

Twenty-one
Levels of
Self-
Deception

by
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Vocatus atque, non vocatus deus arderit.

(‘Summoned or not, a god will be present.’ Written on the lintel of the house of Carl Jung)

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Introduction

'The world being illusive, one must be deluded in some way if one is to triumph in it.'

W.B. Yeats

Each chapter of this work is presented as a delusion. As Chapter 1 indicates, the fundamental delusion is to think that we can say anything at all about the nature of reality. Reality is an experience beyond words or logical analysis. Each chapter then ends with a reminder that we are dealing with a delusion – we have merely chopped up reality and filtered it through a cultural and philosophical context and a language heavily weighted to certain pre-conceived and repressed views and then spat it out via a white male middle-class author. The chances of getting anywhere near truth are therefore negligible! Reading however is an interruption to the flow of life and sometimes a word or phrase can resonate with an individual and provide some small help. That is the hope and intention here. There are also 'mustard seed moments', when the mind is open to new truth and some small word or thought arrives just at that time.

If truth is unknowable or inexpressible, then at least there is truth within a particular context – so far as we are able to realise this. I draw back from describing this as relative truth. The way I describe it is to recognise that when we are discussing a particular matter we do this within a context or boundary whether this is recognised or not. Some boundaries are constructions that we make for ourselves. Some boundaries are forced upon us. Some boundaries are present but are not

acknowledged or are misunderstood or denied. To help emphasise this contingency to all our discussions, each chapter also ends with a description of the boundaries within which the particular topic has been discussed and what the recognition of the boundary might imply. Only in the broadest context of Chapter 1, All is One, is there no boundary by definition. All other discussions are made therefore in opposition (but not in conflict) to this stance.

In like manner, some chapters speak of 'economies' and I use this word to define a bounded set of transactions, such as the 'economy of grace'. Where such terms are employed it is again to try to sharpen our understanding of what is at stake when we use language and make assumptions unconsciously. Looking at the world in terms of distinct economies often serves as a useful tool to highlight points of contention or agreement that otherwise may be overlooked.

I make the distinction between Eros and Agapé but it is a difficult one. Eros should be spoken of mainly in positive terms, but the 'ascendant' aspect of Eros – always seeking higher and further goals – has to a large extent eclipsed the descendant aspect. I have identified this ascendancy primarily with 'spirit'. I do not use the word to imply any pre-existing entity who inhabits us, or some aspect of ourselves that might survive bodily death. Rather it is to try to emphasise the rarefied, aspirational aspect that is so much part of western religion, science and culture. Likewise, I use the word 'soul' to designate all that is 'descendant' in human nature and not in any sense to suggest that the soul can have a separate existence. 'Descendant' is used by way of contrast to

'ascendant'. However, the notion of going 'down' and embracing the Earth and other people is perhaps somewhat difficult. In a way we are already 'down' – or more properly we are in the midst, surrounded, enfolded, embraced and cherished by nature. However, as we so often assume the hierarchical role of ascendancy, then we need some going down just to bring us back to where we really are. We need to acknowledge our true relation with nature and culture. In contrast to Eros, Agapé is probably closer to the descendant aspect of life, and this will be a major theme of the work.

I want to celebrate life – my body, my place in nature, my relationship with other people and with plants and animals. This is the erotic nature of life seeking expression. But various things seem to prevent me from fully realising this goal. How can this be resolved? Added to this, I see the suffering of others. I want to help meet their needs. Again though, this desire is frustrated. My own search for happiness and the suffering of others are difficult problems to relieve. What can be done to remedy this? In essence, these two questions are the premise of the work. Personal happiness – explored best perhaps in psychoanalysis – and happiness for the many, the Marxist ideology. Desire and need.

Psychoanalysis literally means 'letting the butterfly go free.' And Freud spoke of the 'will to pleasure'. Meanwhile the frustration of this quest is succinctly observed here:-

'To adapt to this world, the child abdicates its ecstasy.'

