

Nicoll says that being pure of heart and having ears to hear the teaching of the Kingdom means achieving a new quality of mind, a higher type of mind, a *new mind*, '*another kind of thinking*' (Nicoll 1954:12). This quality of mind, explored in his chapter 'Faith', is *faith* [πιστις], which Nicoll

emphasises is not belief, but concerns higher levels of consciousness and understanding. '*Faith is necessary to open a part of the mind not opened by the senses*' (Nicoll 1954:13 – his italics). In his treatment of Nicodemus in *The Mark* Nicoll shows the difference between this type of faith and belief (Nicoll 1954:115). Nicodemus believed in Christ from having seen his miracles. But such belief is only from his senses, is the 'testifying of man', is not enough, and He 'did not commit himself unto them' who had such 'belief' (John 2:23, 25). Faith, 'the evidence of things not seen' [Hebrews 11:1]

is not believing in the *extraordinary* because miracles are performed, but a perception, an insight, and a conviction that there is an order of Truth above the truth of the senses a certainty that a higher interpretation of life exists [and] that the transformation of Man [his re-birth, of which Nicodemus had no idea] is a possibility (Nicoll 1950: 117, 108).

Christ extols the centurion whose servant he healed as the greatest exemplar of faith precisely because the centurion is a symbol for a man who understands the idea of a hierarchy of levels of consciousness in which each level obeyed the one above (Nicoll 1950:111). A man of faith has force because the various levels in him obey those above; πιστις/*pistis* [faith] derives from πειθω/*peitho* [I persuade – Nicoll 1950:112]. Faith is 'the conviction that a higher interpretation of life exists' (Nicoll 1950:108) and the acceptance of a higher level in oneself that must be obeyed. 'To a man who has faith things become possible that are otherwise impossible' (Nicoll 1950:109).

A similar idea is found in 'The Work', which says a man, by becoming two men, observer and observed, inner and outer, builds those hierarchical levels in himself so that when eventually the intellectual centre controls the emotional, when the higher centres control the whole man, when the levels are connected by that obedience that 'the Work' demands, a man has faith that can move mountains. But this work is achieved through an increase in consciousness, not by blind belief, which is anathema to 'the Work'.

In *The Mark* Nicoll calls attention to the workings of a similar hierarchy in faith by linking *metanoia*, 'rebirth' and the Kingdom of Heaven as a series of three levels in this new mind of faith (Nicoll 1954:102). *Metanoia*, [μετανοια] which means '*transformation of the mind* [and] 'contains no idea of pain or sorrow', regret or repentance (Nicoll 1954:93) involves an entirely new way of thinking:

it refers to a *new mind*, not a new heart, for it is impossible to have a new heart without first possessing a new mind, an entirely new way of thinking, new ideas, new knowledge, and a new approach to everything in life (Nicoll 1954:93).

Nicoll introduces, in a rare reference to the 'Work', the idea of the intellectual centre learning to control the emotional centre as the equivalent of making away with the 'wrong attitude to life which has persisted throughout religious history' (Nicoll 1954:91), an attitude that views imagining that God's will is done on earth as a kind of comfort blanket. Realisation that God's will is not done in earth causes what St. Paul calls 'godly sorrow that worketh repentance [*metanoia*] to salvation' [2 Corinthians 7:10], which Dean Stanley sees as meaning 'ye were grieved so as to change your mind or your repentance amounted to a revolution of mind' (Nicoll 1954:95). Only a person

in the highest state of consciousness, understanding every phrase in the Lord's Prayer [can] understand what 'thy will be done in earth as in heaven' means [that it is a request] and begin to see all its implications (Nicoll 1954:99).

But the world, 'subject to vanity', to the 'God of this world', is saturated with the sort of suffering of which St. Paul says 'to suffer as the world knows brings death' (2 Corinthians 10:7), what 'the Work' calls '*useless suffering*'. One cannot be comforted by seeing this as God's will. Only by a *change of mind*, by *rebirth*, by a 'psychological transformation of oneself' can this useless suffering be evaded (Nicoll 1954:103). But our 'Godly sorrow', which is *not* useless suffering, is necessary to bring about this transformation, to show us that our destiny is the Kingdom of Heaven. But only '*another kind of man*, born from above, can know God'. Only someone who has experienced *metanoia* and 'rebirth' [*palingenesis* [παλιγγενεσις]] can in this way have the Kingdom of Heaven as his destiny (Nicoll 1954:117). Only when 'transformed in the entire renewal of your mind' [Romans 12:2] can you inherit the Kingdom, and worship God as a Spirit (Nicoll 1954: 124, 131).

Nicoll says that these three levels of *Metanoia*, rebirth and the Kingdom of Heaven are Christ's definite teaching. In this teaching there is no emphasis on external rites, or on morality. It is rather concerned with 'the inner work a man does on himself', and has very little to do with 'that thing called "religion"' (Nicoll 1954: 135,122). But

because no one understands that there is anything so specific and real behind what Christ taught and because everything Christ clearly and specifically taught was turned into 'religion', the whole meaning of his teaching was changed into something else (Nicoll 1954:122).

Nicoll emphasises that Christ said that unless we repent (*metanoia*) we shall die, shall be cut down and thrown into the fire as useless, like the fig tree that bore no fruit [Luke 13:6-9] or the vineyard that produced only sour grapes (Nicoll 1950:90-93).<sup>120</sup> But if we change our mind, are re-born, we escape what 'the Work' calls the law of accident and come under the law of our destiny. This destiny, this possible 'future [that lies] in a change of state, not in the hereafter, but now, that is spoken of in almost every line of the Gospels' (Nicoll 1954:107-8) is the Kingdom of Heaven. But these 'ideas of which Christ spoke' are 'from above', above the earthly senses, 'of heaven'. 'Only by starting within, from the spirit of his own understanding can a man reach up and catch the rope' (Nicoll 1954:136).

This discussion of faith presents us with a very different idea of faith from the usual. On this understanding Faith is a kind of gnosis, an understanding with the higher mind of things not concerned with this world, not perceivable by the ordinary mind. Its acquisition is a vital step on the journey of psychological transformation. Through faith a man acquires a new sort of mind, concerned with higher, non-sensual things, subordinate to higher powers while paradoxically becoming powerful in himself in new way. It releases him from the sort of fatalism that sees his every woe as the will of God, making him active, not passive, able to face his destiny. Appropriate to man number five, it is the gateway to the Kingdom of Heaven. It has of course absolutely nothing to do with belief in the ordinary sense.

We have seen in *Living Time* that faith plays as pivotal a role in the view of psychological transformation, the approach to the invisible that I argue is described in that book, as it does in the approach to the Kingdom of Heaven as shown in the Gospels. The acquisition of faith represents a turning point between the initial steps in an approach to the invisible and entering the Kingdom of

---

<sup>120</sup> Vineyard is a very specific image used, Nicoll argues, to mean a 'school' of esoteric teaching. Sour grapes, sour wine and wild grapes are all false teaching. The fig tree growing in a vineyard that produces no fruit must be, I imagine, another sort of teaching (Nicoll 1950:15).

Heaven; it is paradoxically both the fruit of and the necessary means of walking the initial steps of this approach. But, as we have already seen in Nicol's commentary in prayer, a person must pray for a thing and have faith that she already has it, and she will get it; 'All things whatsoever ye pray for and ask for, have faith that ye *have* already received them, and ye *shall have* them' (Mark 11: 24; *Commentaries*: 158, Nicoll's emphasis). A person must understand that he has to leave behind the ordinary self in a search for the invisible in him that is his real self. His first step is a jump, as it were, out of the sensual into the invisible or spiritual which is a kind of resurrection from the dead, which however cannot be achieved without a knowledge of some form of higher teaching, and the creation within him of a new or higher sort of mind that can function in the higher, invisible realm that is his real self. He has to overcome his self-love and see through the illusionary idea he has of himself, to live his life in a 'righteous' way that involves a total commitment that is a form of love that is called laying down his life, or dying to his old self to live to his new. The faith both necessary to achieve this and achieved when it happens is a kind of vision of a higher reality, a new mind.

Nicoll says that psychological transformation is governed by a principle of reversal, of the first being the last. What was there first, for instance *literal* understanding, must give place to *psychological* understanding, and this must in turn give place to *transformed* understanding. John the Baptist giving place to Christ, a symbol for that transformation of the personality in which the inner real self, a figure for the 'invisible' life, takes precedence over the 'visible', the outer personality, also shows the principle at work. 'The Work' symbolises this particular transformation as personality giving place to 'essence'. Both these representations are the determinative images in their traditions for that process of the psychological transformation of the person that Nicoll sees the Gospels as being exclusively concerned with. A whole series of 'hostile brothers' legends in the Old Testament are of a similar nature. But Nicoll has the idea that this principle plays a more profound role in the process of psychological transformation we are discussing. He says, in his exegesis of the wedding at Cana, that the wine which would normally be offered *first*, comes *last*, and that it is *good* wine is indicative of that fact that psychological transformation in general has to do with the reversal of Truth and Good.

He says that the Good of a thing has first to be made contact with through the Truth of it; there must first be water, and jars to hold it. This Truth then takes second place, superseded by the Good; 'the first shall be last' (Matthew 19:30 - Nicoll 1954:49). At the end of his analysis of the Wedding at Cana Nicoll, as we have seen, refers to Plato's idea that Truth and Good characterise *knowledge* and *being*. Though knowledge precedes being, being supersedes it, and only those of an appropriate level of being can understand higher knowledge; *understanding* comes from the reversal of *knowledge* and *being* (*Commentaries*: 527).

Nicoll sees Truth not tempered by Good as knowledge that springs from the

inner state of a man who acts only from external laws and prohibitions for the sake of appearances and feels merit in keeping them, in contrast with that of a man who acts genuinely from what is good (Nicoll 1952:41).

The Pharisees' objection to Jesus healing on the Sabbath symbolises the attitude of a person who places knowledge above good, while the man with the withered hand (Luke 6:10 - Nicoll 1950:39/46) represents the inability of such people to *do*. Once Good has been attained, Truth must be dispensed with. The Pharisee, however, 'twists, to suit his own vanity', the 'truth about what is necessary for reaching the higher level of Good in himself, what is necessary for *inner evolution*', and so cannot undergo psychological transformation (Nicoll 1950:40). Only when a reversal takes place, when 'a man realises that the good of [something] is its highest aspect and far more important than the knowledge that leads to it' (Nicoll 1954:35), when the Good, initially coming after Truth, comes first, can the higher level be attained, can we be 'made whole [and] sin no more' (John 5:14; Nicoll 1950:50).

This reversal of Truth and Good is crucial at the point in the process of transformation we have arrived at in our argument. The man who has acquired faith, now faced with the next stage of transformation, faces the teaching of the parables. He is in some way betwixt and between, no longer of the world, but not yet of heaven either. Such a man is symbolised, I contend, by the cripple who lies by the Pool of Bethesda. Nicoll offers in his chapter 'The Idea of Good being above Truth', in

an exegesis of the parable/miracle of the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-18) a demonstration of the necessary reversal of Truth and Good: 'the miracle is about the deep question of first and second and its reversal' (Nicoll 1950:50).

After all these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep-gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt, withered. And a certain man was there, which had been thirty and eight years in his infirmity. When Jesus saw him lying, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he said unto him, wouldst thou be made whole? The sick man answered, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me in the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus said unto him, Arise, take up thy bed and walk. And straightway the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked (John 5:1- Nicoll 1950:45).

