

The Self System: Toward a New Understanding of the Whole Person (Part 3)

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Of all psychology concepts, perhaps none has a more lengthy history or engendered more controversy and ambiguity than that of the self. Indeed, the self has come to mean so many things that it hardly means anything at all. Consequently, there is currently no single theory integrating all the various meanings of the self concept. Therefore, the primary purpose of this article is to develop an overarching metapsychology by which all aspects of the self can be understood.

To accomplish this purpose, this article engages in a hermeneutic analysis of the self as it appears in transpersonal psychology and also what could be called transcendental psychology (i.e., nondualism). In so doing, it is possible to identify two principle concepts by which the various aspects of the self can be compared and classified: *the S/self* and *the Twin-Tiers*, the presence of both a lower self and deeper Self as aspects of the individual; as well as the presence of nondual reality (i.e., God), which is described relative to two fundamental processes: *the Illusion of Relatedness* and *the Grid of Attention*.

An ongoing tension exists within humanistic psychology, pitting the field against itself (see Rowan, 1989). This tension appears to arise from two of the fundamental features by which the field is usually defined (e.g., Bohart et al., 2003; Bugental, 1964):

1. Humanism: human beings exist in a uniquely human context.
2. Holism: human beings are greater than the sum of their parts (i.e., irreducible to their parts).

The primary contention of this article is that these two principles are ultimately incompatible. As a result, the challenge for humanistic psychology is to acknowl-

edge an exceedingly difficult set of circumstances: *Humanism has a hole in its holism*. This assessment suggests that a significant part of the troubles currently confronting humanistic psychology comes from within.

There is no God [for the humanists] ... toward whom mystical impulses are drawn; there is only the mystical impulse. ... In the absence of God, human beings assumed God's theoretical place. ... Ironically, although humanistic psychology began as a revolt against modernism and its reductionisms, it ended up sharing with modernism its fundamental agenda of deifying human potential, making humans the ultimate agency in the universe. (Garrison, 2001, p. 94)

This captures the essence of the tension nicely: The holism of humanism is not big enough for the two of them—human and God. Consequently, one has to go. Yet, this is an unnecessary conclusion, and, obviously, one with grave implications. Indeed, the alternative to this conclusion is every bit as cogent and draws on the one unassailable virtue of humanistic psychology: *the whole person*. The error of humanistic psychology has been to define the whole person in terms of human beings—who are only *part* of the whole person. In other words, what psychoanalysis has done with the ego, humanism has done with the self—stripped it of its most meaningful part (Vitz, 1994).

Numerous theorists postulate a conception of development involving levels beyond that of the adult human being, even entering into levels of development associated with spirituality and self transcendence. These theories typically indicate that the progression of human development occurs according to a sequential pattern. In other words, development potentially extends into realms beyond that which has been commonly attained by humanity. This extended range of development can be described as follows:

The whole trajectory of human development can be parsed ... into four tiers (Miller & Cook-Greuter, 1994). The first two—preconventional and conventional development—cover mental growth from infancy to adulthood. About 90% of the general adult population function within these first two tiers. ... At present, mental growth to the postconventional tier and beyond is rare in part because it is not supported by society's prevailing mindset, practices, and institutions. ... [T]he two higher tiers, the postconventional and the transcendent, describe rarer and more complex ways of how adults make sense of experience. (Cook-Greuter, 2000, p. 229)

Transpersonal psychology focuses on the second set of tiers, what is perhaps more properly referred to as the second tier altogether, over against the first tier of conventional development—for example, the basic being needs of Maslow's (1968, 1971) hierarchy, or the tiers of Beck and Cowan's (1996) Spiral Dynamics. However, not only does the second tier consist of two levels in its own right, these two levels can be further delineated. Indeed, in keeping with this distinction,

Wilber (2000a, b) indicates that there are two fundamental aspects to the transpersonal Self, each of which occurring in two domains that can be differentiated as follows:

1. The Soul (i.e., postconventional, or transpersonal):
 - a. Psychic level: the observing self, or Witness, that transcends the isolated individual.
 - b. Subtle level: the soul and God enter a deeper union, which discloses at its summit a divine union of Soul and Spirit.
2. The Spirit (i.e., transcendent, or transcendental):
 - a. Causal level: Soul and God are both transcended in the prior identity of Godhead, or pure formless awareness, pure consciousness as such, the pure Self as pure Spirit.
 - b. Nondual level: After breaking through the causal absorption in pure unmanifest and unborn Spirit, the entire manifest world arises once again, but this time as perfect expression of Spirit as Spirit.

As used here, *transpersonal* suggests that the “individual’s sense of identity appears to extend beyond its ordinary limits to encompass wider, broader, or deeper aspects of life or the cosmos—including divine elements of creation” (Krippner, 1998, p. ix). In this view of the self, transpersonal means that the self is in some sense larger or more extensive than ordinarily conceived. But this must be contrasted with the *transcendental Self*: the self as it is ordinarily conceived—that is, a human being, however extensive—is left behind entirely, replaced by a living presence more commonly referred to as God (i.e., the Divine Self). In other words, the transcendental Self can be thought of as more than simply including divine elements, indeed, to actually being the Divine Itself (see Griffiths, 1973; Loy, 1998).