R.D. Laing – 'The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise'

Recovering ecstasy then is the first quest of this work.

As for the second issue – satisfying the needs of others – we have to face the fact that the political solution has not been ultimately realisable and address our concerns accordingly.

Our culture tends to see questions as either/or questions. It tries to reduce everything in the world to such black and white choices. The alternative to this dualistic, polemical approach is a 'dialectic' – a discussion that looks at both/and. I hope that what follows will be such a dialectic. Always, the 'delusions' we discuss are not to be abandoned wholesale. Of particular note is how we might 'bring home' each subject to real life and how it might inform us of our response to ourselves, others and to the world.

Finally, of course, I am not pretending to 'solve' the delusions discussed here. They are probably un-solvable. If you are looking for answers then stop reading now! If however, you are content with 'going nowhere in a timeless moment' then read on!

Part 1 – Eros



1. All is One

*'Before the world was
And the sky was filled with stars...
There was a strange unfathomable Body.
This being, this Body is silent
And beyond substance and sensing.
It stretches beyond everything spanning the
empyrean.
It has always been here and it always will be.
Everything comes from it, and then it is the Mother
of Everything.
I do not know its name. So I call it TAO.'*

In the classic Seventies book 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance', Robert Pirsig says that a lot can be learnt from where people choose to make the first 'split' in the world. Religion for instance might take the split to be between light and darkness, or perhaps heaven and Earth. In philosophy and in science the most obvious split is between 'subjects' and 'objects'.

Our increasingly science-based, technology-driven, industrialised culture recognises only objects in its world view and discounts the reality of subjective experience. Hence, morals and aesthetics, both considered subjective, are given less and less

prominence. There is no '*quality*' recognised as real, only '*quantity*'. Hence, the '*Disqualified Universe*' (Max Weber). In '*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*' Pirsig essentially sets out a metaphysics of quality. The book is subtitled '*An Enquiry into Values*' - it puts quality in the place of truth as the ultimate reality. We will return to this idea in a later chapter.

David Bohm, in his book '*Wholeness and the Implicate Order*' looks at the sentence, '*It is raining*'. What - he asks - is the '*it*' that is doing the raining? Why do we not just say:- '*Rain is going on*'? Clearly, language has created a subject and an object, even where there is not strictly speaking the need to make such a distinction. The point is to illustrate how deeply embedded in our culture and thinking such splits in the world really are. Even language is framed to assume such divisions in the world, so we often adopt them unconsciously and simply as a part of growing up and learning our mother tongue.

Ourselves and others, theism and atheism, future and past - all of these are further splits embedded in our culture. So too is the manner in which words are regarded either as simple signifiers or set within a context. Transcendence and imminence is a further polarity that has a particular bearing on the development of the argument within this work. We will consider each of these dualities below. The split between something and nothing will form the basis of Chapter 2, whilst the noumenon phenomenon division of reality is the subject of Chapter 3. I have of course introduced deliberately two other major splits - that between Eros and Agapé and that between ascendancy and descendancy. The manner in

which these terms are employed in this work is discussed in the Introduction. The reader is reminded that I do not regard any of these splits as real. I am employing them with the deliberate intent of drawing out an understanding of the issues raised within the text. I am also looking to challenge those splits which explicitly or implicitly are embedded in our culture and to see how this has often been a cause of harm.

To some extent, we have been forced into these kinds of dualisms simply in order to survive in the world. We make a distinction first of all about ourselves as subjects, distinct from the world around us. In other words, we 'objectify' the world, including, to some extent, other people. Science merely formalises this notion of the 'detached observer', which is implicit in so much of our language and thinking – whilst philosophy describes this as 'the view from nowhere' (Thomas Nagel). It is a remarkably successful strategy for surviving in the world, but we have come to believe of course that this split is real – that consciousness and matter really are separate substances. Much of western philosophy has been about trying to reconcile the two apparently distinct substances and has tied itself in knots in the process. This of course is the so-called 'mind body problem' – *res cogita, res extensa* – most usually associated with Descartes.

