

## THIRD LECTURE

The idea that man is a machine is not a new one. It is really the only scientific view possible; that is, a view based on experiment and observation. A very good definition of man's mechanicalness was given in the so-called "psycho-physiology" of the second part of the XIXth century. Man was regarded as incapable of any movement without receiving external impressions. Scientists of that time maintained that if it were possible to deprive man, from birth, of all outer and inner impressions and still keep him alive, he would not be able *to make the smallest movement*.

Such an experiment is, of course, impossible even with an animal, because the process of maintaining life, breathing, eating and so on, will produce all sorts of impressions which will start different reflectory movements first, and then awaken the moving centre.

But this idea is interesting because it shows clearly that the activity of the machine depends on external impressions, and begins with responses to these impressions.

Centres in the machine are perfectly adjusted to receive each its own kinds of impressions and to respond to them in a corresponding way. And when centres work rightly, it is possible to calculate the work of the machine and to foresee and foretell many future happenings and responses in the machine, as well as to study them and even direct them.

But unfortunately, centres, even in what is called a healthy and normal man, very rarely work as they should.

The cause of this is that centres are made so that, in a certain way, they can replace one another. In the original plan of Nature the purpose of this was, undoubtedly, to make work of centres continuous and to create a safeguard against possible interruptions in the work of the machine, because in some cases an interruption could be fatal.

But the capacity of centres to work for one another in an untrained and undeveloped machine – as all our machines are – becomes excessive and, as a result, the machine only rarely works with *each centre doing its right work*. Almost every minute one or another centre leaves its own work and tries to do the work of another centre which, in its turn, tries to do the work of a third centre.

I said that centres can replace one another to a certain extent, but not completely, and inevitably in such cases they work in a much less effective way. For instance moving centre can, up to a point, imitate the work of intellectual centre, but it can only produce very vague and disconnected thoughts as, for example, in dreams and in day-dreaming. In its turn, the intellectual centre can work for the moving centre. Try to write, for instance, thinking about every letter you are going to write and how you will write it. You can make experiments of this kind in trying to use your mind to do something which your hands or your legs can do without its help for instance, walk down a staircase noticing every movement, or do some habitual work with your hands, calculating and preparing every small movement by mind. You will immediately see how much more difficult the work will become, how much slower and how much more clumsy the intellectual centre is than the moving centre. You can see this also when you learn some kind of new movement – suppose you learn the use of the typewriter or any kind of new physical work – or take a soldier doing rifle drill. For some time in all your (or his) movements you (or he) will depend on the intellectual centre, and only after some time will they begin to pass to moving centre.

Everyone knows the relief when movements become habitual, when the adjustments become automatic, and when there is no need to *think* and calculate every movement all the time. This means that movement has passed to the moving centre, where it normally belongs.

The instinctive centre can work for the emotional, and the emotional can occasionally work for all other centres. And in some cases the intellectual centre has to work for the instinctive centre, although it can only do a very small part of its work, the part which is connected with

visible movements, such as the movement of the chest during breathing. It is very dangerous to interfere with normal functions of the instinctive centre, as for instance in artificial breathing, which is sometimes described as yogi breathing, and which must never be undertaken without the advice and observation of a competent and experienced teacher.

Returning to the wrong work of centres, I must say that this fills up practically all our life. Our dull impressions, our vague impressions, our lack of impressions, our slow understanding of many things, very often our identifying and our considering, even *our lying*, all these depend on the wrong work of centres.

The idea of the wrong work of centres does not enter into our ordinary thinking and ordinary knowledge, and we do not realise how much harm it does to us, how much energy we spend unnecessarily in this way and the difficulties into which this wrong work of centres leads us.

Insufficient understanding of the wrong work of our machine is usually connected with the false notion of our unity. When we understand how much divided we are in ourselves, we begin to realise the danger that can lie in the fact that one part of ourselves works instead of another part, without our knowing it.