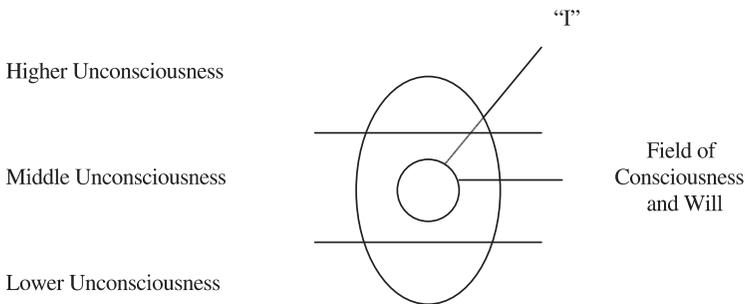
S/SELF AND THE TWIN-TIERS

The self is usually thought of as comprising one’s essential being, that is to say, the locus of their conscious awareness and living presence (Bugental, 1981; Schneider, 1999, 2004). But, as mentioned, there is also a larger Self to consider, what might be thought of as one’s soul, or spirit. Consequently, entity can be most significantly understood as an amalgam of these two kinds of self, and referred to as follows: *the S/self*. A number of theories make use of this conception, seeing the lower self (or ego) as influenced and in intimate connection with a deeper Self. Jung’s (1919, 1964) theory of the Self archetype is perhaps foremost among them. Nonetheless, similar descriptions include Husserl’s transcendental ego (1931), Sartre’s nonpositional consciousness (1957), and Hegel’s soul (1993), as well as

those found in the tenets of Eastern spirituality, such as the “big mind” of Zen Buddhism (Muzuka, 1990), or the “buddhi” of yoga psychology (Feuerstein, 2001).

Assagioli (1965, 1973) articulates a somewhat similar position relative to the S/self. In his view, Self-realization involves a direct link between the Self and the I (or the Self and the ego, in Jung’s terms). By being thus connected, the ego inheres in the Self. Perhaps better said, the ego *arises* in the Self, and ever more conforms to the attributes of the Self. Because the Self and the ego are in intimate union at all times, their relationship exists at every level of development—indeed, even including those in which the ego remains unaware of the presence of the Self. Nonetheless, as Jung (1964) also suggests, the ego can become aware of the deeper presence of which it is connected and, more, this deeper presence is by far the most significant and relevant to its overall well-being.

Another way of saying this is that Self-realization involves an image or reflection of Self—“I”—becoming a clearer and more accurate image or reflection of Self. ... Therefore, employing Assagioli’s oval diagram, Self would be understood as distinct but not separate from the entire area mapped by [the following figure].



In the above diagram, Self is not represented but is understood to pervade all the areas shown. ... Thus, in developing an intimate relationship with Self, and so becoming an increasingly accurate image of Self, one may find increasing openness to the heights and depths of experience. (Firman & Gila, 1997, p. 203)

As can be seen, Assagioli’s conception puts the arrangement into a far greater union, which highlights an important feature of the S/self: it is best thought of as a single, bicameral unit—that is say, single, bicameral entity.

Conceiving of the S/self as an amalgam comprised of Twin-Tiers has significant implications for Jung’s conception of the collective (i.e., transpersonal) unconsciousness. Although Jung speaks of the archetypal perspectives of ancient people as if they somehow get transmitted to present individuals (albeit merely as potential), it would be more accurate to say that the transpersonal unconscious is

the individual's own deeper personality, transmitted to their present state from past lives. The dynamics of this process can be stated as follows:

The deeper personality is the reincarnate, or the reincarnating personality. ... In the birth of any individual this deeper personality conjoins with a gross personality, but it functions outside the brain, appearing as tendencies and destinies that it adds to the gross personality. Thus, although this body has inherited many qualities that are like its parents, many other qualities have been demonstrated in the Lifetime of this apparent personality that are nothing like My mother and father. ... That deeper personality also has its own destiny, and it has been showing its own signs throughout this life. (Adi Da, 1989, p. 46)

In other words, the human infant, while sliding into the world from the mother's womb (if not at some prior, prenatal point in time), conjoins with the spiritual being of the deeper Self. Together they embark on the journey of one's life. The gross, lower self is comprised of genetic material and any congenital features that might have been formed throughout the gestation period. Soon added to this born human being are the displays of the physical world, impressing on the infant their necessity and urgency. Yet, the deeper Self has been present too, along with its own personality. Indeed, it is within the deeper Self that all this impressionable display arises. This experiential bombardment occurs, initially, as a figment of the deeper Self's imagination, precisely because the lower self hardly even *exists*, at this point, except for the merest filaments of genetics. The one exists within the other, but only for a while, for the lower self quickly begins to breed and take over the deeper vehicle (McDonnell, 1997).