Nicoll analyses this as meaning that the man lies disabled between the natural truth of the world of the five senses (the five porches) which he has now left, and the new world of the spiritual *truth* of living water, which he can see but cannot yet reach, cannot stand in it, cannot 'do' it, or *will* it; he lies in Truth only. That another comes before him means that he 'put Truth *first* [before Good] and so was always *second*', feeling only the Truth of what he could see, not the power of this knowledge, not the Good (Nicoll 1950:50). Christ, asking him if he wants to be healed, tells him to take up his bed (the psychology in which he lies, that is the Truth) and '*walk*, to *do* what he knows is the truth' (Nicoll 1950:47). Strangely, this will make him more vulnerable. At this stage of development, leaving the world, to a certain extent overcoming self-love, raising the level of Truth in him by being able to put the Good first, being for the first time really responsible for himself, he can now really sin, which could put him in a worse state than before, as Christ tells him – 'sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee' (John 5:14 - Nicoll 1950:45). Nicoll suggests that 'all sin refers to putting the Truth first, not seeing it as a means to an end' (Nicoll 1952:50). Sinners, the Pharisees in us, miss the point (*hamartia* [ἁμαρτία], 'sin', means 'to miss the mark') of the Gospel teaching of inner evolution by acting only from Truth, which without goodness is merciless (Bethesda means House of Mercy).

From this we see that a person approaching the level of teaching symbolised by the parables needs to raise his level of being by living through the Good of things rather than through their Truth. This represents a profound change in that the person will now be responsible in a way he was not earlier.

This change can be reflected in a change in the outward attitudes of a person, an increase in understanding and the ability to have mercy and to forgive.

Nicoll says that teaching in parables represents a 'quite abrupt' change in the level of Christ's teaching. Everything previous was preparation, but from now on almost everything is in parables (Nicoll 1954:61). That Christ delivered the parable of the Sower, which Nicoll calls the first great parable of the Kingdom, from a boat symbolises that this teaching comes from a higher level than the earth, directed specifically at the disciples with ears to hear (Nicoll 1954:61). If we accept Nicoll's interpretation of the quotation from Isaiah:

I speak to them in parables, because they seeing, see not, hearing, hear not, neither do they understand, lest they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them (Isaiah 6: 9-10 at Matthew 13: 13-15),

parables are by their very form designed to exclude those without ears to hear (Nicoll 1954:61).

Nicoll says that the *parable* is the linguistic vehicle that connects the level of 'heaven', which knows only the '*language of parables*' with the level of 'earth', 'that part of a man built in him by the senses' (Nicoll 1954:55) which knows only the sensory. The medium is that symbolic connective tissue that needs to be interpreted so that 'earth' can know 'heaven', so that heaven's will, or God's will may be done in 'earth'. Nicoll sees these levels as exact equivalents of Plato's idea of the *noumenal* and phenomenal levels. All phenomena are earthly copies of something that exists in its 'real, true, objective significance' in the higher realm of ideas (the opposite of Hades, the realm of 'no ideas', which is here) and were we conscious with '*objective consciousness*' we would be able to see the 'objective meaning of all things around us' (Nicoll 1954:58 – another rare allusion to 'the Work'). In the same way the exterior of the parable is the phenomenal aspect of the *noumenon* that the parable seeks to present. I contend that Nicoll means that only to those whose '*higher emotional*' centre, opened through purity of heart, thus having this what 'the Work' calls '*objective consciousness*', and who can thus read the language of parables, the language of the higher emotional centre, only to them does the parable 'conduct force from higher levels' (Nicoll 1954:58, 60). Nicoll describes those who cannot understand parables as those who do not have the right sort

of mind. To drink the new wine of Christ's teaching a *new mind* is needed. If the old one is used it will burst like an old wine skin, spoiling the teaching (Luke 5:37- Nicoll 1950:127). The 'lowest level of the mind must not be used for ideas not derived from the senses' (Nicoll 1954:56). Only they have ears to hear, only they are blessed. I argue that only those who have undergone the transformative process described above acquire the new mind needed to understand the parables and to act upon what they understand. Parables are a link between what Nicoll in *Living Time* calls the 'visible' and 'invisible' worlds, giving access to the 'invisible world' for those with minds transformed through *metanoia*.

Nicoll presents the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13: 1-23) as one of only two parables in the New Testament interpreted in detail by Christ.

Behold the sower went forth to sow. And whilst he soweth, some fell by the way side: and the birds of the air came and ate them up. And other some fell upon stony ground, where they had not much earth: and they sprung up immediately, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up they were scorched: and because they had not root, they withered away. And others fell among thorns: and the thorns grew up and choked them. And others fell upon good ground: and they brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear (Matthew 13: 3-9, Douai/Rheims, not quoted in Nicoll 1950).

It is stated in the Gospel that without understanding this parable none of the others can be understood. Nicoll sees this parable as not really describing the Kingdom of Heaven, despite it saying 'the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field', but as enumerating particular categories of men who to some extent 'have ears to hear', according to their suitability as potential fruit of the Kingdom, that is

categories of men *in their relationship to esoteric ideas* – those who cannot understand them, those who understand them wrongly, and those who understand them and follow them (Nicoll 1954:55).<sup>121</sup>

The parable of the Sower is about having the *right sort of mind*, good earth in which the new teaching can take root. Nicoll sees the 'seed' sown in the parable (there is actually no mention of seed in the original Greek in Matthew) also as something from 'a higher level in mankind', help from higher centres, as 'the Work' would say, something from 'heaven' in a man, part of him that is 'seed

---

<sup>121</sup> In the ambivalent way of parables, we are to understand men: as the 'seed' that is sown; as the 'earth' in which it is sown; but 'seed' is also the teaching of esotericism that is sown in a man, the Word of God or the 'word of the kingdom' (Nicoll 1954:62).

that can grow upwards in the vertical scale of being' (Nicoll 1954:55), sown in the lower part of him, his 'earth', the quality of which earth varies, either between men or in the man himself at different stages of his development.

The first category, that is those who fall 'by the way' and are eaten up by the birds are those for whom, despite initial enthusiasm, the teaching of esotericism means nothing. At the first logical objection (the birds of the air, logical thoughts) they dismiss as foolishness the whole idea of esotericism (Nicoll 1954:63). That Christ says that 'the wicked one snatcheth away that which was sown in their hearts, *'so that they should not believe, and be saved'* (Matthew 13:15) encapsulates the idea that with sensual thinking, symbolised also by the 'wicked one', esotericism is understood either falsely or not at all. By taking everything literally, people do not enter the Kingdom, but, spoiling others' minds with literalness and excessive proselytising zeal, stop them entering (Matthew 23:13, 15 - Nicoll 1952:129). Nicoll points out elsewhere, as we have noted, that many who did 'the Work' were 'enthusiasts' who had no real idea about it, especially of its inner nature, and such knowledge as they had made no difference to their real selves, besides leading others astray; they had no '*magnetic centre*'. I argue that he has such people in mind in describing this category.

The second category, those who fell on rocky ground, who, finding little soil, sprang up straightway, and, scorched by the sun, withered away, are seen by Nicoll as those who show an interest in esoteric matters. But their interest is at the level of stone or rock, seeing everything in terms of Truth, the law, and knowledge. Nicoll sees their modern equivalents being those interested in various 'occult' or 'esoteric' ideas, but unable to derive any real psychological benefit from them. I suggest that they also represent the conventionally religious, especially 'fundamentalists' or 'moralists', and those who see religion purely intellectually, and people like Peter at the early stage of his development who is described by Nicoll as someone who 'had knowledge and could remember it, but it was not yet emotional' for him (Nicoll 1954:72). As Nicoll says: '*Rock* represents a primitive level of truth that does not quench the thirst' (for righteousness - Nicoll 1954:73). The most

external level of esoteric truth, it does not come from the man himself, and is not suitable as soil ('they had not much earth'). So the sun burns everything. When what should be the source of all nourishment, the esoteric teaching from a higher part of the man, comes, because the man will not apply it to himself but holds to external teaching it finds no place to put roots down in him to nurture him. The knowledge of the esoteric and of religion remains knowledge, becoming a dry, merciless 'truth', and real esoteric truth withers or evaporates because of a 'lack of water' [water meaning truth understood in a psychological way] (Nicoll 1954:71). Such a person, like Peter, who, having no root in himself, but 'believing passionately, violently', cuts off someone's ear (with a sword, which means 'Truth fighting'). This means that understanding only through the truth, the 'persecutions of the Church from *Truth alone*, having no mercy', 'cuts off other people's emotional understanding' (John 18:10 - Nicoll 1950:77).<sup>122</sup>

The third category comprises those who fell among thorns, which grew up and choked them. They also are poor soil because it is already so overgrown that the fruit cannot grow. Nicoll explains this as saying that whereas those who fell on rocky ground showed intellectual interest only, this category shows emotional interest, but of an inadequate or inappropriate kind or intensity.

Emotional interest is, as Nicoll quotes Jung as saying, a judgemental function, an imparting to something of its value for yourself; 'the emotions make a thing important to you' (Nicoll 1954:75).

Those who fall among thorns are those whose emotional interest in the Kingdom of Heaven is such that they understand, but this understanding gets choked by 'what is most important to you, emotionally; their *emotional* part is wrong' (Nicoll 1954:74, 75).

The three 'highest' categories are those who are good soil in which the seed which becomes the fruit of the Kingdom of Heaven can grow. Nicoll argues in *The Mark* that the seed finding good soil means truth finding the right soil which is the *kind of man* in whom

---

<sup>122</sup> It is my idea that the fact that the ear of the High Priests' servant that Peter cut off was the *right* ear means the cutting off of 'emotional understanding [=ear]' of *higher* things [=things of the right hand].

this truth about inner evolution must unite with *good* to develop and grow. [Such a] man must be able to see the *good* of the truth he is being taught. To see the value of a thing is to have good – the power of seeing its worth, this is goodness, the fundamental conception of *good* in the Gospels (Nicoll 1954:80).

Though this parable is often seen as the depiction of various types of men, Nicoll's exegesis of the parable of the sower could be understood, I argue, as showing a 'ladder' of the possible stages of spiritual development possible in one person, or in man generally. That this might be Nicoll's view can be argued from a passage in the *Commentaries* ('The Enneagram IV', [402-8]) where it is said that this 'ladder' of levels is depicted also in the opening chapter of Genesis, and in the prologue to St. John's Gospel (John 1:1-14), which latter is widely understood to be a Midrash (the re-writing in different terms of an earlier story) of Genesis 1. Nicoll says:

If you imagine that Genesis is about the creation of the world, the solar system, you are making a great mistake. Esoteric literature invariably deals with Man himself and his possibilities. Genesis is an esoteric book, not a scientific book. 'In the beginning' refers to Man. The creation of three kinds of men is described in connection with the 7 days of creation, which divides man into 7 different categories (*Commentaries*: 407, 403).

There is not space here to develop the parallels, suggested by this quotation, between the Parable of the Sower, Genesis 1, John 1, and the seven levels of man in 'the Work'. I merely point out, as commentary on Nicoll's exegesis of the Parable of the Sower that Nicoll maintains that 'in the beginning God created Heaven and Earth' applies not to the cosmos, but to man. Nicoll thinks that 'natural man', [the first of the three kinds of men in the quotation above], he whose 'earth was void and empty' (Genesis 1:2) is, from a spiritual or psychological point of view, *dead*. Each day in the 'creation story' in Genesis represents one step up the ladder that Nicoll reads in the parable of the Sower, one step in the raising of this dead man, which culminates in two levels of 'perfected' man, he who is 'man in His own image' (Genesis 1:27) [the second of the three kinds of men in the quotation above] and, Nicoll argues, a superior version, he who had 'breathed into his face the breath of life' by God, and 'became a living soul' (Genesis 2:7) [the third of the three kinds of men in the quotation above]. In the parable of the Sower there are three levels of those who bear fruit in the Kingdom, as there are three levels of 'perfected' man, numbers five, six and seven in 'the Work'. I argue, following Nicoll's hint, that man numbers four, five, six and seven are described also in John

1 as respectively; a man whose name was John who was not that light' (4); those 'who received him' to whom 'he gave the power to be the Sons of God that believe in his name (5); those 'who were born not of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man, but of God' (6); and finally 'the word made flesh who dwelt *in us*, full of grace and truth' (7) (John 1: 8-14). These parallels bear out, I argue, Nicoll's contention that 'Esoteric literature invariably deals with Man'. Though the teaching of the parable of the Sower is pertinent, I argue, to the situation of man as he seeks to move from man at the psychological level of thinking to man at the transformed, the parable itself describes *in nuce*, I argue, the whole process of psychological transformation, from 'natural man' to man as 'a living soul', in 'Work' terms from man number one to man number seven.