In the way of self-study and self-observation it is necessary to study and observe not only the right work of centres, but also the wrong work of centres. It is necessary to know all kinds of wrong work and the particular features of the wrong work belonging to particular individuals. It is impossible to know oneself without knowing one's defects and wrong features. And, in addition to general defects belonging to everyone, each of us has his own particular defects belonging only to himself, and they also have to be studied at the right time.

I pointed out in the beginning that the idea that man *is* a machine brought into motion by external influences is really and truly a scientific idea.

What science does not know is:

*First*, that the human machine does not work up to its standard, and actually works much below its normal standard; that is, not with its full powers, not with all its parts; and

*Second*, that in spite of many obstacles it is capable of developing and creating for itself quite different standards of receptivity and action.

We shall now speak of the conditions necessary for development because it must be remembered that although development is possible, it is at the same time very rare and requires a great number of external and internal conditions.

What are these conditions?

The first of these conditions is that man must understand his position, his difficulties and his possibilities and must have either a very strong desire to get out of his present state or have a very great interest *for the new, for the unknown state which must come with the change*. Speaking shortly, he must be either very strongly repelled by his present state or very strongly attracted by the future state that may be attained.

Further, one must have a certain preparation. A man must be able to understand what he is told.

Also, he must be in right conditions externally, he must have sufficient free time for study and must live in circumstances which make study possible.

It is impossible to enumerate all the conditions which are necessary. But they include among other things a school. And school implies such social and political conditions in the given country in which a school can exist, because a school cannot exist in *any* conditions; and a more or less ordered life and a certain level of culture and *personal freedom* are necessary for the existence of a school. Our time is particularly difficult in this respect. Schools in the East are disappearing very quickly. In many countries they are absolutely impossible. For instance, no school could exist in Bolshevik Russia, or in Hitler's Germany, or in Mussolini's Italy, or in Kemal's Turkey.

I quoted some verses from the *Laws of Manu* referring to this subject in *A New Model of the Universe*.

From the rules for a Snataka (householder):

61. He must not live in a country governed by Shudras, nor in one inhabited by impious men, nor in one conquered by heretics, nor one abounding with men of lower castes.

79. He must not be in the company of outcastes, nor of Candalas, the lowest of men, nor of Pukkakas, nor of idiots, nor of arrogant men, nor of men of low class, nor of Antyavasayins (gravediggers).

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22. A kingdom peopled mostly by Shudras filled with godless men and deprived of twice-born inhabitants, will soon wholly perish, stricken by hunger and disease.

These ideas of the Laws of Manu are very interesting because they give us a basis on which we can judge different political and social conditions *from the point of view of school-work*, and to see which conditions are really progressive, and which bring only the destruction of all real values, although their adherents pretend that these conditions are progressive and even manage to deceive quantities of weak-minded people.

But external conditions do not depend on us. To a certain extent, and sometimes with great difficulty, we can choose the country where we prefer to live, but we cannot choose the period of the century and must try to find what we want in the period in which we are placed by fate.

So we must understand that even the beginning of preparation for development needs a combination of external and internal conditions which only rarely come all together.

But at the same time, we must understand that at least so far as internal conditions are concerned, man is not entirely left to the law of accident. There are many lights arranged for him by which he can find his way if he cares to and if he is *lucky*. His possibility is so small that the element of *luck* cannot be excluded.

Let us now try to answer the question: What makes a man desire to acquire new knowledge and to change himself?

Man lives in life under two kinds of influences. This must be very well understood and the difference between the two kinds of influences must be very clear.

The first kind consists of interests and attractions created by life itself: interests of one's health, safety, wealth, pleasures, amusements, security, vanity, pride, fame., etc.

The second kind consists of interests of a different order aroused by ideas which are not created in life but come originally from schools. These influences do not reach man directly. They are thrown into the general turnover of life, pass through many different minds and reach a man through philosophy, science, religion and art, always mixed with influences of the first kind and generally very little resembling what they were in their beginning.

In most cases men do not realise the different origin of the influences of the second kind and often explain them as having the same origin as the first kind.