As can be seen, the Self does not merely inspire the lower self to organize the fragments of personality, shattered in the difficult processes of birth and early life experience. Rather, the Self presents its own, already integrated and organized, transpersonal personality too—and, indeed, is doing so *right now*, even as this passage is being read. James refers to the dim awareness in which one typically notices the Self as “fringe,” or what is “more” than our waking self, which we may nonetheless actively participate in presently: “May not you and I be confluent in a higher consciousness, and confluently active there, tho we now know it not?” (1909, pp. 289–290).

Ordinary views of consciousness rely on the following premise: that there is an ongoing external reality as the individual undergoes the various and mysterious transformations entailed by the suspension of waking consciousness, not only during spiritual practices, such as meditation, but also during sleep. Indeed, one's usual waking consciousness is principally a product of the functioning of the lower mind. The limits of this consciousness are the boundaries of I-ness at the level of the intellect. It is outwardly oriented, involves action, and seems to have evolved primarily for the purpose of ensuring individual survival. Simply put, the individ-

ual takes the chaos of the world and makes sense of it. The notion of the world out there is based on how information coming in is selected and processed. Learning to assimilate and handle information in similar ways allows people to arrive at similar notions of what reality is. Nonetheless, alternative ways of constructing reality are also possible.

For example, as one slips from the waking state into dreams and deep sleep, the sloughing off of the body and perceptual–sensory awareness could be described in these terms: *dream disembodiment*. Yet, the idea that the familiar world of three-dimensional and objective causality is maintained while one sojourns deeply within their interior recesses is in no way necessary, or even tenable, as can be seen by the following account:

The first step in my core argument ... was that the dream world and the life we lead in it is not a second-hand production composited together by some fantastic tinkerer, by the syntactical operations of a dream *bricoleur*, but is a continuous, spontaneous, formative production in which the dreaming life-world is constituted *de novo*. The second step ... was to argue that dreaming and waking worlds, and the unreflective lives we live in those worlds, are essentially indiscernible. The third step ... is to argue that the constitution of the dreaming life-world is anaclitic upon (leans on) the mechanisms that constitute the waking life-world. Indiscernables demand the same explanation on grounds of parsimony and biological evolution. Since the dreaming mechanism is formative, then the waking mechanism is formative too (not syntactical, as the computational theory of mind would have it) ... (Globus, 1987, p. 91) (emphasis in the original)

The way to sort out the conundrum is as follows: There are two tiers of mind. Spiritual traditions from Hinduism to Buddhism to Taoism have posited different levels of mind (see Conze, 1962; Sharma, 1974)—only the most sophisticated of which are capable of influencing reality to any degree, operating at a level far beyond that determined by culture or community: “We can sense this bare sensation [nirvikalpa perception], but as soon as we try to know it, this ‘raw un verbalized experience’ (William James) becomes associated with thought-conception and hence determinate (savikalpa)” (Loy, 1998, p. 43). As a result, the impressions of experience *combine* with one’s understanding to form a single account of events.

On the other hand, reality (i.e., experience) goes about its own business, regardless of what is happening in the lower mind—that is to say, the mind of ordinary cognition (e.g., constructivism and contextualism). Indeed, the situation could perhaps be best put this way: *reality has a mind of its own*. Dream disembodiment is not unlike Einstein’s elongating and surreal universe, where objects are malleable, routinely distorting their shapes out of all sense of recognition. (Although, in dreams, it happens without the individual having to travel at the speed of light—unless, of course, dreams *are* taking place at the speed of light.) Perhaps the exam-

ple *par excellence* of such an orientation to dream disembodiment is shamanism, where certain individuals are able to directly enter the dream state from the waking state. Shamans claim to be able to access spiritual realms that are not otherwise available to the remaining members of their community (Eliade, 1974; Krippner, 2000). Such individuals engage in a number of spiritual practices that characterize their role as practitioners, as based on this privileged ability for dream disembodiment (Winkelman, 1992): healer, priest or priestess, diviner or medium, and malevolent practitioner (i.e., witch or sorcerer).

Although the shaman engages in dream disembodiment as they enter the spiritual realm, they do so by maintaining a clear sense of *being* a shaman, as they mingle among other spirit entities. In mysticism, this differentiation is lost. There is no separation *within* the fluid and surreal parameters of the dream state. Otherwise, shamanism and mysticism appear to be accounts of essentially the same spirit realm—albeit as participated in by very different orientations of the respective soul travelers.

Perhaps the simplest way to distinguish the two is this:

1. Whereas the shaman *goes to* the spiritual realm, the mystic does not, finding instead that they are already there, and
2. Whereas the shaman interacts with other beings when they get there, in a manner similar to that of the earthly realm, the mystic has no need of interaction—precisely because there is no other with which to interact.

Of course, there are all kinds of permutations and shades in between these types of spiritual masters, creating considerable overlap between them. Nonetheless, these distinctions offer a useful characterization of their fundamental differences.

As the self emancipates into Self and, thereby, enters the spiritual domain, a simultaneous process of integration occurs: The individual becomes aware of their inherent interconnectedness, so much so that they include within entity not only bodily experience but also the *environment* being thus experienced—both in the sense of one's etheric being (i.e., prana or libido; Batie, 2003) and Gaia, or ecopsychology (Roszak et al., 1995).

