

The Two Streams of Reality, and Politics

As psychotherapy down the decades has emphasized, we find growth, satisfaction and authentic relationship, indeed sanity itself, through attending to what is real. The real is always, “what is”, in the “here and now”. Often, we get lost in fantasy, in wanting the world to be different from the way it is, in projecting our non-acceptance onto ourselves or others. Most of us, it seems to me, are to some extent lost in our own stories about ourselves and the world. Stories which have their roots in our insecurity, which flows from our trauma and the pain, hurt, fear, distress, defeatedness, or whatever it was that was too much to bear, that sits unresolved and as yet un-faced in the depths of our hearts.

It is also, I think, important to understand that the way we experience “Reality” is through two ‘streams’, one is the world of the Relative and the other is the world of the Absolute. The world of the “Relative” is the world of our ego, it is the world of Plato’s cave, the world where every stick has a good and bad end, a world of attachment and avoidance, of hope and defeatedness. It is a world of polarities and all points between. The “Absolute” is the world of “Goodness, Beauty and Truth”, a world without opposites, where, within the essence of “what is”, in the depth of “here and now”, we have the possibility of embodying with our minds the Absolute as “Consciousness” itself with a profound awareness of “Awareness”, our hearts can open to “Love” and our bodies to Presence, “Energy” and sensation.

If we are to fulfill our potential, we need to find a way to encompass both worlds so that the Relative is increasingly informed by, and held within the Consciousness, Love and Energy of the Absolute. When not held in this way these two worlds seem paradoxical to each other, but when the Absolute embraces and holds the Relative, it allows it to flow like the Tao, unfolding as it can, according to the slowly unfolding laws of evolution.

It seems however that whilst our evolution is slow, it is accelerating. Changes in societies consciousness that took millennia, then hundreds of years, are now taking decades. China is an incredible example, but I accept that globally it could all also go into reverse very quickly given sufficient trauma, as we’ve seen in Syria. Maybe over optimistically, I do see the recent rise of the Right as just another temporary backwards step in the dance of our evolution, which is slowly taking us from societies based on power and violence (ego) towards ones based on Consciousness and Love.

Much change can take place through repairing our ego, and this is very important. But, change that enables us to live closer to the Absolute, to those qualities of being that only exist through connecting more deeply with the “here and now”, needs to come from opening and connecting to this other level of life. This is about living with more Consciousness, more Love, more embodied Energy. We each need the support that comes from these connections to help us face our insecurities. We also need an increasing appreciation of the Absolute on the societal level. We need to understand that our personal and societal development come from embodying and integrating this Absolute stream of life that has ultimate meaning. That it is these connections that facilitates our unfolding in line with our deepest desires, both personally in liberating us from our ego towards Love and Consciousness, as well the transformation of our society and its institutions towards increasingly facilitating ever higher/deeper levels of Being.

Where politics is driven by dogma and beliefs that are based on compensatory ego needs, the results are always negative, full of the results of the law of unintended consequences. The best politics emerges out of the practical and pragmatic, but this needs to be, as above, held within the frame of the Absolute as much as possible. As the cognitive scientist George Lakoff (The Political Mind 2009)

has argued, human nature is fundamentally empathic and caring, delightfully confirming the essential “Goodness” that I see in people every day. It has been clear to me for a long time that all our negativity and destructiveness comes from trauma and the insecurity it creates.

So, our politics needs to reflect our fundamental values, which are obviously not just about economic growth and wealth creation. These values revolve around knowing that we are developmental creatures who, deep down, want to live increasingly in the “here and now” with increasing fluidity, satisfaction, spontaneity, freedom, understanding and choice. Our potential here is to be increasingly aware of ourselves, our consciousness, aware of our consciousness, our hearts increasingly open to ourselves and others, together with being supported by our physical presence consciously embodying our breath, energy and sensation.

The “how” of this, both personally and politically, is about our need for both support and challenge in order to travel along this developmental path. The absence, or surplus, of either creates problems. We all need support, empathy, understanding, love, all of which have their roots in the Absolute dimension of life. We also need to face the often difficult realities about ourselves and the world, which need our choice, our discrimination, assessment and discernment. We need to take responsibility for what we think, for what we feel, for our bodies, as well as our environment. These aspects come from the Relative dimension of life. Apart from “choice” that is, which is the extraordinary and amazing final piece that was needed for the universes’ whole thirteen billion year old plan to work.

The Universe created ever more complex matter, then ever more complex life, then ever more complex consciousness so that eventually Consciousness could realize its creation of Consciousness from matter. As I understand it, choice emerged from the volume of consciousness that evolved in us and it is essential to the process of our actualizing “self-consciousness”, the crucial last step in the creation of Consciousness and the fulfillment of the Universes’ purpose, to embody itself. Not surprising then that choice is so difficult, it is the last vital process in God realising itself.

The “Absolute” has a difficult reputation, God had to “die” for us to get past “magical” and “mythic/religious” stages of consciousness (Wilber 2017), the future is not about going backwards into those stages, into some pre-rational belief dominated consciousness. That is the last thing we need. This is all about understanding and developing our experience of the truth that lies at the heart of all the great religions, not from a position of belief, but from verifiable objective experience. We need modernism’s rationality as well as postmodernism’s understanding of the relativity of everything. It is only by having gone through and integrated these stages that we can again approach “God” / “The Absolute” from this more sophisticated and holistic standpoint.