Although man does not know of the existence of two kinds of influence, they both act on him and in one way or another way he responds to them.

He can be more identified with one or with some of the influences of the first kind and not feel influences of the second kind at all. Or he can be attracted and affected by one or another of the influences of the second kind. The result is different in each case.

We will call the first kind of influence, influence *A* and the second, influence *B*.

If a man is fully in the power of influence *A*, or of one particular influence *A*, and quite indifferent to influence *B*, nothing happens to him and his possibility of development diminishes with every year of his life, and at a certain age, sometimes quite an early age, it disappears completely. This means that man dies while physically remaining still alive, like grain that cannot germinate and produce a plant.

But if, on the other hand, man is not completely in the power of influence *A* and if

influences *B* attract him and make him feel and think, *results of the impressions they produce collect in him together*, attract other influences of the same kind and grow, occupying a more important place in his mind and life.

If the results produced by influence *B* become sufficiently strong, they fuse together and form in man what is called a *magnetic centre*. It must be understood at once that the word “centre” in this case does not mean the same thing as the “intellectual” or the “moving” centre; that is, centres in the essence. *Magnetic centre* is in personality, it is simply a group of interests which, when they become sufficiently strong, serve, to a certain degree, as a guiding and controlling factor. Magnetic centre turns one’s interests in a certain direction and helps to keep them there. At the same time it cannot do much by itself. A school is necessary. Magnetic centre cannot replace a school, but it can help to realise the need of a school; it can help to begin to look for a school, or if one meets a school by chance, magnetic centre can help to recognise a school and try not to lose it. Because nothing is easier to lose than a school.

Possession of a magnetic centre is the first, although quite unspoken, demand of a school. If a man without a magnetic centre, or a small or a weak magnetic centre, or with several contradictory magnetic centres; that is, interested in many incompatible things at the same time, meets a school, he does not become interested in it, or he becomes critical at once before he can know anything, or his interest disappears very quickly when he meets with the first difficulties of school work. This is the chief safeguard of a school. Without it the school would be filled with quite a wrong kind of people who would immediately distort the school teaching. A right magnetic centre not only helps one to recognise a school, it also helps to absorb the school teaching which is different from both influences *A* and influences *B* and may be called influence *C*.

Influence *C* can be transferred only by word of mouth, by direct instruction, explanation and demonstration.

When a man meets with influence *C* and is able to absorb it, it is said about him that in one point of himself; that is, in *magnetic centre*, he becomes free from the law of accident. From this moment the magnetic centre has actually played its part. It brought man to a school or helped him in his first steps there. From then on the ideas and the teaching of the school take the place of magnetic centre and slowly begin to penetrate into the different parts of personality and with time into essence.

One can learn many things about schools, about their organisation and about their activity in the ordinary way by reading and by studying historical periods when schools were more conspicuous and more accessible. But there are certain things about schools that one can learn only in schools themselves. And the explanation of school principles and rules occupies a very considerable place in school teaching.

One of the most important principles one learns in this way is that real school work must proceed by *three lines* simultaneously. One line of work, or two lines of work, cannot be called real “school work.”

What are these three lines?

In the first lecture I said that these lectures are not a school. Now I will be able to explain why they are not a school.

Once at a lecture a question was asked: Do people who study this system work only for themselves or do they work for other people? Now I will also answer this question.

The first line is study of oneself and study of the system, or the “language.” Working on this line one certainly works *for oneself*.

The second line is work with other people in the school and working with them, one works not only with them but *for* them. So in the second line one learns to work with people and for people.

This is why the second line is particularly difficult for some people.

In the third line, one works *for the school*. In order to work for the school, one must first understand the work of the school, *understand* its aims and needs. And this requires time unless one is really well prepared, because some people can *begin* with the third line, or in any case find it very easily.

When I said that these lectures are not a school, I meant that these lectures give the possibility of only one line of work; that is, study of the system and self-study. It is true that even by learning together people study the beginning of the second line of work, at least they learn to bear one another, and if their thought is broad enough and their perception quick enough they can even grasp something about the second and third lines of work. Still one cannot expect much just from lectures.