The Gaia hypothesis postulates that the Earth's biosphere (that band of air, land, and water that contains life) acts as a super-organism with the ability to regulate environmental conditions to sustain itself. ... The Earth is one big body, according to Gaia. (Shannon, 1992, p. 48)

Indeed, entity is thought to include a number of extensive concepts in ecopsychology: the ecological self (Roszak, 1992), a “psyche the size of the Earth” (Hillman, 1995), the more-than-human self (Conn, 1995), and the primal matrix

(Glendinning, 1994). However they are conceived, the interconnection of these types of entities is best put this way: *interpenetration*.

According to such a view, one does not exist merely as some internal presence to an external reality. Rather, one exists *as* that reality—without *any* internal or external referents. The notion of being a discrete individual, separate and apart from the Earth, becomes curious and obsolete at this level interpenetration. Indeed, participating in the Earth is just the beginning, for interpenetration can be thought to extend so far as to include not even the whole universe, but all of existence itself. Consequently, the whole is not merely greater than the sum of its parts; it is contained *within* each of its parts. Obviously, this vastly increases the complexity of what could be called the whole person. Likewise it elaborates on Jung's idea of the archetypes and collective unconscious: "Hence 'at bottom' the psyche is simply 'world'" (1940, p. 173). However, Jung maintains the existence of both the collective unconscious and physical embodiment, with the ego mediating between the two. Yet, the two taken together in this way are untenable. Indeed, the spiritual processes of shamanism and mysticism exist precisely to overcome the illusion of embodiment.

THE ILLUSION OF RELATEDNESS

Although Jung did not incorporate nondualism into his theory of psychic structure, the intimate relationship between the two aspects of the S/self has, at times, been interpreted in such a fashion. Assagioli's psychosynthesis can be used as an example:

This abiding dependence of "I" upon Self amounts to an ontological union of "I" and Self. ... So complete is this union that it may be called "nondual," a unity transcending any sense of duality, isolation, or separation. (Firman & Gila, 1997, p. 45)

Yet, the relationship cannot be so simply stated. This passage indicates the kind of confusion obscuring a true understanding of nondualism. In fact, to use the term in this way is misleading. Although nondualism is sometimes used in this way to refer to the relationship between Self and self, it most accurately refers to the relationship between Self and God.

Unfortunately, to use the term *nondualism* in this way is misleading. It is precisely in speaking of nondualism as a "unity" that is the difficulty. There are two possible ways to consider the relationship between the ego and Self:

1. Unity: The two are joined together so that they each seem to be a part of a larger whole.
2. Identity: They are no longer two, but a single presence.

Actually, so long as the two are joined together in a unity, they are still *two*. As can be seen, unity actually *means* duality. But nondualism is something entirely

different from this. A popular textbook devoted to psychotherapy based on nondualism defines nondualism this way:

It derives from the Sanskrit word *Advaita* which means “not-two.” Nondual wisdom refers to the understanding and direct experience of a fundamental consciousness that underlies the apparent distinction between perceiver and perceived. (Prendergast, Fenner, & Krystal, 2003, p. 2)

According to the doctrine of nondualism, there is no separation between self and any objects or others but, rather, only the nonseparate sense of self that subsumes all existence within a single, all-inclusive presence.

In a sense, the divine reality of nondualism can be likened to a zygote, that is to say, a cell as it appears just prior to splitting into two. This cell at this point exists in a state of pristine, undifferentiated oneness. However, this native state is soon disrupted by the emergence of a cleft within it, which seemingly splits it into separate parts. But in the case of nondualism, the split does not actually occur. That it seems so is nothing more than an illusion. Like a Bing cherry with two plump sides and cleavage running down the middle, the split is only imposed on the berry, but without actually rendering it in two.

In other words, union only approximates nondualism. The mistake is to confuse the sense of going beyond oneself and, thereby, becoming one with a greater reality with a far more profound realization: No separate objects or others even exist, by which one might possibly enter into union with them. So long as any sense of a separate self exists—even as it takes place while connecting with some larger reality, such as shamanistic interpenetration, identification with Gaia, or the Christian *unio mystica*—there is no nondualism. The entire range of mystical states is sometimes equated to nondualism, even extending to include other extraordinary states of being, such as peak experiences (see Maslow, 1964). Either way, the confusion comes down to this: mistaking a *larger* sense of self for *no* sense of self at all.

As can be seen, the concept of nondualism is quite complicated. Indeed, the term is used in many different, albeit related ways. For example, academic treatments of nondualism frequently equate nondualism with monism. Yet, this misses the point of nondualism. Whereas monism claims that reality consists of a single substance, however it might manifest in a multitude of divergent appearances, nondualism makes a different point entirely: There is *no separation* between any apparent distinctions in reality. As can be seen in the case of monism, even a single substance could be divided into innumerable pieces. Consequently, monism, dualism, and pluralism *all* rest on a nondual base. Irrespective of the ultimate constituency of reality, there is no separation to be found within reality.

