

THE DRAMATIC UNIVERSE

COMMENTARY BY: A.G.E. BLAKE

Undated

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The publication of The Dramatic Universe (Vol. I, 1956; Vol. II, 1961; Vol. III, 1966; and Vol. IV, 1966) was one of the major intellectual events of this century and, in keeping with all major events, passed almost unnoticed by the world at large. There were people interested in personal transformation who found the language too difficult and the writing too condensed. There were others who had the necessary intellectual equipment but were locked in one or other specialist viewpoint that prevented access to the vision that was put in front of them. Bennett had set himself to give a framework for understanding the whole of human experience. He drew heavily on the writings of Gurdjieff and even considered himself as one "picking up crumbs from the ideas table" of his teacher. In fact, Bennett faithfully followed Gurdjieff's dictum, "take the wisdom of the East and the knowledge of the West and search". Nothing was to be left out. No compromise was to be made. Everything in human experience was to be accounted for, its significance revealed and not explained away. Science, art, philosophy, religion, history, linguistics, politics, sociology and all the other disciplines and elements of human culture were to be understood in a new way that designated none of them but showed their mutual enhancement in a total vision.

Of course, there was a starting point: that man is made for self-transformation and that this transformation is not predetermined but hazardous. If this is how it is for man, then nothing less can be accepted than that the whole world is hazardous and existence itself is capable of transformation.

Fully accepting the revelations of natural science on the determinate and necessarily conditioned nature of existence and at the same time, fully accepting the revelations of art as to the reality of unconditioned values, of religion of the reality of freedom and of history of the reality of progress, Bennett evolved a framework of thought which enables one to grasp that all these revelations make sense together only in a Dramatic Universe. The drama is primary. Questions of mechanism and purpose -which still dominate philosophical discourse - are secondary and miss the essential element.

The problem of arriving at a total view has always been that in order to express it one has to use a language that derives from just one aspect of the whole. One person will write scientifically, another religiously, another aesthetically and so on. It would seem to be impossible to escape

The Dramatic Universe

from the bias inherent in using terms with recognizable meaning. Bennett's solution was astonishing, though only a very few have grasped the nature of the achievement. He took as the language of his framework the concrete significance of number. Number is abstract, but its significance is concrete. In other words, one can start with a bare form and progress towards concrete experience in an ever-deepening manner. Through the numbers we can come to understand experience, whatever the content of the experience might be. It is difficult to see from this bare summary that this is quite the opposite of the usual practice of making a Procrustean bed on which one stretches the short and chops the long to make them fit - in other words arranges the universe to fit one's mental constructs.

There is no doubt that Bennett's extensive research into the law of three that Ouspensky heard from Gurdjieff played a major part in enabling him to see into the very structure of understanding. He saw that it could not make sense to have a three-fold principle, (even together with the seven-fold principle of the octave), as the only forms of realization. Taking up Gurdjieff's hints on the significance of ancient number symbolism, Bennett set himself to look at the concrete significance of number one can almost say empirically. He did study traditional sources but always felt that what had come down to us was so diluted and so out of touch with the discoveries of the last few hundred years that it was stultifying to base one's thinking upon them.

In Volume I the concrete significance of number followed Ouspensky's dictum "think in new categories." Ouspensky had grasped the slavery of human thinking to dyadic forms, either or, true and false, positive and negative and so on and that with the three-fold category, man's understanding went beyond logic. Bennett extended the whole range to twelve categories, each revealing a definite aspect and understanding of experience. This was applied to the data of the natural sciences to give a classificatory scheme of the world of fact.

In Volume II the categories had evolved into specific forms of understanding, the multi-term systems sets of independent but mutually relevant terms, which were more than classes which compared only to the abstract nature of number. It was in this volume that he elaborated in an extraordinary way Gurdjieff's law of three in several chapters on will. He also investigated the systematics of being by means of the tetrad.

In Volume III the terms Function, Being and Will had already appeared and were to play a major part in the succeeding volumes. Function, Being and Will contribute what can be called the major Arcana of The Dramatic Universe, taking the symbolism inherent in playing cards and the Tarot in particular. The multi systems, following the analogy, are then the structures which are exemplified in each of the suits; and the suits correspond to the various domains of experience such as fact, value, society, man and so on. Needless to say, the structure of The Dramatic Universe is far more complex and subtle than that which is found in the playing card symbolism.

