

Some Clarity - Part 2 – Autumn 2022 – The personal and the transpersonal

In this piece I want, as promised in Part 1, to explore the transpersonal dimension of our nature. To look into the nature of our “spiritual” experience, our “ground of being”, and how we embody the Transpersonal on our journey through “stages” and “states”. The planned section reviewing the traps and pitfalls along the way, will have to wait for Part 3.

The first basic piece of clarity that I want to share is the understanding that we have both personal and transpersonal dimensions to our being, and that *the transpersonal is impersonal*. It is the part of us that is connected to what is beyond the personal, it is about our connection to the unknowable “Whole”, to “God”, to the “Ocean of Being”, and a lifetime of self-reflection and inquiry has convinced me that this Whole has three facets, Consciousness, Love, and the Energy of Life.

At what point in our in-utero development do we acquire personal traits? Who knows! But it seems clear that we are born with nascent personalities. It seems we are all born with some form of type, which is configured by our genes defining our particular body, our particular style of emotional and intellectual make up. These interact with our conditioning, both before and after birth, to create our “personality”. An important part of which is made up of our ego, which I understand as the defensive structures we create around our traumas and their maintenance. Genetics, conditioning, trauma, and ego, all together form our personality, the personal dimension of our being.

It is also surely clear from those moments of being present to the devastating openness of a new born baby, that the impersonal transpersonal is also there at birth. I also have a clear memory of walking down my road as a six-year-old, experiencing being conscious of my consciousness. The quality of this experience has not changed over the intervening six decades or so, it has just slowly become more accessible. The transpersonal permeates and interpenetrates our experience of the personal so that there is no clear dividing line between them. The ordinary can be experienced as extraordinary, and visa-versa. Yes, when we are identified with our ego, we are out of touch with the spiritual or transpersonal dimensions of our being, but this dimension is always still there in the background, always available at any moment within the depth of our “here and now”. We access it through either; our attention / presence / awareness of consciousness, or through the opening of our heart in some relational connection, i.e., Love, or through our body with its energy and breath. Preferably, through some combination of these three fundamental ways in which we relate to life.

At any moment, within any stage of our developmental journey we can be touched by, and grateful for, moments of connection to the transpersonal dimension of life. They can be through moments of washing up, meditation, prayer, reading, singing, yoga, dance, art, music, ceremonies, nature, intimacy, sport, etc., etc. These moments of a deeper than normal connection to the “here and now” provide glimpses of the freedom and meaning that is possible when we connect to this transpersonal level of Being. The experience of flow that comes from being skilled at anything, our experience of being inspired by art or ceremonies, of those “aha” moments of insight and self-understanding, of understanding anything, be it maths or our emotions, or of opening to this moment now, they are all experiences which are touched by and include something of the transpersonal. They are moments that provide us with glimpses of freedom and meaning. Of course our ego claims everything for itself, the performance, the flow, the goodness, the intelligence etc., but if we are ruthlessly honest, we can see that these are “gifts” from beyond our personal selves.

This opens up the need to address the idea of “our soul” or “our essential self” which has often been confusing to me, I have struggled to understand what “my soul” is? Is it my deepest feelings, my

most profound beingness? Was I born with it? Can I lose it? I have concluded that what we take for my soul is not actually mine, it is just, “Soul”, the one universal transpersonal ocean to which we are all connected. Our deepest longings and most profound delights are informed by our intuitive recognition of the profound meaning and freedom that comes from connecting and opening to the transpersonal Whole, with its Love, Consciousness and Energy. Yes, we naturally tend to want to make these experiences mine, and identify myself with it, but I think it is a trap to do so.

One thing I know is that we can bury our soul (our connection to the transpersonal) below mountains of negativity and self/other destructiveness, as I have done on a few occasions in my life. Scott Peck in his book *People of the Lie* even describes how there are those that get so lost that all that is left is a total commitment to the negative. We obviously need to be very wary of such people as they can become very powerful. But as history, and its great teachers, have repeatedly shown us, Love, Consciousness, and the Energy of Life, are in the end far more powerful. The force of “Goodness, Beauty and Truth” is always there in the background searching for ways to heal, to evolve and manifest.

According to many traditions and many explorations of human development (see Wilber 2006, 2017) there are three to five state of being possible for us (depending on the model you chose). Wilber usefully separates “states of being ” from “stages of development” and clarifies their difference. We can experience different “states of being” at any “developmental stage”, but “stages” necessarily follow a recognisable and established sequence.

However, I have found his portrayal of the lack of relationship between stages and states to be somewhat unsatisfactory, which is why I wrote a piece arguing that there must be a closer relationship between the two than his “map” was indicating.

(<https://jimrobinsoncouk.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/different-approach-to-states-in-wilbers-integral-map-v2.pdf>). My point in this article is that if we develop holistically - i.e., integrating our heart, head, and body - then, as we transition through the necessary sequential stages of our development we inevitably also transition through the different levels of states of being. The table below is an attempt to illustrate, very briefly, this integration of states and stages.