Loy claims these different versions of nondualism have never been fully clarified or integrated in the spiritual traditions and attempts to fashion such an integral theory in his work, drawing primarily on the concepts of nondualism prevailing in

Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta, and Taoism. These concepts can be described according to certain principle features:

The following types of nonduality are discussed here: the negation of dualistic thinking, the nonplurality of the world, and the non-difference of subject and object ... although there [are] two other nondualities which are also closely related: first, what has been called the identity of phenomena and Absolute, or the Mahayana equation of *samsara* and *nirvana*, which can also be expressed as “the nonduality of duality and nonduality”; second, the possibility of a mystical unity between God and man. (Loy, 1998, p. 17)

In other words, dualistic thinking separates the nonseparate unity of reality into parts or categories (i.e., dualistic perception). Consequently, reversing the process, by *eliminating* this separation, reverses the self/other dichotomy and returns the multitude of discrete objects to their pristine state—the original identity of reality—which is always already the case to begin with. However, the claim is also made that this unity of reality is not only prior to conventional apprehensions of reality, but also superior. In other words, the concept of nondualism serves both an ontological and soteriological function: it criticizes dualistic experience and understanding as delusive and unsatisfactory—in fact, it is the source of all suffering.

The difficulty for most accounts of nondualism, whether they exist within the spiritual traditions or transpersonal psychology, is twofold:

1. They suggest that God is the *goal* of development.
2. They misrepresent the actual *mechanics* whereby God manifests into human beings.

For example, Wilber (2000a, 2000b) attempts to account for the mechanics of incarnation through the process of involution and evolution, or what could be referred to as the Great Path of Return (see Adi Da, 2004). Such mechanics are found both in Eastern and Western spiritual revelations (e.g., Aurobindo, 1973; Plotinus, 1992). It is the very dynamic of these mechanics that makes God a goal of development. Wilber’s (1997, pp. 26, 44) ambivalence can be seen in these two essentially contradictory passages from his integral theory:

1. “Thus Spirit is *both* the highest *goal* of all development and evolution, and the *ground* of the entire sequence, as present fully at the beginning as at the end. Spirit is prior to this world, but not other to this world.”
2. “You always already ARE enlightened Spirit, and therefore to seek Spirit is simply to deny Spirit. You can no more attain Spirit than you can attain your feet or acquire your lungs. ... [T]hus seeking Spirit is exactly that which prevents realization.”

Yet, setting God up as a goal is precisely what inserts seeking into the equation—and eliminates God thereby.

According to the “Radical” Non-Dualism of Adi Da (2000b, 2004), the ultimate nature of nondual reality can be put like this: *There is only God*. And this nondual reality can be described according to the following attributes: *Love-Bliss Awareness*. However, at the most profound level of existence, this couplet of attributes is utterly inseparable from one another (see Loy, 1998). Traditionally, this idea has been put this way:

This is the term *saccidananda*. ... The ultimate reality, the ultimate truth, is “sat”—being, “cit”—consciousness, and “ananda”—bliss. This is as near as we can come to an affirmation of the nature of the Godhead. (Griffiths, 1973, pp. 10–12)

Indeed, at the most profound level of existence in which the Godhead resides, these attributes are not separate from one another. This state of not being separate from one another is nondualism.

Yet, unfortunately, separation is precisely what is introduced into this pristine state of divinity. According to the tenets of “Radical” Non-Dualism, the sense of a separate self arises within Divine Being as an activity of self-contraction. Because this state of contraction arises spontaneously, there is no cause or reason for it. Yet, it tends to persist and to be repeated. It is a disturbance *in* Consciousness, or a permutation within it. As a result of this divisive wedge, Awareness and Love-Bliss seem to become separated. It is in this manner that attention is introduced into Consciousness, for it is only under these conditions that Consciousness becomes aware *of* objects. Indeed, objects literally *are* Love-Bliss, or better said, mitigations of Love-Bliss. It is as a result of this illusion that one develops desire, because they are now seemingly separate from the ultimate object of desire—Love-Bliss—and can only observe it from across the chasm of their apparent separation.

If Consciousness identifies with the self-contraction, it will falsely presume that it is no longer itself but, instead, an illusion of itself. It will regard itself to be other than or separate from itself, and exist as the painful activity of self-contraction. Consequently, it will tend to resolve the discomfort of this separate state of being through attention and falsely presume that it is paradoxically *related* to itself, across the nonexistent gulf of this (merely apparent) separateness. By this act of contraction and subsequent identification, Consciousness presumes to be a Self, diminishing, thereby, its own bliss of radiant “Bright” Being, scaling itself in the (apparent) reality of what is nothing other than its own, lost Love.

Having thus separated from Consciousness in this way, and created a divisive wound of separation in its place, this process of identification with the self-contraction continues and a false impression of difference from Consciousness is likewise created, based on this sense of separation. Yet, there is still only prior reality (which the Self continues to actually be). The tension of separation goes both ways, like a rubber band stretched taut, simultaneously pulled both toward and

away. As a result, the Self can only feel its own, inherent feeling of Love-Bliss when it *relaxes* this contracted state. And in so doing, the Illusion of Relatedness is released into its own native state of Consciousness—which exists in a blissful state of Awareness of all that is arising.