The discourse so far in this chapter of the thesis has been a discussion of how the stages of the way of psychological transformation which Nicoll sees, I argue, as the Gospel's chief concern, are rendered in biblical images. This progression up as it were a ladder of inner states is, however, a preparatory progress, and most of the *perikopes* used to illustrate it are not parables. But in the parables that follow (in Matthew) the initial two great parables (those of the Sower, and the Wheat and the Tares) the evangelist changes the image he uses to describe this psychological progress. Before it was steps up a ladder; now it is the idea of something *lost and found*. Nicoll says that in the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven in the Meal the Kingdom of Heaven (Mathew 13:31-33- Nicoll 1950:137) is seen as something that grows in a person from the smallest beginnings, something having been *taken* and planted, buried or hidden, hence lost in oneself. These small beginnings (mustard seed and meal, seemingly contemptible, almost invisible) eventually determine and overshadow the whole person. Each of the parables of the man finding treasure in the field he then buys, and the merchant buying the pearl of great price after selling all he has portrays people, finding something hidden or lost but of supreme value, selling everything to buy it. The Kingdom of Heaven is shown here as something obscure, rare, hidden, unlikely, found inside a person (in 'his own garden', though maybe planted there), but lost, though so important, and so different from

anything else in a person's life, that they must in a certain way give this up to realise it (Matthew 13: 44-46; Nicoll 1950:142).

The ascent of a ladder of psychological states is also, as we have seen, one of the images used in Nicoll's description of 'the Work'. But just as Matthew changes the image of the Kingdom of Heaven from spiritual progression to 'lost and found', so does 'the Work'. The most graphic example of 'lost and found' that it uses is that of 'essence', lost through being submerged by growing personality, needing to be found and nurtured before 'real "I"' can be realised. But just as I have suggested that it would be mistaken to see these two representations of spiritual progress in 'the Work', rising up a ladder and lost and found, as being consecutive, they needing to be viewed as different aspects of a single process, so it is in the Gospel. Even the idea of rising up a ladder is a simplification and rationalisation for descriptive purposes of a simultaneously occurring multi-faceted developmental process. So in describing the spiritual progress that Nicoll sees as incorporated in the Gospel teaching it would be false to see 'lost and found' as describing the culmination of a process. Indeed, though Nicoll uses the parable of the Prodigal Son as the crowning example of lost and found in his argument, in describing the moment of *metanoia*, the 'coming to himself', the parable is a representation of the whole process, from the initial 'fall', through the turning point, to the return, the re-finding of that which was lost.

In the chapter 'Truth' in *The Mark* Nicoll discusses this idea of lost and found in the parable of the Lost Sheep as a preliminary to his discussion of the parable of the Prodigal Son. Nicoll has an original view of this parable, seeing the lost sheep as something that takes precedence over the man who finds it (it completes him). In customary exegesis this idea is almost entirely lost. Nicoll, in his exegesis, arrives at a just valuation of this, I suggest.

To silence the Pharisees Christ tells the parable of the Lost Sheep.

For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. What think you? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them should go astray: doth he not leave the ninety-and-nine in the mountains and go to seek that which is gone astray? And if it so be that he should find it: Amen, I say to you, he

rejoiceth more for that than for the ninety-and nine that went not astray. Even so, it is not the will of your father who is in Heaven, that one of these little ones should perish (Matthew 18: 11-14 – Douai/Rheims)

Nicoll says that ‘the lost sheep is something lost in a man that he himself must find himself’ (Nicoll 1954:140). When this lost element is added to the ninety-and-nine, it makes the completion, the *hundred*. There was a system of counting on the hands, current in antiquity in the Middle East that uses the left hand only for the numbers one to ninety-nine; to make a hundred the right hand alone is used.<sup>123</sup> The writer of the Gospel must, it seems to me, have seen the symbolism of this. Nicoll says that the ‘ninety-and-nine who have no need of repentance’ (Luke 15:7- Nicoll 1954:140) represent the sensual personality (left means ‘man at his ordinary level – “evil”’, while right means ‘a higher level of understanding’ [Nicoll 1950:60]). Nicoll says that Christ tells the Pharisees that to transform themselves they must find their lost sheep, that element in themselves, ‘*what is internal in themselves*’ (Nicoll 1950:130), contemptible because only *one*, which is nevertheless the one thing genuinely their own that will ‘complete’ them, making everything they do genuine, what they now do being only from appearances. In Matthew’s version of the parable (Matthew 18: 12-14) the littleness of this beginning, its contemptible nature, is emphasised through comparison with children and ‘little ones’ (Nicoll 1954:144). The Lost sheep is a little one both in the sense of someone ‘small in faith’ at the beginning of his road to the Kingdom, or, seen psychologically, that part of a man (like the ‘seed’, the mustard seed, the leaven, the treasure and the pearl) that is growing towards a thorough refashioning of the person. The lost sheep is infinitely valuable [‘precious as gold’ – Nicoll 1954:145]. To find this *one*, ‘his own’ (Luke 16:12), the ninety-and nine, ‘not his own’,<sup>124</sup> only needed to live outer life, can be ‘left on the mountain’; the personality must be abandoned to find a man’s essence, what is essentially his, that has been lost (Nicoll 1954:152).

---

<sup>123</sup> Kendrick Grobel, in his edition of Valentinus’ *Gospel of Truth* (Grobel 1960) in which ‘Gospel’ a version of the parable also appears [32:1], explains this method of counting on the fingers, which he says was ‘once universal in Latin-speaking lands’ (p129); but, unlike in the canonical version, in the *Gospel of Truth* the method itself and the symbolism involved (the *one* that is missing that is needed to make the *one hundred* [‘the sign of Him who is the Father’]) are incorporated in the parable itself.

<sup>124</sup> Personality in man is what is ‘not his own’ [which] means what has come from outside, what he has learned, or reflects, all traces of exterior impressions left in the memory, and in the sensations, all words and movements that have been learned, all feelings created by imitation (Ouspensky 1950:161).

When the true significance of the lost sheep is understood it can be seen that the idea of what is found taking precedence over the finder is restored. For it is that part of a person which she lacks to in order to complete herself, that part of him which will reform and henceforth govern his personality, what turns her or him from being 'not his own' into being her own, allowing him or her to possess him- or herself. Nicoll's exegesis also tells us that ridding oneself of the personality in favour of finding the essence is either the equivalent or an essential part of this process.

The theme of the lost and found *one* finds for Nicoll its most developed expression in Luke's parable of the Prodigal Son. Arguing from the sources I maintain that, despite the fact that he does not treat it in *The New Man*, this parable is for Nicoll the crucial parable in the New Testament, describing the 'return journey' (*Commentaries*: 1615) of the lost-and-found Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father: Father, give me the portion of substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his substance. And not many days after, the younger son, gathering all together, went abroad into a far country; and there wasted his substance, living riotously. And after he had spent all, there came a mighty famine in that country: and he began to be in want. And he went and cleaved to one of the citizens of that country. And he sent him into his farm to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And returning to himself [AV 'when he came to himself'] he said: How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father and will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am not worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And rising up, he came to his father. And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion and running to him fell upon his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, I am not worth to be called thy son. And the father said to his servants: Bring forth quickly the first robe and put it upon him: and put a ring upon his hand and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it: and let us eat and be merry. Now the elder son was in the field: and when he came and drew nigh to the house he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him: Thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe. And he was angry and would not go in. His father therefore coming out began to entreat him. And he, answering, said to his father: Behold, for so many years do I serve thee and I have never transgressed thy commandment: and yet thou hast never given me a kid to make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son is come, who hath devoured his substance with harlots, thou has killed for him the fatted calf. But he said to him: Son, thou art always with me, and all I have is thine. But it was fit that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is come to life again, he was lost, and is found (Luke 15: 11-32 – Douai/Rheims).

Nicoll writes:

It will be simplest to take the elder son as the conventional side of a man and the prodigal son as the real side. Everything done from the conventional side has its own value in life but is not done from the real man himself (unpublished note).

Interpreting this, Nicoll says that the 'famine', in which the younger son is reduced to wanting to eat pig-feed, shows him that this animal gratification, a 'wasting of his substance' [essence] (Luke 15:13), cannot satisfy the real side of him; identifying with the world, he has gone to sleep. But when, revolted (Nicoll 1954:147), he 'comes to himself' or, as the *Hermetica* puts it, he 'recognised himself [and he saw that he could] enter into that Good which is above him' (*Commentaries*: 1616), he could 'turn again' [*metanoiesate* and *epistrepsate* [ἐπιστρεψατε] {military parlance for 'about turn'}] to the level of 'his father'. This 'returning', the recognition that he is a sinner, is *metanoia*. He is helped on this journey from a higher part of himself; 'while still far off his father saw him and had compassion'. Pursued by grace, in obedience to this higher in himself, he casts off the personality acquired for this outward journey [Jerusalem Bible has '*I will leave this place*' – place for Nicoll is a psychological state, so this means he moves from one psychological state ('the *wrong state of himself*'– Nicoll 1954:149) to another], returns his essence, his inheritance ['this absent part of ourselves that must find itself again, *what is his own*' (Nicoll 1954:148), from whence it came: 'bring out the *first* [my emphasis – this is the Douai/Rheims translation of *proten* [πρωτεν] robe and put it on him; put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet' (Luke15:22).<sup>125</sup> He is, I argue, the 'spiritual' son who inherits, one who 'was dead and has come back to life; and was lost and is found', who, in the building of a new body in a transformation will rule over the worldly aspect, the carnal body (Luke 15: 24, 32- Nicoll 1954:148).

In theological comment on this parable, that again I say is a description of the whole process of psychological transformation, I say that this journey, a metaphor for the 'fall' of a spiritual principle into materiality, is of the essence of the nature of life. Life on earth is the only arena where 'essence', sent down and born into materiality, can 'grow', and only in this life can the soul thus be

---

<sup>125</sup> AV has 'best' for first. I argue that this is wrong. First implies 'the one he had on first', so the command means a restoration of his previous status (as does the ring and the shoes). This is congruent with the idea that the younger son left this robe behind when he went into a far country. While there is no idea of this identity in the version of the parable in Luke, it is a crucial part of the story told in *The Hymn of Pearl* (also called *The Hymn of the Robe of Glory*), which I argue is a Gnostic Midrash of Luke's story (or vice-versa) (Layton 1987:366-375). Nicoll makes this connection in 'Essence and the Return Journey' (*Commentaries*: 1614-1618).

formed. 'Essence' has to be lost and found. The 'task' of essence is to bring itself to heaven, to develop from being 'in the image of God' (Genesis 2:26) to 'become a living soul' (Genesis 2:7-  
*Commentaries*: 405-6). 'Essence', originally innocent (*Commentaries*: 899),

is the eternal divine spark which inhabits a body, a bit of himself which Real "I" sends down, and it goes back richer. [It is] the pearl spoken of in esoteric literature (Pogson in Pogson 1994:243).<sup>126</sup>

Gurdjieff said:

The term soul is used in the system, but in the sense of life principle only. Essence, personality and soul taken together correspond to what used to be called the soul. Soul is material, a certain quantity of fine matter, energy if you like, which leaves the body at death (Gurdjieff, a Record of Meetings, 64, August 1935).

Remembering that St. Paul's 'spiritual body' is not a body made of spirit, but a body made for the spirit:

Spirit is not body; Essence is not body; Spirit is Real I. The growth of Essence forms the body for Spirit to manifest (Pogson 2000:35).