The Dramatic Universe

Function corresponds to the knowable element of experience which shows us the world as a process which can be reduced to the working of mechanisms and apparatuses. Being corresponds to the experience of consciousness and to what things are, not what they do or how they appear. Will corresponds to that which can neither be known nor "conscious," but only understood. Will shows us the how and why of the world, not what is going on, nor what it is; rather, what it is for.

Function, resting on the world as interaction, has no inherent principle of its own and can therefore be understood in many different ways according to the categories. Will, however is through and through relatedness and must contain the principle of three foldness. This is not at first obvious, until one reflects that will as an urge by itself can never "do" anything, and that there must be a resistance for something to happen. This resistance itself must have a will character. One can then grasp that no condition of affirmation - urge and denial - resistance can in and by itself lead to anything without mediation. This is the third force of reconciliation which allows for independence from purpose and mechanism, urge and resistance. In the domain of Being, the essential characteristic is subsistence: Being is. This is more than relatedness or dynamism and corresponds to four-foldness. Again, this is not immediately obvious, until one grasps how it is that a four-fold structure allows for the establishment of a definite order that can be maintained while allowing for internal differentiation. An anthropomorphic way of putting this is that it allows consciousness, which gives being access to itself without dissolving its own structure (consciousness is far more puzzling than it at first seems).

The systematics of will constitutes in itself an overwhelming achievement and results in a remarkable account of the seven worlds of man (and every free intelligence) derived entirely from the law of three and the division between existence and essence. The latter distinction is the very theme of the second volume. Essence does not exist but can be realized in existence. Existence is conditioned but can be spiritualized by essence. The dyad essence-existence that appears in the early chapters is resolved in the final chapter of the volume where Bennett makes another major contribution to human thought in the scheme of essence-classes. This scheme was derived from a diagram Gurdjieff showed Ouspensky (diagram of anything living described in *In Search of the Miraculous*), and constitutes an extraordinary teaching on universal ecology. There, more than anywhere else is revealed the meaning of Gurdjieff's "reciprocal maintenance." In one scheme, the whole range of reciprocal feeding from heat to God is made comprehensible. This scheme is undoubtedly the key to understanding what Gurdjieff was expressing throughout *All and Everything* and can enable one to grasp the requirements of the New Epoch we are entering.

In Volume II, there is also a study of synchronicity or, as Bennett called it, Para aesthetic phenomena. This laid the foundations for a new understanding of non-causal phenomena and clearly showed how contemporary pseudo-scientific studies in this region are bound to miss the point. These phenomena are closely related to one of Bennett's chief concerns, the development of finer perceptions, and in particular perceptions of the spirit world that are now needed to be reawakened in people.

The Dramatic Universe

The framework of this study of synchronicity was derived from the six-dimensional scheme presented in the first volume. This scheme is another master idea of The Dramatic Universe and rests primarily on the extraordinary notion that there are three kinds of time, each corresponding to one of the three basic elements Function, Being and Will. The 'major arena' is only partially expressed in existence, but the dimensions apply wholly to existence. In correspondence with Function is successive time, the time of actualization; with Being is eternity, the timeless time of non-observable potential and with Will is hyparxis, the time of ableness-to-be, through which uncertainty opens up the opportunity of freedom within existence. According to Bennett himself, only one man, David Bohn of Birbeck College, a man of remarkable creative power and intelligence who pioneered the theoretical side of plasma physics, grasped the meaning of hyparxis purely by reading The Dramatic Universe. In correspondence, Bohn showed how the three-fold scheme of time applied in quantum mechanics.

By this scheme of time Bennett had made it possible to account for the irreducible nature of potential energy in physics and for the exercise of free choice. He showed that 'timeless experience' had a foundation as natural as successive experience and went far beyond Ouspensky in the idea of the recurrence through which a given whole realizes itself. As with many of the fundamental ideas, hyparxis is so simple that people find it difficult to grasp.