Adi Da puts the situation this way:

All That Appears To Be Not-Consciousness (or an “object” Of Consciousness) Is An Apparition Produced By Apparent Modification (or Spontaneous Contraction and Perturbation) Of The Inherent Self-Radiance (or Native Love-Bliss-State) Of Consciousness Itself. ... All Of this arising Is (In Itself—or Separately) An Illusion—The Principal Signs Of Which Are The Presumption Of Relatedness (and Of “Difference”), The Presumption Of a Separate self ... (2006, pp. 374, 375)

As a result, two aspects of reality come to exist and are engaged in an intense paradox of God and Self—the latter tussling with the former in a struggle over the sovereignty of its assumed identity. Because Self *is* God, it takes itself to *be* God, but only as a false version *of* God. In this way God is reduced and limited to finite being (however immense) rather than Being itself. The paradox is that Self both is God and is not God, trying to *be* God (which it actually already *is*). This is the fundamental dynamic that defines the state of narcissism that characterizes the human being, merely pretending to be that which one actually is. This account of nondualism is diagrammed in Figure 1.

As can be seen, the situation for the Illusion of Relatedness is something like that of cell meiosis, in which the Radiance of Divine Being seems to be split in two. Indeed, the separation of Awareness and Love-Bliss could be thought of similarly to the chromosomes of the cell being cut in half—except that in this case the nondual connection between them is never truly severed.

Most accounts of nondualism attempt to resolve the paradox inherent to the Illusion of Relatedness from the side of the ego-“I”—but not the greater condition which is God. In other words, they try to make sense of the paradox from within the parameters of the paradox, which is a futile effort. However, God can only be understood on the other side of the paradox, prior to its formation.

[T]he “radical” approach to Realization of Reality (or Truth, or Real God) is ... to Realize Reality, Truth, or Real God In Place (or As That Which Is Always Already The Case, Where and As you Are, Most Perfectly Beyond and Prior to ego-“I,” or the act of self-contraction, or of “differentiation,” which act is the prismatic fault that Breaks the Light, or envisions It as seeming two, and more). (Adi Da, 2000a, p. 276)

Theories of development based on nondualism typically focus on the Self/Other duality, to the exclusion of the God/Self duality underlying the Illusion of Relatedness. For example, conceiving of consciousness as if a spectrum (see Wilber, 2000a, 2000b) only ends up undermining the nondual reality it is intended

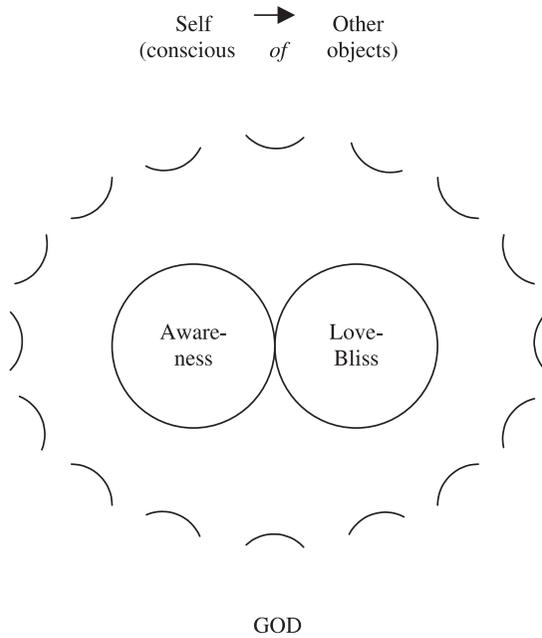


FIGURE 1 Illusion of Relatedness.

to advocate. It is by virtue of the Illusion of Relatedness that the nondual state of “Brightness” is corrupted and transmuted into a spectrum—as if by a prism. Traditional accounts of nondualism typically describe this prior unity *while within the prism* (e.g., McEvilley, 2002; Sprung, 1979). Even though this witnessing of reality exists prior to the Light transmuting into a spectrum, it does not exist prior to the Light *entering the prism*. As a result, such accounts actually focus on the mechanics of the prism—as the nondual “Brightness” exists within it. Although the Light has not yet transmuted into the spectrum, nonetheless, the forces are building by which it will do so. Yet, the divine reality of “Brightness” exists on the other side of the prism, before its dreadful mechanics of incarnation even come to exist—and, indeed, remains even after the fact, in the event that they do.