'Essence' acts as a bridge from spirit to the ego to bring the soul into being. But only when liberated from false personality can 'essence' grow. Children, a symbol for 'essence' in that at birth there is no personality to occlude experience of it represent in the Gospels and in fairy tales emerging 'essence' (Pogson 2000:34/5): '*A child shall lead them*'. 'Essence' [when it grows again] shall lead because it knows the way' (Pogson 2000:18). Man must awaken and become 'conscious at the third level', equivalent to 'essence', to live on the level of his essence that mediates influences from 'higher centres'. Only when he is transformed can influences from 'higher centres' through 'essence' reach him. Then, when 'essence' is realised the soul can come into being. Nicoll says:

What is a man's soul? It is the *concentration* of his interests, his desires, his impulses. And all these represent where he believes what is best, and what is most true, lie. Soul is the greatest meaning in the man as he actually is (Nicoll in Pogson 2000:27).

---

<sup>126</sup> M. Scott Fletcher, in *The Psychology of the New Testament*, writes: 'man has "a lower, outer bodily side to his nature (the carnal), and an inner, higher spiritual side" (the spiritual), in which "man's inner nature is set in different relations", and, "when the soul is conditioned by the former, is called *soul*, but when spoken of as it is in itself, or as coming from God, is called *spirit*". Man, who is a soul, may have the spirit (if he is a *pneumatic* as opposed to a *psychic*) and a 'life of such divine quality that it will require a "spiritual" body to be the organ for its perfect expression' (Fletcher 1912:25-71 *passim*).

The soul has to be formed, rather than being a given; essence growing and returning to heaven is a metaphor for the soul turning from the material to the spiritual. If essence does not return to heaven, but instead stops growing, it dies. It is this theology that lies behind the parable of the Prodigal Son.

As psychological comment on the parable I offer Nicoll's comment (in *The Mark*) on the journey of the Prodigal Son which describes it in terms of a man's soul, lost and found, and possessed, this process seen as the finding of himself. But this comment is, I argue, not only Nicoll's comment (but not in psychological terminology) on this parable, but also comment on the whole process of psychological transformation that I argue he sees as the subject of these two books:

Something in us, eternally young, that can understand beyond the visible world, beyond phenomenal reality [becomes] lost in us in the world of objects and the external things of the senses, and, using the logic of the senses, wastes itself in useless speculations without meaning for it, because it is capable of understanding a higher logic and a new world, utterly different from this dark world of sense and temporal logic into which it passes and in which it becomes lost. This magical side of ourselves which in childhood we feel is destroyed by life and remains only a memory dimly felt at moments, recalling fleetingly something once possessed but now gone out of our lives (Nicoll 1954: 148-9).

This *one* in us (I continue by paraphrasing Nicoll), this absent, lost part of ourselves, truly ourselves, from which our evolution can begin, we must find again, take it out of life, withdraw it from the power of outer things and make it alive *again*. Only when the true connection to this *one* is found through *metanoia* can we reach our right state and begin our evolution. Without this all we do is wrong. This is what sin is. When a man realises that he is *himself* – not what he has been taking himself as, this is *metanoia* in its fullest meaning. In this state of *consciousness* life could never hurt a man. He would awaken from the sleep of the senses, from death, *come to himself, remember* and become alive *again*. He would possess himself, his own soul. He would find 'I' (Nicoll 1954: 148, 152 – his italics).

***The validation of 'the Work' by the Authority of Scripture: the marriage of Truth and Good***

Nicoll says: 'in my view and experience, the understanding of the Work is necessary for the understanding of the Gospels' (*Commentaries*: 1946). I argue that the immense journey from the

‘mustard seed’ (Matthew 13:31- Nicoll 1950:137) of Nicoll’s understanding that ‘no one knew anything’ to his over-arching vision, the ‘tree greater than all the others’, in which the ‘birds of the air’ of *metanoia*, re-birth and the Kingdom of Heaven make their nests was driven by Nicoll’s intellectual engagement with ‘the Work’ that issued in his mature understanding of the Gospels. But the converse is also true. While Nicoll’s insight into the ignorance of his Head Master was the mustard seed, his intuition of some invaluable truth encapsulated in the parables (inferred from his realisation, aged fifteen, that he did not know what they meant, that no one knew or cared what they meant, his anxiety to know what they meant, and his confusion on realising that his Head Master could explain nothing, resulting in his first experience of ‘self-remembering’ [*Commentaries*: 8]) was the ‘leaven’ hidden in the meal (Matthew 13:33 - Nicoll 1950:137). As Nicoll tells us, ‘after such moments of real self-remembering one always goes to sleep again’, but, like the leaven, ‘such moments of higher consciousness stand always in higher parts of centres and remain and await (*Commentaries*: 9). I argue that as the mustard seed of Nicoll’s *intellectual* enquiry, a search for Truth, was growing, the leaven of the *emotional valuation*, of judgement, of Good, was, during periods of unconscious ferment between self-remembering episodes, leavening his whole personality, informing his growing awareness of the truth of ‘the Work’. Also, since the knowledge that Nicoll acquired, eventually through ‘the Work’, though first from Jung’s teaching, and then from Platonic philosophy, particularly the *Corpus Hermeticum*, was symbolical, it therefore had aspects both of the growing mustard seed and the fermenting leaven. For, as Nicoll has suggested, simple knowledge strikes the mind differently from the symbolical; leaven works differently from seed growing.

As vehicles for esoteric thought, however, the Gospels are more valuable than any presentation of ‘the Work’. How can the power of the symbolic marriage of Truth and Good described in Nicoll’s analysis of the Gospels compare with the dry formulations of the same idea in ‘the Work’? But even Nicoll’s psychological exegesis of the Gospel images in turn lacks the power of such formulations as presented directly in the Gospels (for instance the Wedding at Cana). Even that formulation, though

more 'symbolic' than either 'Work' formulations or Nicoll's Gospel analysis lacks the supreme power of the symbol 'Jesus Christ'. Though Nicoll points out that when the names Jesus Christ are used together in John's Gospel (this happens twice only) as *the* symbol for this reversal in a 'marriage of Good and Truth' (Nicoll 1950:48), even this explanation does not have the effect of the symbol itself, because symbols, falling on a different part of the mind from analysis, convey the esoteric truth far more powerfully.

Nicoll needed the prosaic, almost scientific nature of modern psychology and 'the Work' to understand the Gospels, even though their power of symbolical expression is, as I have just argued, for those with 'ears to hear' a more effective transmitter of truth than either psychology or 'the Work'. I argue that while 'the Work' might have given Nicoll knowledge, Truth, it was his engagement with the power and the religious expressiveness of the Gospels, of Good, that validated this knowledge, turning it into understanding. The eventual higher valuation of the *symbolical* Gospels over the *intellectual* 'Work' is a reversal of Truth and Good, the marriage of being with knowledge to give understanding, the 'inner marriage', the marriage of Truth and Good for which 'Jesus Christ' is the supreme symbol.

Thus I affirm Nicoll's statement that understanding the 'the Work' is necessary for understanding the Gospels. But the converse is that Nicoll needed the Gospels to validate 'the Work', as his copious use of biblical references in the *Commentaries* shows. This reverse current, therefore, is more than understanding; it is validation, and, as I have shown, this validation comes through the symbolic. 'Jesus Christ', symbol of the marriage of Truth and Good in John's Gospel, foundation of the Gospels, is also an integral element in 'the Work', validating this 'system' of 'esoteric Christianity'.

Nevertheless, in finally summing up this chapter, and with it the whole of my argument, I say that though Nicoll, in his final two books, offers an exegesis of religious texts that shows how ideas and images, some psychological, some religious are used as metaphors to represent the process of psychological transformation which he maintains is the only concern of the Gospels, this is only one

view of the story. For the as-it-were unravelling of metaphor, the explanation of religion as psychology is also itself an exercise in metaphor. Psychological ideas and explanations are in their turn just as much metaphors as religious ideas. So when it is implied that the process of psychological transformation leading to the 'birth of the Christ within' might be the equivalent of 'a man realising his "real I" ', or that if a man might 'possess his own soul' he might equally be said to 'come to himself', or to 'possess himself', the latter expressions of each pair being a *psychological* explanation of the former *religious* formulations, these psychological expressions are nevertheless equally metaphors. So despite having argued for the immense power of symbols and metaphors, and of Nicoll's insights into how they work, I have to say finally that Nicoll's over-arching view is not symbolical or metaphorical at all. Behind the almost 'baroque' complication of his exegesis lies a formulation expressed in a passage that Nicoll wrote at the beginning of *The Mark*. Though intended as an introduction to that book, it sums up, I argue, the whole of his philosophy as presented in all his writings from *Living Time* onwards. It lifts the whole narrative above both the narrowly psychological and the religious.

Nicoll writes:

The universe is not merely what the senses show. Not the outer scene alone, it is always a combination of oneself with it. It is not merely the perception of the senses of this hard world, that outer point of light in the sky, but perception of ideas, insights into truths, realisations of meaning, of seeing familiar things in a new light, intuition of essences, experience of suffering and bliss. It is given as bread from heaven as much as fact from earth. On its grandest scale it lies beyond all command of the sense and is only discerned inwardly in the understanding (Nicoll 1954:20).

Nicoll is saying that the whole 'invisible' world of ideas, truths, meanings and understanding is only to be found when realised inside a man.

There can suddenly be opened within the heart or in the mind a realm of experience that is not the external world and we are bathed in the light of meaning. We feel ourselves created by every experience of this light, but this we say is what we are always looking for – this meaning and reality, this bliss we have misinterpreted and sought in a thousand useless physical directions – this is what we all desire, which the outer light pretends to offer, but never properly gives, this *union* which we perceive really is union, the secret idea behind our odd, searching, incomplete lives (Nicoll 1954:20).

Nicoll sees that 'what really matters' is meaning, understanding, a light that leads to some kind of creative *union* that transcends psychology and religion, which are mere metaphors for the process of

reaching it, and indeed transcends metaphor itself. By saying 'if you dislike the word God, say *meaning* instead. The two are the same' (Nicoll 1954:19), and that the light of which St. John talks is consciousness, Nicoll is trying to express the idea of sublime truth transcending metaphors. I suggest that St. Paul does the same in 1 Corinthians 13. Just as in the Kingdom of Heaven 'prophecies shall be made void, tongues shall cease and knowledge be destroyed, leaving only faith, hope and *agape*,<sup>127</sup> so will psychology, religion and metaphor also disappear, and 'language and imagery pass into pure meaning' (Nicoll 1954:81) leaving only the *union* that is *logos*, consciousness, understanding, meaning and light.

---

<sup>127</sup> 'To love God with all your heart and soul [is] to be wholly united with the nature and spirit of God. If you have the Divine Nature and Spirit in you, just so much power have you of loving yourself and your neighbour aright' (Law 1950:160). [*cf* 'Yet Christianity says precisely this, to love all men' - Gurdjieff in Needleman 1980:169)].

## **Conclusion: On the psychological basis of 'esoteric Christianity': a recapitulation**

I have shown in Chapter Two how Nicoll rejected his natal Christianity as morality that disgusted him. Youthful mystical experiences vindicated him in this aversion, leading him to seek for the meaning of life. This quest he pursued first through a study of Natural Sciences. Studying and practising medicine, Nicoll came to see that his vocation lay with medical psychology, then in its infancy. Study in Vienna and with Jung confirmed his choice, alleviated feelings of inferiority toward his father, and gave him the entrée to Harley Street. Nicoll's treating shell-shock victims during the First World War was one factor leading to his becoming something of an outsider, a status confirmed when he forsook Jung's cause and joined Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's circle. *Dream Psychology*, analysed in Chapter Three, presented his assimilation of Jung's theories in the 'simple, lucid and faithful English' (Ward 1955:243) that characterises his writings, showing Jung's idea of an 'eschatological' (as Nicoll phrased it) element to all psychological healing. Nicoll came to see that the realisation and fulfilment of the essential personality necessary for psychic health is the true vocation of every man. Even in this early work Nicoll says that failure in this was the only real problem in the world, success the only significant achievement.