	Kohlberg	Wilber’s “states”		Wilber “Stages” within 3 “Tiers”	
1	Preconventional	Egocentric	Gross	Archaic	1 st Tier – From child to adulthood
2	Conventional	Ethnocentric		Magic	
3	Postconventional	Worldcentric	Egoic		
4	Post-postconventional		Tribal		
5	Non-Dual Consciousness, Love, Embodied Energy	Kosmocentric	Mythic		
			Modern		
			Postmodern	Integral 1	2 nd Tier
				Integral 2	
				Stages of letting the ego go	3 rd Tier
				Ego transcended	

During the 1st Tier stages of our development, especially the earlier ones as children, we have little understanding that our being is made up of both the personal and transpersonal dimensions. Our

ego tends to claim everything for itself. Even at “Mythic” where we might connect to religious experiences connected to Non-Duality or Love or Energy, we still take these personally. At Modern though we start to develop the capacity for objective inquiry, to search for truth, and in the Postmodern we start to be able to self-reflect and look at what is conditioning us to be the way we are, seeing how deeply our perspective is subjective. It seems to me that people usually arrive as young adults with the force of youth powering their strong ego / personality, and this remains fairly dominant until around the age of thirty. (It apparently takes that long for the brain to finish developing). These ten years or so can often see the transition from the “Modern” to the “Postmodern” stage.

I see this as the preparation for the first of the two major steps in our development, the transitions between the Tiers from 1 to 2, and 2 to 3. Whilst there are inevitably challenges in every stage transition - after all each time we have to let go of the known and familiar in order to integrate the new - the two transitions that occur between the Tiers are the most challenging I think.

In the Tier 2 Integral stages we start to really take responsibility for ourselves, for understanding more deeply what is motivating us to be the way we are, and see past our “conventional” preconceptions, assumptions, and prejudices. This is the start of becoming aware of all the unconscious, trauma-derived, ego-driven, defensive structures that cause us to live in automatic or compulsive modes of being. Here the work is to heal our trauma / ego and establish our authentic selves. This involves finding self-compassion and trust in ourselves. It is where we separate fully from our parents, family, tribal, religious / institutional / cultural enmeshments. This move into 2nd Tier, or the “post-postconventional” stage, is a big step into greater self-awareness and self-reflection where we start to take responsibility for ourselves at a new level. Here we develop an expanded “Kosmocentric” awareness of our place in the universe and what it means to be a human being,

During these Integral stages, as we heal and integrate ourselves, it becomes possible for the movement between the personal and transpersonal to flow more readily. We can slowly develop our ability to “plug into” different “states of being” that are more informed and connected to the transpersonal. We can also see more clearly the road ahead, that there are further developmental stages and states possible.

If we continue developing through knowing and healing and integrating ourselves, via the process described in my Part 1 of “Some Clarity” - i.e., that of Robert Keagan’s “making objects out of what are subject to”, then the ego / personality at some point becomes healed and completed enough for the process of being let go to start, in an organic and healthy way. When we know ourselves deeply enough we can start the second major transition, from Tier 2 into Tier 3. There are many people’s testimony (see batgap.com) that demonstrate that this transition is possible. This change is into living with a more consistent and permanent connection to the transpersonal dimension of being. This developmental stage transition crystallises our “state” change into a more permanent connection with the transpersonal, rather than what has up to now just been temporary experiences.

The transition into, and through, the 3rd Tier stages must be all about the subtle and paradoxical process of letting go of the personal with its habitual ego patterns, whilst increasingly embodying the transpersonal. This is deeply paradoxical process because who or what is letting go of who or what. Every step is inevitably taken as a personal gain which then has to immediately be let go of. In my experience our ego and its insecurity repeatedly inveigle themselves into claiming each developmental achievement. Every time this then has to be faced, owned, suffered and let go of, and each time we do this we slowly let the ego go and embody the transpersonal a little more. So that eventually, after struggling with this through the many stages of our development, it is possible,

according to reports about the great sages of history, that what is left is simply the radiation of “Goodness, Beauty and Truth”, with very little personality left.

The “refining of being” during this stage, is full of contradictions to our logical minds. How can the personal let go of itself? What/who is doing what to whom? It seems that there must be some sort of merging of the personal and transpersonal parts of the self in the latter stages of “Tier 3”. This paradoxical process must be about both taking ever deeper self-responsibility and at the same time opening to ever-greater surrender.

Both of these major steps between the Tiers can take decades to negotiate in my experience. The second step into the 3rd Tier, or the “Awake” state, is where I currently see myself, as I struggle to negotiate this transition. In “Part 1”, I referred to this as starting to live more closely connected to the experience of “being lived”, also as about being awake enough to use every problem that arises, to consciously heal what still needs healing. It is clear though from those who have achieved this transition into the “3rd Tier”, that there is still work to do, that the remaining habitual ego aspects of our being still need to be cleared as we slowly surrender more and more our personality. Any progress through the latter parts of Tier 2 and early stages of Tier 3 must obviously be accompanied by the switching of motivation, from the “push” of what we don’t want, to increasingly responding to the “pull” of the Transpersonal. The pull of its freedom, love, and energy. Who knows if there is any final stage to these transition? Maybe it is in death?