THE GRID OF ATTENTION

In most philosophical traditions, awareness is based on an orientation toward consciousness that can be found in the phenomenological concept of intentionality. According to this point of view, consciousness is always directed toward its objects. “*Consciousness* is the essence of experience. ... It has no structure of its own but only essence. It is not static nor is it in motion. Consciousness, however, is al-

ways *about* something” (Combs, 2002, p. 7). But consciousness can be understood in radically different terms. In and of itself, consciousness is not aware *of* things. It is more primal than that. It simply *is* awareness—whether the objects of mind arise within its field or not:

Consciousness is not attention, it’s not the mind. Those are *objects* of Consciousness, merely Witnessed. Consciousness is just *That*, Consciousness. . . . Finally you Realize that *attention* is object to you as well, where you’re merely in the Witness-Position. (Adi Da, 1996, pp. 35–36)

To access consciousness in its most pristine state, certain spiritual traditions advocate “*witness consciousness*.” Here, the individual no longer perceives and understands experience from the point of view of the ego-“I” or a personal self. Rather, the individual participates in experience as the very consciousness that is observing all that exists—even *while* they continue to participate in the events of life. It is within this expansive state of sublime awareness that the most fundamental domain of being exists. In other words, Awareness is not the same as attention, or the objects on which it may be focused. Therefore, intentionality must be reconceived along these lines: whenever there is an apparent object, it is already one with attention.

You can think of attention this way, then—an unmoving point on a grid, a grid of infinite size. Or, in other words, made up of an infinite number of possible points. If attention appears to move, or is willed to move, it’s the grid that moves. The point of attention is the same, it never moves. And apparently, then, attention has shifted to another point on the grid. That point coincides with any object of attention in any moment. Fundamentally, then, in terms of the mechanics of attention, that is all there is—the point of attention and this grid, apparently modified energy taking on the form of apparent objects, or points in space/time. . . . [But], in truth, there is neither attention nor the grid, there is only consciousness itself and its inherent radiance. (Adi Da, 1995, from a talk)

One perceives the grid to consist of objects and spatial conditions and time conditions and so on. But it is an illusion made by this apparently fixed point of separate attention and the mechanical grid. If one was not identified with the body and, therefore, with a spatial concept of existence, all they would see is this grid.

It is in this fashion that attention is one with its every object. There is no difference between consciousness and energy. Likewise, there is no difference between attention and its object. But to have an experience of an object, one must put stress on the point of attention itself, and then a thought, sensation, or perception appears. Although this operation is being done in every moment, typically the individual does not notice this is what they are doing. For example, one does not think to think. If such were the case, they would be caught in an infinite regress. Thinking simply occurs as a result of the tension (will) being applied to the point of attention and the grid. And the same is true with everything else that appears to arise. One

does not do something physical to feel the body. They directly feel the body, while allowing stress on the point of attention to generate that appearance in the field of attention. By putting stress on the point of attention, an object spontaneously arises that corresponds to that particular stress. It is the field that appears to change, or the grid that appears to change. Attention does not create it, nor does attention move. It is always one with that grid of energy. None of that energy is *in* attention itself.

It is not attention that creates anything. It is the mechanisms that are in the grid that make the changes, generate the thoughts, the feelings, the sensations, the ideas, and the perceptions. In a sense, as the meiosis of the Illusion of Relatedness occurs, instead of the chromosomes splitting apart a “bulge” takes place in the sphere of Awareness, pushing toward Love-Bliss. This bulge is the focusing of attention toward Love-Bliss. In doing so a tension emerges at its tip, ultimately erupting into the Grid of Attention. It is precisely this tension that is suggested by a rubber band being stretched taut. This is why it is important for one to realize that they are not really attention but, rather, merely a witness. To exist as attention is to be bound to the illusions in the grid. But attention does not know any meaning. Only the mind, or the grid, knows meaning. Yet, the mind is simply another apparent object of attention. To find thought meaningful, one has to stand in the position of the mind. But this only puts them into a paradoxical position, where they must go back to the source of attention to reclaim their own native state of Being.

Consequently, the nondual Divine Domain is augmented by the Dual-Domain, and is diagrammed in Figure 2. As can be seen, the entire apparatus of the grid, brought on by the Illusion of Relatedness, can be seen as held in the embrace of the larger context of Love-Bliss Awareness (*nirvana*). The two are utterly inseparable from one another, except under the illusory conditions of the self-contraction. Awareness can be thought of as the living presence of the human being, intimately affiliated with Love-Bliss. Attention, on the other hand, results from the self-contraction operating in the midst of Love-Bliss Awareness directed toward its objects of interest. Indeed, objects literally *are* Love-Bliss, or better said, mitigations of Love-Bliss thrown up on the grid as a reduction and distortion of Love-Bliss. The entire manifest universe is nothing but illusory images appearing on this grid. In a sense, the point at the tip of attention is like a phonograph needle, pressing into the sphere of Love-Bliss and, thereby, eliciting the apparent movement of the spinning record that is the grid—which is, itself, comprised of Love-Bliss.