Nicoll, realising that though he understood through Jung's ideas what was necessary to realise what he even then called the Kingdom of Heaven in both himself and his patients, was made aware, by attendance at Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man that he could not bring this about either for himself or for anyone else using Jung's techniques. He felt that only through 'the Work' could this be achieved. This resulted in his parting from Jung. Under Ouspensky's and Gurdjieff's tutelage he then set out to master both theory and practice of 'the Work'. During his 'apprenticeship' to Ouspensky he wrote *Living Time*, a riposte to Ouspensky's ideas about esotericism and the fourth dimension. Nicoll developed these ideas further and, influenced by many

philosophical and religious traditions (the Christian Fathers, mystics, Plato, Neoplatonists and Hermeticists) formulated his theories concerning the transformation of man's inner life, as I show in Chapter Four. Arguing how fostering a group of individuals who could develop 'ears to hear' esoteric truth and live by it had been the exclusive concern of esoteric religious and philosophical traditions he had studied, Nicoll in his book widened this view, presenting the development of Ouspensky's ideas on time and the fourth dimension to affirm that effecting psychological transformation was to gain 'eternal life', 'a more abundant life to be lived here and now' (Ward 1955:243) that transcended reality. Turning then his psychological skills on the theory and practice of 'the Work', Nicoll presented talks to his classes explaining the psychology behind 'the Work' and its practical application. The focus of these talks which were collected in the five-volume *Commentaries*, discussed in Chapter Five, is narrower than in *Living Time*, since their chief concern was 'the Work' as a practical guide to realising Gurdjieff's idea of 'real I'. But Nicoll's view is also broadened, in that he incorporates, to a far greater extent than Gurdjieff or Ouspensky, biblical quotations, thereby hinting at his view that the Gospels are an account of this work of transformation.

Though in *Dream Psychology* religion receives little mention, and in *Living Time* religious ideas are viewed mostly from a non-biblical perspective, the *Commentaries* are redolent with biblical quotations. It is as though Nicoll overcame his aversion to Christianity *per se* (though not to the 'orthodox' church as an organisation), coming to realise that the Bible treats the same topics as 'the Work'. This insight is brought to completion in *The New Man* and *The Mark*, where Nicoll shows that 'the Gospels speak of the essential purpose of Christ's teaching' which is to be understood as 'man's redemption in strictly psychological terms, [and] the soul's liberation by evolution within the individual' (Ward 1955:243).

I have shown that Nicoll's view is that 'what really mattered' – his key phrase in his letter to Bush – is 'the liberation of the soul, a phrase that has no meaning other than an esoteric one, essentially the same phrase as "The kingdom of Heaven is within you"' (Ward 1955:243). I have shown in the thesis

that Nicoll arrived at this conclusion through critical engagement with the 'external' authorities (WRN, Jung, Gurdjieff and Ouspensky). I think it not an exaggeration to suggest that Nicoll's view of the Gospels puts them in the same category as Gurdjieff's apocalyptic writings, showing them to be apocalyptic and subversive documents directed, as Gurdjieff says of his writings, toward the solution 'of the following three cardinal problems':

to destroy, mercilessly, without any compromises whatsoever, in the mentation and being of the reader, the beliefs and views, by centuries rooted in him, about everything existing in the world;

to acquaint the reader with the material required for a new creation and to prove the soundness and good quality of it;

to assist the arising in the mentation and in the feelings of the reader of a veritable, non-fantastic representation not of that illusory world which he now perceives, but of the world existing in reality (Gurdjieff in *Wellbeloved* 2003:2-3).

In stating this I affirm that I have answered my three research questions. In his search for 'what really mattered' Nicoll practised modern scientific psychology on the understanding that he was curing the souls of his patients and pupils. The means he ultimately utilised to do this, 'the Work', is undoubtedly a form of Christianity, and Nicoll, and with him Gurdjieff, maintained that it was the means of showing people the necessary condition of being a Christian, how to love God and your neighbour as you should. Nicoll also saw that the Gospel, if interpreted in the manner in which he says was originally intended, that is as much as psychology as religion, is the ideal vehicle for this esoteric Teaching that enables one to become a Christian in this way and to realise the Kingdom of Heaven in oneself.

This presentation of Nicoll as the proponent of psychological 'religion' would not be complete without locating him in the development of a strand of thought that Wayne Rollins (in his *Soul and Psyche*, a book that 'applies psychological and psychoanalytical insight into the study of the bible, its origins, its content, its interpretation' [Rollins1999: v]) calls 'biblical psychology'. Rollins shows that Nicoll and his like see 'religions [as] psychotherapeutic systems in the truest sense of the word [that avow and recognise] the soul and at the same time reveal the soul's nature' (Jung *CW* 10: para 367). Rollins maintains that 'religion' is fundamentally 'the care, nourishment, proper development and

goal of the human psyche' (Rollins 1997:141). Rollins places at the beginning of the development of this 'biblical psychology' Fanz Delitzsch, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Leipzig University in the 1850s, one of the earliest of modern champions, in the light of the rise of modern psychology, of 'biblical psychology'. In *A System of Biblical Psychology* (1855) Delitzsch presents the bible as a psychological document pertinent to 'personal psychotherapy' which describes 'the human soul, the illnesses and sins that beset it, and of ways to cure it (salvation, redemption)'.

Biblical psychology, one of the oldest sciences of the church [is] a scientific representation of the doctrine of Scripture on the psychological constitution of man as created, and how this constitution has been affected by sin and redemption (Delitzsch 1855:16).

In saying that 'Scripture is infinitely more about man's soul and spirit than about Orion and the Pleiades' (Delitzsch 1855:15) Delitzsch sees that the bible is not the story of 'creation', or the seeming history and factual reportage usually imputed of it, but 'a picture of the "psychical constitution" of the soul' (Delitzsch 1855:16). Asserting the need to 'see clearly and without prejudice the rays of truth [which shine] outside the range of confession of faith' (Delitzsch 1855:7), Delitzsch praises contemporaries who have supplied from 'experimental psychology abounding materials for biblical psychology' (Delitzsch 1855:9-12). He asks whether 'what Plato or what Plotinus teach [is] to be absolutely branded, because Plato and Plotinus teach it?' (Delitzsch 1855:118) Delitzsch's 'biblical psychological' model of human development sees that 'the goal of the developmental process is to move from a *natural*, unconscious state to a *personal*, conscious, and free *pneumatico-psychical* state'. 'The Bible, "a book just as much human as divine", informs the reader of the "natural condition" of the self and proffers a vision of the new humanity to which it is called':

"Biblical psychology offers to dogmatics the knowledge that is required for the understanding of the human essential constitution of the God-man" [and] a diagnosis and a protocol of treatment "for the restoration of the true human nature" (quotations {" " } Delitzsch 1855:18, 189, 384 in Rollins 1999:26, 28).

I suggest that Nicoll's view, that 'the Gospels are not religion – they are psychology' (unpublished note, dated 24/7/47), salvation coming from a psychology described in Scripture, makes him a proponent of 'biblical psychology' as Delitzsch described it in 1855 and as Rollins recasts this in 1999.

In his thesis, *The Psychology of the New Testament*, presented in 1910, M. Scott Fletcher, whom Rollins sees as assuming Delitzsch's mantle, also presents the New Testament as the exposition of a psychological therapeutic system. Examining the psychological meaning of the terms soul, spirit, heart and flesh as used in the New Testament, and then outlining an *ordo salutis* which addresses the topics of conversion, repentance, faith, spiritual resurrection or quickening, mystical union with Christ, and sanctification, Fletcher maintains that these biblical symbols are psychological terms that articulate the psychological process described by St. Paul as attaining 'unto the full-grown man' (Ephesians 4:18), as 'putting off "the old man" and putting on "the new man which is being renewed after the image of Him that created him"' (Colossians 3:10 - Fletcher 1912:230). Fletcher also describes this psychological process in such Pauline or Johannine expressions as: ' "natural" man becoming "spiritual" man' (Fletcher 1912:230); 'spiritual renewal called a "new birth", being "born anew from above, born of the Spirit" (John 3: 3,7 - Fletcher 1912:235); being 'renewed in the spirit of your mind' (Ephesians 4:24) or 'transformed by the renewal of your mind (Romans 12:2) or 'renewed unto knowledge' (Colossians 3:10 - Fletcher 1912:236). Fletcher argues that for St. Paul death and resurrection and Christ living within us are images that describe this transformation, as for example in the New Testament passages: 'God quickened us together with Christ and raised us together with him' (Ephesians 2: 5, 6 – Fletcher 1912:237); 'I have been crucified with Christ: yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me' (Galations 2:20). Fletcher thus says that the New Testament describes as a *psychological* process, but 'from many different standpoints', the engendering of 'the new regenerate life into which the personality passes at conversion, a new personality or type of manhood, Christ-like and spiritual, [a] revolution and renovation in [a man's] inner life' (Fletcher 1912: 229, 238). Priest rather than psychologist, Fletcher nevertheless anticipates, I argue, Nicoll's view of the New Testament. Indeed, I suggest that had Rollins heard of Nicoll he might have included him in *Soul and Psyche* as Fletcher's successor in the development of 'biblical psychology', one who 'fulfilled the need for refinement of what Rollins calls the *descriptive*

*agenda* for biblical psychology in terms of new psychological theories that have emerged since the early twentieth century' (Rollins 1999:141).

Jung (whom Rollins sees as Fletcher's actual successor), in addressing the problem of seeing metaphysics as psychology is more radical than Fletcher, saying that his aim is

to bring everything that purports to be metaphysical into the daylight of psychological understanding by dismissing without mercy the metaphysical claims of all esoteric teachings. [We] must accord the psyche the same validity as the empirical world. One cannot grasp anything metaphysically; one can only do so psychologically. Therefore I strip things of their metaphysical wrappings in order to make them objects of psychology (Jung CW 13: para 73).

A yet more radical view would see that there is no such thing as metaphysical reality, but would not thereby dismiss the metaphysical as such, saying rather that 'metaphysical reality' is psychological reality. Though careful to maintain his empirical scientific persona in public, I contend that in private Jung would own the more radical view.

Though views of the bible as biblical psychology, 'speaking *explicitly* of the nature and habits of the soul', but 'bearing witness *implicitly* to a vision of the nature, mettle, and developmental potential of the human soul' (Rollins 1999:141) are now increasingly accepted in theological and biblical studies, and though Rollins does trace the continuation of research in 'biblical psychology', citing such writers as Rudolf Bultmann, G. C. Grant, J. E. Pederson, C. E. Cerling, Gerd Theissen and John Carter, I question whether even now the significance of what Delitzsch and his successors, Nicoll included, were saying is acknowledged as it was by R. H. Ward. Is not rather, even in Rollins' book, 'biblical psychology' seen merely as one of a number of 'exegetical topics ripe for psychological-critical inquiry' (Rollins 1999:115), rather than as the kernel of Christianity, and indeed of all 'religion' which, I argue, it is?

Jung, in saying that stripping away the metaphysical wrappings of biblical 'psychological' concepts leads to the development of what he has called the Self, points to another aspect of the process, the historical outgrowing of '*primordial participation mystique*':

When the primordial *participation mystique* with things is abolished the centre of gravity of the total personality shifts from the ego to the hypothetical point between the conscious and the unconscious which might be called the self (Jung CW 13: para 65/67).