As Vedanta often expressed this, there is our personal self, with a small s, and then there is the Self with a capital S. The latter represents the extraordinary fact that the transpersonal dimension of ourselves is simply our connection to the unfathomable Whole. Being a human being is to have a part of us that is personal, separate, alone, and responsible for ourselves, and part of us that is not separate, that is simply a part of the Whole. Our ultimate potential it seems is through increasingly embodying Self with a capital S. Whatever the exact nature of the process, one thing is clear, we can only fully embody this after we have first healed and actualised our small self.

I think it will be useful to look briefly at what is involved for each part of us, that is our head, heart, and body, in opening its own door to the transpersonal dimension. It is crucial to understand that these “doors” are openings into the here and now, doors which enables us to meet our “what is” at a level that often exists below the surface of ourselves. Especially to meet, face and see what is really going on in our hearts.

But to start with the head, with awareness / consciousness. Here it is the movement into the here and now is through making our own consciousness “an object to myself”. It is about becoming aware that I am aware. It is possible for this to lead to a deep experience of Non-Duality, where we embody the truth that we are not separate from anything or anybody, where everything is just happening and in the only way it can, where we are connected to the silence of pure Beingness unfolding. It is not easy to get past all the trauma generated voices in our heads with the associated prejudices and assumptions, blame and judgements, with all the essentially defensive and self-justifying non-stop internal “chatter” that my ego generates. But sometimes, either through receiving a pure “gift”, perhaps from someone able to transmit such a gift, or perhaps through some persistent use of attention in meditation or mindfulness, we can find that silence, and we can then see that this is indeed the underlying ground of our consciousness. It is what is there when the ego, is either temporarily silenced, or more fully transcended. We instinctively know that this silence is profoundly intelligent.

From the heart, the transpersonal starts to appear whenever I make an object out of the feelings I am subject to. It exists in the gap between myself and what I am experiencing. Again, this can only happen by facing and attending more deeply to our actual here and now feelings. It is this that enables us to accept and enquire into, and start to understand what we are feeling, seeing its meaning and its relationship to any underlying conditioning. This in turn enables us to open our hearts in self-compassion. In my experience, Love is what is there when we heal and reconcile our trauma induced kaleidoscope of ego generated compensatory feelings, thoughts, and tensions. Underneath all our grief, woundedness, hurt, distress, fear, envy, jealousy, anger, insecurity, resentment, etc., etc., there is the ground of Love, and when we connect to this, our hearts can rest in peace. Self-care naturally flows from this, as does love and sensitivity and care for everything and everyone.

The effect that illness or pain has on us makes it very clear how profoundly the personal dimension of ourselves is connected to our body and how we rely on our "God given" energy and health to feel balanced and creative. This shows how deeply our personality is linked to our body and how finding any equanimity in the face of illness or pain requires is a very advanced stage of development. But whenever we turn our attention to our bodies we again make an object out of part of ourselves, and if we can stay there long enough to sense our energy and breath, we are immediately in touch with the transpersonal. We are connected to the Energy of Life. If we can use mindfulness / meditation / exercise / Yoga or Tai Chi or whatever it is, to deepen this connection, then the more we can experience this extraordinary fact and sense the miracle of being alive. It is also the case that every piece of anxiety causes an instantaneous corresponding tension in the body, and this can be very useful in helping us to inquire into our underlying feelings, helping towards our healing and relaxation.

All of this shows this underlying miracle that we live with, namely that whenever we connect to the "Transpersonal" in any form, we are connected to an extraordinarily deep well of wisdom and creativity. Out of silence emerges insight, intelligence, and creativity, out of Love comes our emotional intelligence and its blessings and creativity, from our embodied presence we are touched by the holistic wisdom of the body and the Earth. It surely becomes ever clearer that "Goodness, Beauty and Truth" are given by the that which is beyond the personal. We are simply the vehicles through which these qualities are manifested.

Claudio Naranjo in "Gestalt Therapy", Jill Hall's humanistic psychology in her wonderful book "The Reluctant Adult", Peter Levine and Gabor Mate from trauma psychology, Almas, John Welwood, Ken Wilber, Terry Patten, and Thomas Hübl, from the more psycho-spiritual approaches, are just some of the very many calling for this recognition of our dual nature. That we are made up of both the personal and the Transpersonal and it is the latter that brings "Goodness, Beauty and Truth" into our lives. All that is precious and meaningful has its roots in this non-personal dimension of our existence.

This is what it seems to me is most crucial for the world to recognise; the fact that we have this Transpersonal dimension to our being and that this is fundamental to understanding human nature and thus to understanding how to structure a healthy global society. Our task then is to take responsibility for facilitating and supporting this understanding in permeating and transforming our world. As part of this, we also need to more thoroughly integrate the understanding of how trauma is the source of all negativity, destructiveness, and the thwarted development that blocks the flow of the Transpersonal. Again, to paraphrase Rumi, we can't aim for Love / Consciousness / Wisdom / Freedom; all we can do is heal and dismantle the obstacles within us, so that this Transpersonal creativity can increasingly manifest in this tiny and remote corner of our utterly vast universe.

Jim Robinson - December 2021