The more I understand, the clearer it becomes to me, that our development, with its expansion of our minds, opening our hearts and embodying our energy and breath, is towards our potential to live at an extra-ordinary level of “being”. It is towards embodying the “Absolute”, however we define it. How many of us, get to what stage on this journey, is obviously totally unknown? But the point is that it is this journey that brings meaning, satisfaction, joy, etc., to our lives. So, let’s acknowledge it and celebrate it and hold it as our aim, both personally as well as politically.

There is of course this profound paradox of living with an “aim” to live more in the “here and now”. But this is just another aspect of the fact that we live these “two streams”, the “Relative” and the “Absolute”. We develop over time, to being able to embody the timeless.

To return to the political and Lakoff's ideas, which are what prompted this piece, he looks at how our political views are generated by largely unconscious prejudices, what he calls "frames". He argues that the conservative "frames" are generated by the obedience to authority and that the "progressive" frames are much more about the inherent human quality of empathy. I agree with much of what he says, and he opens the door to understanding politics in new and exciting way. However, I think that the fundamentals are not quite as he understands them.

The split in our nature comes from the way that our reality has these two streams of the "Relative" and the "Absolute". On the one hand there is support, love, empathy, understanding, the roots of which are in the "Absolute" dimension of life, here we are not separate, our consciousness, love and energy are all profoundly connected to the universe, our deepest nature is that we are part of "God". On the other side is our "Relative" reality, and it is here that choice and responsibility are paramount.

So, on the one hand we have what is "given", and on the other hand we have choice, to accept it or not. As I always say, change, development, healing, growth, they all require both support and challenge. We cannot become aware of any aspect of ourselves without first at some level taking responsibility for it, and we cannot take that self-responsibility without first becoming aware of it. The two processes need to work together for our development to progress. No amount of increased awareness can in the end help an addict change, there has to be choice and struggle, and we are all addicts in the sense that the vast majority of us live with some level of insecurity.

So, there is a truth in the Conservative's perspective. Its power lies in the truth that we need to develop our self-responsibility, and I do not think Lakoff quite grasped this. But the Left are, of course, also correct, "support" is absolutely necessary. This really is a case of both, not "either or". The trouble is though that we live in world that is conditioned by trauma of all sorts and on many levels. This means that we still need lots of strong boundaries because there are still many people who are deeply negative and destructive. The power of the refusal of self-responsibility flowing from trauma is enormous, and it can be very scary. To avoid facing our pain we will do almost anything at times in our desperate blind refusal, kill ourselves or others, cheat, lie, distort, rob, bully, abuse, abandon, hate, blame and so on. So, we are naturally frightened of our own and others negative power and it is this fear that the Right plug into so readily, with their call for more control, more boundaries, more authoritarianism.

But, as I see so often in my practice, the levels of trauma in society are very slowly healing, with generations struggling to be less damaging than their parents, who were less damaged than their grandparents. This process is confirmed by the general falling crime rates for example, just one of the ways that, as Steven Pinker and Hans Rosling point out, on the longer broader perspective the world is getting better, not worse. Maybe we can avoid catastrophic climate change, but we certainly need to counter our genetic as well as and "pathological" negative biases. When we are defeated and traumatized, we can be like an addict that wants all those around them to collude in their addiction. At the same time, I do not want to diminish the problems we have, which all seem to have their roots in Capitalism, be it climate change and all the various pernicious forms of inequality. Capitalism is "power over", it is a brutal power that dehumanizes, and this is true of our current political and civil structures as well with their roots in the raw power of military violence.

As we develop and heal both personally, and as a society, we need fewer boundaries. Our motivations become more connected to the "Absolute" level of life, connected to "Love" and "Consciousness" and "Energy/Sensation". So many "Conservative" values are defensive and selfish at heart and I think they are naturally losing their validity. To me the current upsurge in conservative authoritarianism, is like a

“death throw”, it is as though there is the intuition that this perspective is becoming increasingly untenable, but cannot be accepted, so there are increasingly desperate attempts to resist.

The main thrust of Lakoff’s book is that the Right have been very clever and effective in their use of intuitive “frames” to such an extent that they have in many cases dominated the political discourse. Often in the primitive form of binary choices as in “are you for us or against us?”, “are you for or against freedom?”, “you must take self-responsibility!”, or “you mustn’t be for those bad people / ideas”. So, the Left need to learn how to frame their arguments more consciously and skillfully, not as they have so often tried to do, in “old-fashioned Enlightenment logic terms”, but much more in “frames” that refer to, and appeal to our natural empathy and our deep desire for what is beyond our narrow egoic needs / desires.

This is of course our current “culture wars”, which whilst new in this current form, is nothing new in principle, after all civil wars have been happening for centuries. Hopefully this one will not need violence to resolve it! As Ken Wilber has been so good at articulating, there have always been conflicts between different “stages of consciousness” and the different world views that emerge from them.

I love what Lakoff has done in this book in terms of expanding our understanding of the unconscious forces behind our politics. What I am saying is that we need to go further and see that empathy is just one aspect of a fuller sense of meaning and value that comes from the “Absolute” dimension of our lives. Yes, we need both support and challenge, but what we most need is to see the whole more clearly, to see the deeper reality, of what our lives are all about, of what we exist for. We need this awareness to increase across society, as it surely will as more and more people understand how we are profoundly developmental beings, with the potential to “be”, that is often beyond our imagining.

References

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