The subject object split, as was said, leads us into 'objectifying' others - treating them to an extent as commodities rather than as individual persons. We will be examining this in more detail throughout the work. Also, there has been an assumption that considering ourselves as subjects is just a simple notion. Psychoanalysis has shown however that

becoming a subject is actually a very fraught process, involving by definition, the suppression of desire. (The denial of Eros – hence very pertinent to our discussion.) It is also a process that as currently described, is deeply related to death and is heavily misogynistic, both in its conception and in its consequences. Again, this will be considered more in later chapters.

In the theism atheism duality, the question:- 'Is there a God?' is too simplistic. The kind of separate, fully transcendent being that is normally implied by the question can be seen as just another way in which we choose to split reality. The distinction then between 'God' and 'not God' and so between 'believer' and 'unbeliever' is arbitrary. In fact, the way this polarity is contested simply reinforces the underlying assumptions on which both theism and atheism are built. The God who is rejected by atheists is the same God who is embraced (or feared) by believers. The understanding of what or who 'God' might be is never really contested. We may contrast this with the kind of Pantheism advocated by Spinoza, in which God and nature are seen as twin aspects of a single underlying reality. Alternative ways of viewing all dualities are clearly possible, and the theism atheism duality illustrates this particularly well because the two 'sides' of the duality are so fiercely contested.

Past, present and future are likewise just convenient ways of carving up reality. In a sense, time does not exist. We divide ourselves up by thinking about what we would like to be in the future, or things that we would like to achieve. Again, whilst this is helpful in terms of making plans, it is actually a false split. There is no future

me, or past me. You (and I) are all that we ever will be just in this moment. So, regretting the past or worrying over the future are pointless abstractions. Planning for the future in a reasonable manner however is to make proper use of this artificial split in the world.

There is also a split in the world with any kind of description - in fact any word causes such a split. As soon as we use a word to describe something, we automatically assign all other things as being something else. Hence, calling something a table immediately creates a split between things that belong to the description as tables and things that don't. However, this is no more than just a convenient way to carve up the world. Many things could serve as 'tables' for instance, so the description is not really an accurate one - it is just a useful designation that fits our purposes. In fact it is a little more difficult than this. To describe something as a 'table' is to use a word as a simple signifier and it might be assumed that all words, if used clearly enough and with correct construction of sentences, would act in the same way (much in the manner of Bertrand Russell attempting to formulate logic by means of language). Context however creates a worldview in which individual words sit. As such, the meaning of individual words is at least partly dependant on context and an individual's familiarity or otherwise with that context. A worldview - perhaps all world views - are therefore 'constructed'. In this work, the context of our discussion is given by defining boundaries and 'economies'.

In a similar vein, we distinguish between 'transcendent' ideals such as truth, goodness and beauty and their representations (or immanence)

in the world. Values then come to be seen as having some kind of ghostly existence of their own – even sometimes for people who have no religious belief. The Platonic forms – perhaps the most familiar example of transcendent ideals – are now widely rejected, but covertly still applied. Consider for instance the writings of physicists about mathematical truths. Scientism thus has an insidious grip – science claims to speak from a position of neutrality, but in fact has underlying assumptions that go unchallenged. There is for instance an underlying desire in science (and western culture generally) that is denied – perhaps we could call it power over nature. This in turn is derived from the culture's repressed obsession with death that expresses itself as 'power over' and 'power under' dynamics (sodomasochism). Western politics has followed suit. Religion, at least in the west, actually reinforces this approach rather than contesting it. There is a reaching for an objective 'hook' on which to hang subjective notions of spirituality. Perhaps we want to believe in some kind of real 'transcendence', something more than just transcendence of value, as spoken of above. In doing so, we may fail to see that this is just one more way of conveniently carving up reality. Jean Paul Sartre describes people like this as 'the serious' – that is, they take seriously the reality of transcendent values. A constant theme of this work is the tendency to try to make so many things transcendent. We will return to this several times as the argument progresses and seek to rediscover the immanence of value that has been marginalised or overlooked.