In the second line of work, in complete school organisation, people must not only *talk* together, but work together, and this work can be very different but must always, in one or another way, be *useful to the school*. So it means that working in the first line people study the second line and working in the second line they study the third line. Later you will learn why three lines are necessary and why only three lines of work can proceed successfully and towards a definite aim.

Even now you can understand the chief reason of the necessity of three lines of work if you realise that man is asleep and whatever work he starts, he soon loses interest in it and continues mechanically. Three lines of work are necessary, first of all, because one line awakes a man who falls asleep over another line. If one really works on three lines, one can never fall asleep completely; in any case one cannot sleep as happily as before; one will always awake and realise that one's work has stopped.

I can show also one very characteristic difference between three lines of work.

In the first line, one works chiefly on the study of the system or self-study and on self-observation, and one must manifest in one's work a certain amount of initiative in relation to oneself.

In the second line one works in connection with certain organised work and one must only *do what one is told*. No initiative is required or admitted in the second line and the chief point in this is *discipline* and following exactly what one is told, without bringing in any of one's own ideas even if they appear better than those that have been given.

In the third line again one can manifest more initiative, but one must always *verify* oneself and not make decisions against rules and principles, or against what one has been told.

I said before that the work begins with the study of the language. It will be very useful if at this point you try to realise that you already know a certain number of words of this new language, and it will also be very useful if you try to count these new words and write them down together. Only they must be written down without any comments; that is, without interpretation – comments and interpretations or explanations must be in your understanding. You cannot put them on paper. If this were possible, the study of psychological teachings would be very simple. It would be sufficient to publish a sort of dictionary or glossary and people would know all that is necessary to know. But, fortunately or unfortunately, this is impossible and men have to learn and work each for himself.

We must again return to centres and find why we cannot develop more quickly without the necessity for long school work.

We know that when we learn something, we accumulate new material in our memory. But what is our memory? In order to understand this, we must learn to regard each centre as a separate and independent machine, consisting of a sensitive matter similar to the *mass of phonographic rolls*. All that happens to us, all that we see, all that we hear, all that we feel, all that we learn is registered on these rolls. It means that all external and internal events leave

certain “impressions” on the rolls. “Impressions” is a very good word because it actually is an impression or an imprint. An impression can be deep, or it can be very slight, or it can be simply a glancing impression that disappears very quickly and leaves no trace after it. But whether deep or slight they are impressions. And these impressions on rolls are all that we have, all our possessions. Everything that we know, everything that we have learned, everything that we have experienced is all there on our rolls. Exactly in the same way all our thought processes, calculations, speculations consist only of comparing the inscriptions on rolls, reading them again and again, trying to understand them by putting them together, and so on. We can think of nothing new, nothing that is not on our rolls. We can neither say nor do anything that does not correspond to some inscription on the rolls. We cannot invent a new thought in the same way as we cannot invent a new animal, because all our ideas of animals are created by our observations of existing animals.

Inscriptions or impressions on rolls are connected by associations. Associations connect impressions either received simultaneously or in some way similar to one another.

In my first lecture I said that memory depends on consciousness and that we actually remember only the moments when we had flashes of consciousness. It is quite clear that different simultaneous impressions connected together will remain longer in memory than unconnected impressions. In the flash of self-consciousness, or even near it, all impressions of the moment are connected and remain connected in the memory. The same refers to impressions connected by their inner similarity. If one is more conscious in the moment of receiving impressions, one connects more definitely the new impressions with similar old impressions and they remain connected in memory. On the other hand if one receives impressions in a state of identification, one simply does not notice them and their traces disappear before they can be appreciated or associated. In the state of identification one does not see and one does not hear. One is wholly in one’s grievance, or in one’s desire, or in one’s imagination. One cannot separate oneself from things or feelings or memories and one is shut off from all the world around.

The above is the text of the third lecture of six printed in the book *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution* by P. D. Ouspensky.