He has been anticipated in this by Nicoll, who wrote, in *Some Analytical Interpretations* (Nicoll 1921)

[incidentally explaining Levy-Bruhl's term *participation mystique*]:

In man, in the state of least differentiation the collective unconscious is realised as if it lay in the objective world projected outwards [in] *participation mystique*. *The unconscious is in the object*. The next stage in the psychological evolution of man is when he begins to free himself from [this] projection, the unconscious becoming detached from the object. *Immediately the collective unconscious begins to be detached from the object, mythology arises* (Nicoll 1921:27-9).

Segal, seeing Jung as dividing religiously evolving man into four levels, primitives, ancients, moderns and contemporaries (these are nevertheless Segal's terms, not Jung's), argues that 'religion' is a progression from the situation of 'primitives' who project themselves on to the world in the form of 'gods', and identify with their projections (as Nicoll describes) to that of 'ancients' who also project themselves on to the world, but not identifying with the 'gods', create mythology, also as Nicoll describes. Through this mythology

primitive man divides *the world of psychological realities from the world of objective realities*. Mythology is primarily composed of the archetypal motives contained in the racial collective unconscious, "world images in general under the form of primordial images or mythical themes" [Jung], [including] the attributes of God as archetype [whose] function is real in a psychological sense (Nicoll 1921: 27-9).

Jung says, according to Segal, that 'moderns', withdrawing this projection (since mythology is still a form of projection) nevertheless continue to interpret religion literally, and therefore reject it under the influence of the rational thinking of science. But while 'moderns' spurn the need for a substitute for religion, in the process facing an invasion of the now no-longer-recognised unconscious, often in the form of neurosis, 'contemporaries', in the same psychological situation of rejecting religion because they cannot 'believe' in it literally, nevertheless crave a substitute, a non-projective means of attending to the unconscious (paraphrase and development of Jung CW 13: para 395 at Segal 2000:69-70). Many today, this argument goes on, aided and abetted by most organised religion, unable to take leave of exoteric religion by withdrawing projections, cannot make the advance from 'moderns' to 'contemporaries', but are kept in bondage by a

theology [that wrongly] rejects any tendency to take the assertions of its earlier records as written myths and, accordingly, to understand them symbolically (Jung CW 10: para 551).

I argue that ‘contemporaries’, (who, in this argument, need a non-projected substitute for the concretised projections of previous ages) readily accept the reality of their perception of the outer world, while actually, [*pace* Kant] knowing nothing of it in itself, build it in their mind from sensory perceptions, nevertheless accepting as a working supposition that it is not in itself an illusion. What they do not similarly accept is the reality of the world of ‘Mind’,<sup>128</sup> or ‘higher mind’ as ‘the Work’ calls it, that which lies within. Though we cannot normally apprehend ‘Mind’ in itself, but merely, as with outer phenomena, build a picture in our mind from our perceptions of it, the world of ‘Mind’, approached from the inner, is, on this model, nevertheless a reality. The essence is to understand that for instance what we earlier understood of Christ in a concrete way through projection does not disappear when the projection is withdrawn; on the contrary, a Christ apprehended as something inward is more real than a psychological projection. Further, whereas we shall never experience directly the outer world in itself, and similarly usually only experience ‘Mind’ indirectly, change of mind, *metanoia*, brings *immediate* experience of the inner world of ‘Mind’, which Mead calls ‘Father-God, the Shepherd, the Reason of all mastership’ (Goodrick-Clarke 2005:120, 127). We are called to *metanoia* to apprehend directly ‘higher mind’. This, I argue, is a feature of mystical discovery in the Christian tradition such as what Eckhart means when he says we must become God; Ruysbroeck, when he says that we can become divine, by participation if not in essence; ‘the Work’, when it calls us to realise our ‘real’, behind which lies God; St. Paul when he calls us to union with the divine that is *caritas* or *agape* [1 Corinthians 13], and to put on Christ [Galatians 4:27]. In this way the psychological becomes transcendent. Far from losing something by seeing religion as psychological, those who view it thus rid themselves of the illusions created by projection, finding transcendental reality. I argue that ‘the Work’, and the Christian religion understood in the light of such systems as ‘the Work’ offer a way of escaping the concreteness of our primitive psychological projection and making these previously projected contents conscious.

---

<sup>128</sup> ‘Great Mind’ is a ‘hermetic’ term (Mead 1906:40).

In *The New Man* Nicoll cites the second great parable about the Kingdom of Heaven, (which Christ also interprets), that of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:25-Nicoll 1950:133).

Another parable he set before them, saying, the Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the blade sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares [darnel] also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it tares? And he said unto them, an enemy hath done this. And the servants say unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he saith, Nay: lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn (Matthew 13:24-30)

Nicoll argues that this parable, one of the few he treats that are not concerned primarily with personal psychology, gives a view of the birth of a true Religion and its distortion. The 'sowing of the good seed', 'the word of the Kingdom', is the genesis of a 'new Religion', something that happens from 'age to age'. Truth, the 'Word of the Kingdom', is 'sown' in the field that is humanity on Earth (and in the 'earth' of each person), grows and 'bears fruit' [attracting followers to 'true religion']. Nicoll's view of esotericism suggests that the truth of each Religion is essentially the same, the formulations of it varying according to local circumstances. On the basis of the parable he argues that each Religion has its own time, its own age, eventually losing force and becoming ineffective; 'there has always been a failure of such teaching in *process of time*' (Nicoll 1954:183). Failure is followed by renewal of the truth in another form. R.H. Ward thinks that in our own time (for Ward the 1950s, but I think he means roughly the end of the second millennium) the aeon of Christianity is dying and something new is being born. The various 'apocalypses', 'revelations' in the Bible, misunderstood, Nicoll argues, through mistranslating *aionos* ('consummation of the age') as 'everlasting', are taken as literal descriptions of cataclysmic 'events' of the end of time. But Nicoll argues that they describe the failure of a Religion and the birth of a new era, age, or aeon. There was such an end in Christ's 'time'. Nicoll sees the 'second coming' as another re-birth of this perennial truth (*palingenesis*, a coming again) through the coming of a new Religion (Nicoll 1952:185).

Working in the mid-nineteenth century Delitzsch was of the same opinion; ‘the end of the Christian era [is] becoming, according to a divine law in the formation of history, increasingly like to its beginning’ (Delitzsch 1855:25). Ward, similarly, in his broadcast, speaks of

an eastern belief, that, during the last phase of a civilisation, there occurs a recapitulation of what might be called the spiritual content of an era. So, while the organised and exoteric expressions of the Christian religion, which have given our age its character, wane with the passing of the Christian era, there emerge lost memories of the era’s beginning. Something of this kind may be happening [now] (Ward 1955:247).

Ward sees Nicoll’s books, and the ‘ageless truth’ they contained, written by a man whose character was that of a ‘new man’ as one of the signs that he was living in the terminal phase of a civilisation.

In these books of Dr Nicoll’s the spiritual impulse of these beginnings springs up like the living water with which Christ baptised his followers. At the end of the pre-Christian age these were the new men in whom an eternal and ageless truth was vested on behalf of an age which was dawning, new men without whom the values underlying that Christian era could not have characterised and civilised it as they have. Now, at the end of the Christian era, who are the men who will in turn carry those eternal truths and values beyond destruction and into the age which is to come? This all-important question Dr Nicoll answers (Ward 1955:247).

The truth, the Word of God, essentially esoteric, is sown ‘to lift man beyond his senses’ (Nicoll 1954:187), and out of barbarism. Unfortunately the teaching becomes distorted from the inception of a new Religion. Tares, (darnel, which, when just coming up cannot be distinguished from wheat [Nicoll 1952:135]), sown ‘in the sleep of man’, that is sown in men who are asleep in the ‘Work’ sense, sown in a part of the mind that is asleep, represent true teaching distorted, taken in a worldly way, [‘sown by “the devil” ’] misunderstood and distorted; esoteric ideas become contaminated by the world. Because it is hard to tell the difference between true and false teaching, this error cannot simply be uprooted, lest true teaching also be destroyed. Thus during the aeon the two ‘truths’, truth and error, esoteric truth and its distorted ‘worldly’ form ‘grow together’. Nicoll argues that only at the ‘consummation of the age’ (v40) [which, Nicoll argues, is not the ‘end of the world’, which is a mistranslation of *en te synteleia aionos* {έν τη συντελεια αίονος}] will error, the sensuous religion that dominates the world, tares, be ‘harvested, bundled and cast into the fire’ [Matthew 13:30 - Nicoll 1950:134]; truth will be ‘gathered and stored in a barn’. What is being described, I argue, is the opposition between a ‘concrete’, ‘worldly’ form of the religion represented by the Christianity Nicoll rejected in his youth, and ‘esoteric’, ‘inner’, ‘spiritual’ psychologically understood

religion. At the end of the age the sensuous religion that dominates the world, the tares, will be 'tied in bundles and burnt' (Matthew 13:20), which means it will simply pass away. True religion, however, esoteric spiritual religion, will be 'gathered into my barn', which means it will become the seed corn for the next phase of religious development. Though the formulations of truth carried by Religions during the course of the ages lose force, truth itself remains, carried by the perennial esoteric tradition that grows together with Religions. Often this alternative tradition surfaces within the church. To name only figures referred to in this thesis, Origen, Eckhart, Luther, Boehme and Law were carriers of the esoteric tradition within the church, though all were viewed suspiciously by it.

Though Nicoll sees his own particular system, and 'the Work' more generically, as formulations of a common esoteric truth, he, Gurdjieff and Ouspensky nevertheless understood that 'the Work' was essentially Christian. We might even say that all three remained Christians. We have noted Gurdjieff's admission that 'the Work' was a form of Christianity. He, who was buried with the full panoply of the Orthodox Church, says: 'The Institute can help one to become a Christian (Gurdjieff 1973:153). Ouspensky's view of the Gospels must, I argue, suggest that he was a believer. One argument of my thesis is that Nicoll returned to his natal Christianity. Nicoll grasped that the life of Christ symbolises the truth and how it might be lived:

Esoteric Christianity, as G. called it, is not religion, but it is the inner meaning of what Christ taught. It does not make any difference whether you are a Jew, or a Christian, or anything else, this work is about Esoteric Christianity. If you do not understand this, you have a wrong attitude to the Work (Nicoll in Pogson 1961:281).

And though Gurdjieff expressly says that 'the Work' is not a religion, it is, I have argued, nevertheless religious. But it is neither a discrete new religion nor the basis for a New Religious Movement, seeking neither to uproot the teaching of Christianity nor to destroy the church nor even to reform it, lest the wheat be uprooted with the tares.<sup>129</sup> It therefore exists alongside existing institutional formations with which practitioners interact or not.

---

<sup>129</sup> This is said from the point of view of 'the Work' in Gurdjieff's time. The following quotation does, however, suggest that 'the Fourth Way' might become a religion. Petsche draws attention to the fact that as long ago as

Gurdjieff said [that] the role of the Fourth Way is to appear and disappear, after having deposited what was necessary at this moment, in a certain epoch, in a certain place on the earth. This way could blend into society, change form, become an organisation, a religion, or disappear (Claustres 1999:54).

But in their lifetimes Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and Nicoll, I argue, were Stewards of Unrighteousness (in the sense of Ouspensky's [and Nicoll's] interpretation of the parable), regenerate, illuminated, 'returned' to the world to help those not illuminated bear their burden of the sin of 'missing the mark' by showing them how to understand the teaching by distinguishing wheat from tares, or showing how to turn tares into wheat. Describing the most appropriate term within the study of Religions for understanding these teachers, Sutcliffe says that 'Gurdjieff can, apparently, be switched smoothly between the tracks of "new religion" and "esotericism" ' but has 'low visibility in NRM [New Religious Movement] studies'. Rather than 'introducing a unique revelation or updating a perennial teaching' Gurdjieff, according to Sutcliffe, occupies 'a dual role of "Western guru" and *bricoleur*',<sup>130</sup> being 'an ad-libber, trying out circumstances (and people) as he came across them' (Sutcliffe 2014:18-19). Neither did Nicoll introduce a unique revelation, but was more concerned with making an ancient one better understood. But even if what Ward suggests of Nicoll's role in ushering in a *palingenesis*, a second coming, a new aeon, is correct, any new Religion would, I suggest, be in essence 'only' esoteric Christianity as Nicoll sees it.