There is a quality of discernment that we can bring to questions and situations that respects all of the notions mentioned above. Perhaps the best way to

describe it is to contrast dualist or polemic with dialectic. Or, to put it more simply – both /and rather than either/or. A restriction of knowledge is recognised and the two oppositions are weighed against one another. The result is not necessarily a mixture of both sides, nor necessarily a 'third way', as both these options suggest some kind of final outcome. The discernment is instead a 'conversation' between the various options - and this conversation may continue indefinitely.

We turn now however to consider the essential oneness of reality. Of course, even saying that ultimate reality is one thing falls foul of the same problems described above. Jonathan Culler writes about the problem of describing reality in these terms as follows:-

'We are on dangerous ground even with such "innocent" phrases as "All is One". The Universe is not a whole, nor a collection of parts, but a "holarchy". An ever-receding domain of wholes within parts within wholes. There is no boundary either "upwards" (to larger groupings of parts) or "downwards" (to increasing fine divisions of wholes).

'Total context (final Wholeness) is unmasterable, both in principle and in practice. *Meaning is context bound, but context is boundless*'

Ken Wilber, in commenting on this passage, says this:-

'The mind's omega point, for each theorist, is the context that they believe cannot be outcontexted, the context beyond which growth or expansion does not or should not proceed...

'And a final Omega Point? That would imply a final Whole, and there is no such holon anywhere in manifest existence. But perhaps we can interpret it differently. Who knows, perhaps Telos, perhaps Eros, moves the entire Kosmos, and God may indeed be an all-embracing chaotic Attractor, acting...throughout the world by gentle persuasion toward love.'

Ken Wilber - 'Sex, Ecology, Spirituality'

Again, our boundaries and economies are the means deployed in this work of setting contexts and therefore recognising parochial meaning.

Such discussions therefore often use the term 'nondual', meaning simply, 'not two'. This is really the closest that we can come in words to describing the indescribable. (Indeed, Wilber is one of the chief contemporary proponents of nonduality.)

Nonduality might seem at first a subject rather distant from our concerns of the self's search for satisfaction of desire and meeting the needs of others. However, Jerry Katz, in his book 'Essential Writings on Nonduality', speaks about desire and the self being entwined:-

'Our heart's desire and who, what and where we are, are not separate.

'Our pursuit for truth is for the full recognition of non-separation, not-two-ness, or nonduality. The value of this quality of desire is confirmed in the first verse of the scripture from Hindu tradition known as the Avadhuta Ghita, or Song of the Free:

"Through the grace of God alone, the desire for nonduality arises in wise people to save them from fear."

'The need for knowing nonduality, or non-separation from truth, is grace, a profound gift arising from truth. The desire, the Avadhuta Ghita says, arises in wise people. We could say the hunger for nonduality is wisdom. Wisdom is allowing the desire for nonduality to unfold. That is the way to be saved from fear.'

Jerry Katz – 'Essential Writings on Nonduality'

Katz goes on to explain the nature of the fear that nonduality saves us from. One fear is simply our own non-existence in death, the other fear is that we may be spending our lives desiring the wrong things. We will return to these ideas later in the work.

Desire is usually seen as an endless process of searching. It was Hegel who suggested that this process could only be brought to a satisfactory conclusion in belief. The nature of western religion, philosophy and science in particular have frustrated this aim by making 'God' into an object, creating an image of a transcendent fulfilled (that is, desire-satisfying) life beyond this one and reinforcing rather than solving the desire that is manifest in all of us. The satisfaction of desire by means of transcendent belief is a notion that needs to be challenged, and this will occupy us in later chapters.

There is no striving for nonduality – it is just recognised or it is not. Nonduality is just ordinary life; it's not Enlightenment, or Nirvana or Samadhi necessarily, although of course it contains all of

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