The new understanding of time found an extraordinary sequence in Volume IV which presents the central drama of existence as "The War with Time." Clearly drawn from Gurdjieff's idea of the workings of a living intelligence in front of the "merciless heropass" or Time this drama focuses on the structure of the present moment. Here one can find the most extraordinary accounts of human experience which show how mind, soul and historical events can be understood in the same realization. Human mechanicalness, creativity, transformation, revelation, the workings of providence and so on emerge naturally from our understanding of the present moment. But it is not only human existence that is given a new meaning, the worlds of material objects, living beings and spiritual agencies are an integral part of the whole scheme. The last chapters move forward into the history of the Earth and give an account of evolution and human history that brings into play all the elements that have been elaborated in the previous volumes and chapters.

Mention must be made of the content of the third volume, which corresponds to the various 'suits' of the pack of ideas. The progress made by that time in grasping the nature of multi-term systems is described in the first chapter, Systematics. This is Bennett's understanding of the world as an organized complexity. The systematics is then applied to the domain of values, to man himself, to human life and to human societies. It is in these domains that new ideas arise. Bennett was never satisfied with the chapter he wrote on man, "Anthropology." He saw that even with the systematics, the essential wholeness, unknowableness and complexity of man was not expressed. Something of this kind was already latent in his account of will, for will can combine the characteristics of relatedness and individuation, uniqueness. The scheme of individuality of Volume II is as important as the systematics of the law of three. Then, again, in the chapter on

The Dramatic Universe

human societies he introduced the notion of forms going beyond the systems, which he there called structures and symbioses.

What began to emerge, in the final volume on History, was that one had to take very sincerely the connections of the action that originates from the spiritual, formless or unconditioned world. In history, Bennett concluded, we come to the threshold of this action in the evidence for higher intelligence working in the world, first in evolution, then in guidance of man through different epochs of mind. This theme was given increasing weight and eventually gave rise to his last book, *The Masters of Wisdom* which was an attempt to describe a particular event of demiurgic nature.

The point is that the demiurgic action or action of higher intelligence cannot be understood in terms of one and many, separate from man or as part of man. All usual distinctions have to be abandoned. The practical consequences of this in human life became Bennett's main concern in his final years and is not directly relevant here. What must be added to the drama of his writings however, is that there emerged a most wonderful account of Love. Love, which he saw as the essence of eternity, he regarded as beyond the higher intelligence. Naturally enough, then, the central event in his account of history is the incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior. In spite of himself, Bennett attempted to make sense of the theological disputes and contradictions and of the different views embodied in the different major religions. What inspired him from the beginning was the realization that God was real but did not exist and was not anything. God is will and is primarily to be understood as the Reconciling Will.

Thus, on a deeper level *The Dramatic Universe* is an attempt to understand Reconciliation. It was given to Bennett to be shown the real meaning of events in the life of Christ which he gave to the world in *The Masters of Wisdom*, fulfilling Gurdjieff's Prophecy that he would "give a conference on the meaning of the Last Supper that will help many people". He also saw that in our time it may well be that people abandon the notion of God as a powerful being and begin to understand that the real spirituality is to be found in the sacredness of life and in the special unity of a community that is expressed in the phrase "communion of saints".

Never satisfied with what he had accomplished, Bennett continued to "take the wisdom of the East and the knowledge of the West and search". After *The Dramatic Universe* was written, he found new significance in the notion of universal hazard and from this eventually came to see the concrete significance of the ancient doctrine of worlds. Again, his concern was practical. He saw as his task to tell people about the reality of other worlds and to help them learn how to enter them. This was the culmination of an understanding of understanding, the realization of the essential meaning of Gurdjieff's dictum "only a Real Man can do".

New Publication

The Dramatic Universe

The Four Volumes of The Dramatic Universe constitute idea resources of considerable value. They are being republished in the firm conviction that increasingly with time, there will be people willing and able to struggle with the material and help themselves and others understand the world in its "concrete significance". At the same time, there will be published a series of studies on particular themes taken from the book. The first three are being prepared from various talks that Mr. Bennett gave in the years after its publication.

These are:

- 1) Hazard
- 2) The Conditions of Existence
- 3) The Creation

There exists material on other important themes such as life, time and the several worlds of man. These will be published according to what emerges as the need of the future.