I end by closing the circle. We have seen how Nicoll moved away from his natal Christianity and returned to what might be called a reformed version of it perhaps without ever having really left it. Though it was, as we have seen, the atmosphere of moral rectitude, where 'morality was only sexual morality, and the feeling of being a sinner was the main idea of religion' (*Commentaries*: 8), and the need for 'belief' in the miraculous that WRN insisted as a *sine qua non* for Christianity, that repelled Maurice Nicoll, allied to this attitude was WRN's affirming that 'those who cannot receive the supernatural begin with an assumption which makes faith impossible' (Nicoll *The Church's One*

---

1980 'James Webb stated that 'the Foundation network "has increasingly developed the characteristics of a church" ' (Webb 1980:477 quoted in Petsche 2013:75).

<sup>130</sup> Someone ' "adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks", [able] to make do with "whatever is at hand" ' ( " " Levi-Strauss 1966 [whose term it is] in Sutcliffe 2014:17).

*Foundation* in Ives 2001:199). It was his demanding old-style faith that is a blind 'belief' in the 'supernatural' understood as something external to a man, and the concomitant obdurate insistence on the literal meaning of scripture, which Nicoll and many like him found impossible and a barrier to any real faith. Nicoll saw that an earlier age without a psychological vocabulary had talked about the psychological using supernatural images, but that a naïve belief in these supernatural images had always been an error. The figurative interpretation of scriptural images was the key to their psychological meaning. As Jung said in the 'Red Book':

Where reason abides, one needs no magic; our time no longer needs magic (Jung 2009:403).

Nicoll's insight was that through psychological understanding a person could be psychologically transformed, becoming a 'New Man', who lives in the Kingdom of Heaven, here and now. Though this insight might seem to be a new religious outlook it is, as Nicoll and R. H. Ward argue, ' "new" only in so far as it was old long before the Christian era dawned' (Ward 1955:243).

# **Bibliography**

## **Primary Sources**

### **Maurice Nicoll: published works**

Nicoll, Maurice (1999) *A Few Recollections of Dr. Nicoll and of Amwell, 1949-1953* (D[iana] P[ettaval] [ed.]: Utrecht: Eureka Editions)

Nicoll, Maurice (1917a) *Dream Psychology* (London: Henry Frowde, Hodder & Stoughton; New York: Samuel Weiser [1979])

Nicoll, Maurice (1920) *Dream Psychology* (London: Henry Frowde, Hodder & Stoughton)

Nicoll, Maurice (2009) *Informal Work Talks and Teachings 1940-1950* (Lewis Creed, [ed.]: Utrecht: Eureka Editions)

Nicoll, Maurice (1952) *Living Time and the Integration of the Life* (London: Vincent Stuart)

Nicoll, Maurice (1917b) *In Mesopotamia* (London/New York/Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton [modern reprint, np., nd.])

Nicoll, Maurice (1995) *Notes Taken at Meetings, January 18, 1934 to April 28, 1934* (Creed, Lewis [ed.]: Utrecht: Eureka Editions) [Two copies, different edition with additional material]

Nicoll, Maurice (1957, 1957a, 1957b, 1960, 1960b) *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky*, 5 Volumes (London: Vincent Stuart)

Nicoll, Maurice (1996) *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, Volume Six – Index (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc.)

(Nicoll, Maurice (1997) *Selections from Meetings in 1953 at Great Amwell House* (Utrecht: Eureka Editions)

Nicoll, Maurice (1921) Lecture given to the Tavistock Square Clinic for functional Nervous Disease: 'Some Analytical Interpretations' in *J Neurol Psychopathol* 1921 st1-2:26-382 <http://jnnp.bmj.com>

Nicoll, Maurice (1919) *The Blue Germ* (modern reprint, no place, no date)

Nicoll, Maurice (1954) *The Mark* (London: Stuart & Watkins)

Nicoll, Maurice (1950) *The New Man: The Interpretation of some of the Parables and Miracles of Christ* (London: Vincent Stuart)

Nicoll, Maurice (1918) "Why is the 'Unconscious' Unconscious" in *British Journal of Psychology*: 9/2: 230-235 (1918)

### **William Robertson Nicoll: published works**

Nicoll, William Robertson (1910) *My Father: An Aberdeenshire Minister 1812-1891* (London: Hodder & Stoughton [facsimile modern reprint from India, no details given])

Nicoll, William Robertson (1905) *The Church's One Foundation: Christ and Recent Criticism* (New York: [modern reprint by Armstrong: ISHA Books, New Delhi reprint 2013])

Nicoll, William Robertson (1905) *The Garden of Nuts: William Robertson Nicoll and St. John of the Cross, and various other essays* (London: Hodder & Stoughton [modern reprint by General Books LLC, Memphis, USA, 2012])

Nicoll, William Robertson (1897) *The Return to the Cross* (London: Hodder & Stoughton [modern reprint by ISHA Books, New Delhi, 2013])

### **Gurdjieff: published works**

Gurdjieff, George I. (1950) *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson: An objectively impartial criticism of the life of man. Third Book* (London, Melbourne and Henley: Arkana)

Gurdjieff, George I. (1933) *Gurdjieff's Herald of Coming Good* (Paris: New York: Samuel Weiser)

Gurdjieff, George I. (1975) *Life is Real only Then, When 'I am'* (London: Penguin/Arkana)

Gurdjieff, George I. (1963) *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul)

Gurdjieff, George I. (1973) [*Early Talks of Gurdjieff:*] *Views from the Real World* (London, Melbourne and Henley: Arkana)

Gurdjieff, George I. (2014) *Gurdjieff's Early Talks: 1914-1931* (no place: Book Studies) ['re-issue' of the previous entry]

### **Ouspensky: published works**

Ouspensky, Pyotr D. (1931) *A New Model of the Universe: Principles of the Psychological Method in its Application to Problems of Science, Religion, and Art* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications [1997])

Ouspensky, Pyotr D. (1950) *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments from an Unknown Teaching* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul)

Ouspensky, Pyotr D. (1919) *Letters from Russia* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978 – originally letters published in Orage's *New Age* Magazine during 1919)

Ouspensky, Pyotr D. (1953) *Memory* (Cape Town: Sourton Press)

Ouspensky, Pyotr D. (1957) *Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul)

### **Pogson: published works**

Pogson, Beryl (2000) *Brighton Work Talks 1960-1967* (compiled by Bob Hunter: Utrecht: Eureka Editions)

Pogson, Beryl (1995) *Centenary Fragments based on the Teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky & Maurice Nicoll* (York: Quack Books)

Pogson, Beryl (1961) *Maurice Nicoll: A Portrait* (London: Vincent Stuart)

Pogson, Beryl (1967) *More Work Talks* (York: Quack Books/Lewis Creed, 1993)

Pogson, B (1994a) *The Work Life: based on Teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky and Maurice Nicoll* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc.)

Pogson, B (1994) *Unforgotten Fragments: based on Teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky and Maurice Nicoll* (York: Quack Books)

Pogson, Beryl (1993) *Works Talks at the Dicker 1966* (privately printed, no data)

### **Jung: published works**

Jung, Carl Gustav (1959) *Aion* (trans. R. F. C. Hull: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: Collected Works, Volume Nine, Part Two)

Jung, Carl Gustav (1917a) *Die Psychologie der unbewussten Prozesse* (Zürich: Verlag von Rascher)

Jung, Carl Gustav (1995) *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (Harmondsworth: Fontana Press/Harper Collins – English original 1963)

Jung, Carl Gustav (1912) 'Neue Bahnen der Psychologie' in *Raschers Jahrbuch für Schweizer Art und Kunst III* (Zürich und Leipzig: Verlag von RASCHER & Co)

Jung, Carl Gustav 'New Paths in Psychology' [1912] in Jung, Carl Gustav (1953) *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology* (trans. R. F. C. Hull: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: Collected Works, Volume Seven, 245-268)

Jung, C. G./Long, Constance 'On Psychoanalysis' [1912] in Jung, C. G. /Long, Constance (1916) *Collected Papers on analytical Psychology: Authorised Translation* (London: Baillière, Tindall and Cox, modern reprint by Gyan Books PVT. Ltd, New Delhi, 2015, 226-235)

Jung, C. G./Long, Constance 'Psychoanalysis' [1912] in Jung, C. G./ Long, Constance (1916) *Collected Papers on analytical Psychology: Authorised Translation* (London: Baillière, Tindall and Cox, modern reprint by Gyan Books PVT. Ltd, New Delhi, 2015, 206-225)

Jung, Carl Gustav (1921) *Psychological Types* (trans. H. G. Baynes/R. F. C. Hull: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: Collected Works, Volume Six)

Jung, Carl Gustav/Hinkle, Beatrice (1916) *Psychology of the Unconscious; A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido, a Contribution to the History of the Evolution of Thought* (translation by Beatrice Hinkle of Jung's *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*: New York: Dodd, Mead and Company 1931 reprint of 1916 edition, modern reprint by Gyan Books PVT, New Delhi, 2017)

Jung, Carl Gustav (1956 [1911/12]) *Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia* (translated from the German by R. F. C. Hull: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: Collected Works, Volume Five)

Jung, Carl Gustav 'The Philosophical Tree' [1969] in Jung, Carl Gustav (1967) *Alchemical Studies* (translated from the German by R. F. C. Hull: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: Collected Works, Volume Thirteen, 251-350)

Jung, Carl Gustav 'The Theory of Psychoanalysis' [1916] in *Freud and Psycho-Analysis* (translated from the German by R. F. C. Hull: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: Collected Works, Volume Four, 83-226)

Jung, Carl Gustav 'The Undiscovered Self' [1961] in Jung, Carl Gustav (1964) *Civilisation in Transition* (translated from the German by R. F. C. Hull: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: Collected Works, Volume Ten, 245-303)

Jung, C. G./Long, Constance 'The Content of the Psychoses' [1914] in Jung, C. G./Long, Constance (1916) *Collected Papers on analytical Psychology: Authorised Translation* (London: Baillière, Tindall and Cox, modern reprint by Gyan Books PVT. Ltd, New Delhi, 2015, 312-361)

Jung, Carl Gustav (2009) *The Red Book: Liber Novus: A Reader's Edition* (ed. Sonu Shamdasani: New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company)

Jung, Carl Gustav 'The Structure of the Unconscious' [1916] in Jung, Carl Gustav (1953) *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology* (trans. R. F. C. Hull: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: Collected Works, Volume Seven, 269-304)

### **Archival material**

Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library: Personal Note from Lewis Creed, hand-written, from 27 Norfolk Street, YORK, YO2 1JY, dated August 1995, no addressee. Maurice Nicoll Papers, MS 1348, Accession No 97-M-61, Series No 1, Box No. 1, Folder No. 2

Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library: TMs for unpublished novel "*Pelican Hotel*" – Maurice Nicoll Papers (MS1348) Original Accession 1914-1994 Box No. 1 Folder No. 2 undated

Archiv der ETH Zürich: Letter from Maurice Nicoll to C. G. Jung from 14b Harley Street, dated April 9, 1923. Umschrift MS: 1056:61

Archiv und Nachlassen der ETH-Bibliothek Zürich: Letter from James Young to C. G. Jung from 146 Harley Street, London W. 1., dated 12. 11. 23. MS 1056:69

Archiv und Nachlassen der ETH-Bibliothek Zürich: Letter from James Young to C. G. Jung from 33 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, London SW. 3, dated 8. 1. 31. MS 1056:1056

Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library: P. D. Ouspensky Memorial Collection: Typescripts of various chapters of Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous*. MS 840 Series No. 11 Boxes Nos. 36 – 41; undated, and various dates from 1926-1935, in Russian, French and English.

Special Collections, University of Edinburgh: Maurcie Nicoll Archive (in preparation): various citations from 'diaries', 1913-1922. An unpublished note. Catalogue details in preparation.

## Secondary Sources

- Azize, Joseph (2013) '“The Four Ideals”': A Contemplative Exercise by Gurdjieff' in *ARIES* 13 (2013) 173-203
- Backhurst, David (2005) 'Solovyov, Vladimir Sergeevich' in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (ed. Ted Honderich; Oxford University Press) 883
- Begg, Ean (1977) 'Jung's Lost Lieutenant: Jung's Friendship with Maurice Nicoll' in *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, Harvest, 1977.
- Blunden, Edmund (1928) *Undertones of War* (London: Penguin books)
- Bucke, Richard Maurice (1900) *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (London: Penguin Books)
- Butkowsky-Hewitt, Anna (1978) *With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg and Paris* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul)
- Claustres, Solange (1999) *Becoming Conscious with G. I. Gurdjieff* (Utrecht: Eureka Editions)
- Copley, Samuel (1989) *Portrait of a Vertical Man* (London: Swayne Publications)
- Crystal, David (1994) *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia* (Cambridge University Press)
- Darlow, T. H. (1925) *William Robertson Nicoll: Life and Letters* (London: Hodder & Stoughton)
- Delitzsch, Franz (1855) *A System of Biblical Psychology* (Translated by R. E. Wallis: Edinburgh: T&T Clark: 1885: Forgotten Books reprint, London, 2015)
- Durkheim, Émile (1938) *The Rules of Sociological Method* (translated by Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller: New York: The Free Press: London: Collier-Macmillan Limited: [originally published in French in 1895])
- Ehrman, Bart D. (2005) *Misquoting Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper)
- Einstein, Albert (1916) *Relativity: The Special and General Theory* (authorised translation by Robert W. Lawson: London and New York: Routledge, 2001)
- Faivre, Antoine (1994) *Access to Western Esotericism* (New York: State University of New York Press)
- Fletcher, M. Scott (1912) *The Psychology of the New Testament* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton [Forgotten Books reprint, London])
- Freud, Sigmund (1899) *The Interpretation of Dreams* (trans. James Strachey [1930]: Harmondsworth: Penguin Books [1975/6])
- Gilhus, Ingvild S. (2011) 'Hermeneutics' in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* (ed. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler: London and New York: Routledge) 275-284
- Goodrick-Clarke, Clare & Nicholas (2005) *G. R. S. Mead and the Gnostic Quest* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books)
- Gosse, Edmund (1907) *Father and Son: a study of two personalities* (London: Penguin)

- Grobel, Kendrick (1960) *The Gospel of Truth* (London: Adam and Charles Black)
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. (1998) *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press)
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. (2004) 'Esotericism' in Hanegraaff, Wouter J., Faivre, Antoine, van den Broek, Roelof and Brach, Jean-Pierre *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill) 336-340
- Hannah, Barbara (1977) *JUNG: His Life and Work; A Biographical Memoir* (London: Michael Joseph)
- Hinton, Charles Howard (1881) *A New Era of Thought* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co – Cornell University Library Digital Collections)
- Hinton, Charles Howard (1886) *Scientific Romances* (London: Merchant Books – modern reprint 2008)
- de Hartmann, Thomas and Olga (1964) *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (Idaho: Sandpoint Press)
- Hunter, Bob (2000) *Ouspensky: Pioneer of the Fourth Way* (Utrecht: Eureka Books)
- [Hunter, Bob (2006) *Don't Forget: P. D. Ouspensky's Life of Self-remembering* (California: Bardic Press) – same book as previous entry]
- Israel, Martin & Broadbent, Neil (2001) *The Devout Life: William Law's Understanding of Divine Love* (London & New York: Continuum)
- Ives, Keith A. (2011) *Voice of Nonconformity: William Robertson Nicoll and the British Weekly* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press)
- James, William (1902) *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Folio society: 2008)
- Jones, Ernest (1953-7) *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd)
- Kerr, John (2012) *A Dangerous Method* (np: Atlantic Books)
- King, Richard (2010) 'Mysticism and Spirituality' in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (ed. John Hinnells: London and New York: Routledge) 323-338
- Landau, Rom (1935) *God is My Adventure: A Book of Modern Mystics, Masters and Teachers* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson Limited)
- Law, William 'The Spirit of Prayer' in Law, William (1950) *The Pocket William Law* (abridged, London: Latimer House Limited [originally published 1749], 121-160)
- Layton, Bentley (1987) *The Gnostic Scriptures: Ancient Wisdom for the New Age* (New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/Auckland: Doubleday)
- Luther, Martin (2007) 'The Freedom of the Christian [1520]' in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther, Volume 2* (ed. Theodore G. Tappert: Minneapolis: Fortress Press)
- Lyon, Ardon J. (2005) 'Durkheim, Émile' in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (ed. Ted Honderich; Oxford University Press) 223
- Lyon, Ardon J. (2005) 'Bergson, Henri-Louis' in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (ed. Ted Honderich; Oxford University Press) 91

- McGrath, Alister E (2005) *Iustitia Dei* (Cambridge University Press Cambridge)
- Mead, G. R. S. (1903) *Did Jesus Live 100 BC?* (New York: Cosimo Classics)
- Mead, G. R. S. (1922) 'On a Speculation in Fourth Dimensionalism' in *The Quest: A Quarterly Review*, Volume XII. Numbers 1-4, October, 1920, to July, 1921; John M. Watkins, 21, Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, W. C. 2. London 1922. pp 43-55
- Mead, G. R. S. (1921) 'Some Remarks on Fourth Dimensionalism and the Time-Enigma' in *The Quest: A Quarterly Review*, Volume XIII. Numbers 1-4, October, 1921, to July, 1922; John M. Watkins, 21, Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, W. C. 2. London. 1921, pp 493-505
- Mead, G. R. S. (1906) *Thrice-Greatest Hermes: Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis – Volume 2* (London and Benares: The Theosophical Publishing Society – modern reprint, n. p., n. d.)
- Moore, J (1991) *Gurdjieff A Biography: The Anatomy of a Myth* (Shaftesbury/Rockport/Brisbane: Element)
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1961) *Thus Spake Zarathustra: a book for every one and no one* (translated by R. J. Hollingdale: London: Penguin Books [original publication 1884-1890])
- Noll, Richard (1996) *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (London: Fontana Press)
- Nott, C. S. (1961) *Teachings of Gurdjieff: A Pupil's Journal* (London: Penguin/Arkana)
- Nott, C. S. (1969) *Journey through this World: The Second Journal of a Pupil* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul)
- Needleman, Jacob (1980) *Lost Christianity: A Journey of Rediscovery to the Center of Christian Experience* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.)
- Partee, Charles (2008) *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press)
- Petsche, Johanna J. M. (2013) 'A Gurdjieff Genealogy: Tracing the Manifold Ways the Gurdjieff Teaching Has Travelled' in *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 4.1 (2013) 49-79
- Petsche, Johanna J. M. (2013a) 'Gurdjieff and de Hartmann's Music for Movements' in *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* Volume 4 Issue 1 2013 92-121
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric (2003) 'The Making of Modern Mysticism' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* June 2003, Vol. 71, No. 2, pp 273-302
- Priestley, J. B. (1964) *Man and Time* (London: Aldus Books)
- Rawlinson, Andrew (1997) *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court)
- Reyner, J. H. (1981) *Ouspensky: The Unsung Genius* (London: George Allan & Unwin)
- Robertson, J. M. (1903) *Pagan Christs: Studies in Comparative Hierology* (New York: Barnes & Noble)
- Rollins, Wayne (1999) *Soul and Psyche* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press)
- Rovelli, Carlo (2016) *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (London: Allen Lane [Penguin Books])
- Sassoon, Siegfried (1936) *Sherstone's Progress* (London: Penguin Books)

- Schneiders, Sandra M. (1991) *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco)
- Segal, Robert A. (2010) 'Myth and Ritual' in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (ed. John Hinnells: London and New York: Routledge) 372-396
- Segal, Robert A. (2000) 'Jung's Psychology of Religion' in *Beyond New Age; Exploring Alternative Spirituality* (edited by Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman: Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press)
- Selderhuis, Herman J. (2008) *The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company)
- Storr, Anthony (1996) *Feet of Clay: Saints, Sinners, and Madmen: A Study of Gurus* (New York, London et al: The Free Press)
- Sutcliffe, Steven & Bowman, Marion (2000) *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press)
- Sutcliffe, Steven (2014) 'Hard Work: locating Gurdjieff in the Study of Religion/s' in *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, Volume 27.3 2014, 262-284
- Sutcliffe, Steven J. (2004) 'The Dynamics of Alternative Spirituality: Seekers, Networks, and "New Age" ' in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* (Editor: James R. Lewis: Oxford, OUP) 466-490
- Taylor, Paul Beekman (2008) *G. I. Gurdjieff: A New Life* (Utrecht: Eureka Editions)
- Taylor, Paul Beekman (2012) *Real Worlds of G. I. Gurdjieff: Chapters in the Life of a Master* (Utrecht: Eureka Editions)
- Taylor, Paul Beekman (2010) *Gurdjieff in the Public Eye: Newspaper articles, Magazines and Books 1914-1949* (Utrecht: Eureka Editions)
- Tchekhovitch, Tcheslaw (2006) *Gurdjieff: A Master in Life: Recollections of Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch* (Toronto: Dolmen Meadow Editions)
- Thring, M. W. (2002) *Quotations from G. I. Gurdjieff's Teaching: A personal companion – Revised Edition* (Luzac Oriental: Oxford)
- Underhill, Evelyn (1911) *Mysticism: The Development of Humankind's Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Bracken Books) [1995]
- Vidler, Alec R. (1961) *The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the present day* (London: Penguin Books)
- Waldberg, Michel (1981) *Gurdjieff: an Approach to his Ideas* (original French edition 1973: trans. Steve Cox for Penguin/Arkana: London)
- Walker, Kenneth (1963) *The Making of Man* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul)
- Walker, Kenneth (1952) *Venture with Ideas: Meetings with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky* (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy)
- Ward, R. H. (1955) 'A New Interpretation of the Gospels' in *The Listener*, 10. February 1955 (Volume 50: 242-7) (Broadcast on Sunday, 23. January, 1955 at 5.40 pm [Disc No SLO.69778, recorded 6. Jan '55 - unpublished note in Nicoll Archive, Special Collections, University of Edinburgh])

Webb, James (1980) *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Work of G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons)

Weeks, Andrew (1991) *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (State University of New York Press).

Wellbeloved, Sophia (2002) *Gurdjieff, Astrology and Beelzebub's tales* (Aurora, Oregon: Abintra Books)

Wellbeloved, Sophia (2013) blog posted in [Gurdjieff, JOSEPH AZIZE PAGE: 'Behind real I lies God': www.gurdjieffbooks.com](http://www.gurdjieffbooks.com). wordpress.com/tag/lewis-creed/24/09/13

Willmetts, John P. /Sutcliffe, Steven J. (2016) 'Issues in Assessing a Gurdjieffian Tradition: Lessons from a Study of Maurice Nicoll (1884-1953)' in *Fieldwork in Religion* 11.1 (2016) 76-90

#### **Letter:**

Tennyson, Alfred Lord (n. d.) '*The Two Voices*'. Letter to Mr. P. Blood (in James 1902, 324, fn)

#### **Newspaper articles:**

'Diogenes' in *Time and Tide* Volume XXXI (1950) p 487

Special Collections, University of Aberdeen: 'Robertson Nicoll' Archive: *The Times*, 8. May, 1963, Article on William Robertson Nicoll, 'Robertson Nicoll – and Claudius Clear'; 'from a correspondent': MS 3518 1/1/8