From this point of view, Awareness and Love-Bliss can be thought of something like hinges, either swinging in the direction of the ego-“I” or God. As the ego-“I,” these two attributes represent the unseen boundaries of the person, compromised and contorted into the illusion appearing on the grid. Yet, unfortunately, this illusion is usually taken seriously, enticing human beings into a chimera of existence cycling endlessly in a self-defeating round of desire and seeking (*karma* and *samsara*). All philosophies and theories of physical reality and psychology pertain to the illusory phenomena thrown up on this grid—perhaps even in the sense that Heidegger (1962) states human beings are thrown into this world. On the other hand, as God, these two

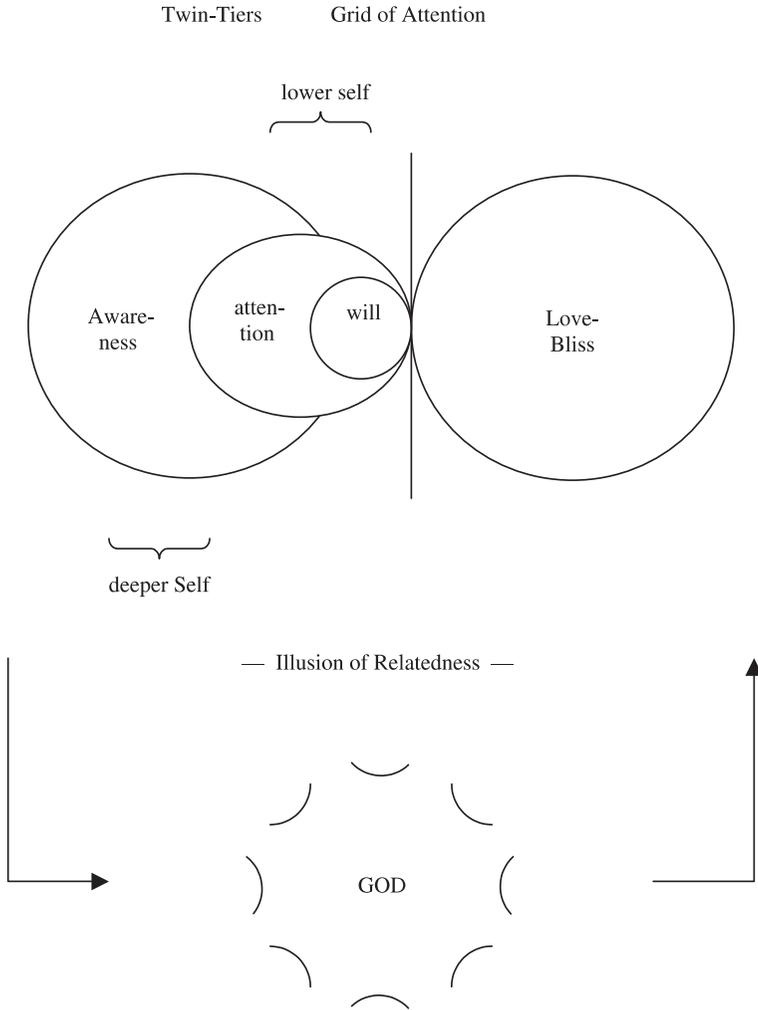


FIGURE 2 Grid of Attention.

attributes do not represent boundaries, but exist as the ultimate, primordial condition of reality, the very substance of which every human being is comprised and, indeed, is the very source out of which each human being arises.

CONCLUSION

The nondualist approach to the self dramatically reverses the usual orientation toward the self. That is, nondualism is not simply another account of the self, albeit tak-

ing place when the self/other dichotomy is eliminated, leaving only self. Rather, nondualism is a *criticism* of the self, and at two levels: the lower self and the deeper Self. Loy puts the situation this way: “the nondualistic systems also agree that our usual sense of duality—the sense of separation (hence alienation) between myself and the world ‘I’ am ‘in’—is the root delusion that needs to be overcome” (1998, p. 178).

Consequently, nondualism serves ontological and soteriological functions: criticizes dualistic experience and understanding as delusive and unsatisfactory—in fact, the source of all suffering. As a result, nondualism has important implications for therapy. In nondualism, the essential nature of the self is understood to be an impediment to love and happiness, a false and misguided impersonator. The S/self is literally a mental illness according to this view, an overlay superimposed on the real nature of the human being.

However, this depiction runs counter to the humanist appraisal of what is of value in being a human being. In fact, the humanist appraisal can even impose its own untenable interpretation on the doctrine of nondualism:

Love does indeed come from beyond us, from pure being, from the absolute source that shines through us and those we love. And the essence of love does involve a dissolving of the boundaries of separation. Yet, defining love purely as a mutual recognition of transpersonal being is incomplete and unsatisfying in human terms. ... Nondual teachings that mainly emphasize the illusory quality of human experience can, unfortunately, serve as just another dehumanizing force in a world where our basic humanity is already under siege at every turn. (Welwood, 2003, p. 145)

Unfortunately, this way of understanding nondualism takes away what is of value in nondualism. Speaking equivocally about the S/self only undermines our ability address its limitations. It is precisely in indicating the diagnosis without ambivalence—“the illusory quality of human experience”—that an effective treatment plan can be implemented. To waffle on the diagnosis is to sympathize with the symptoms, even if unconsciously.

Nondualism has significant implications for clinical practice. Put simply: *Love is the healing principle*. The primary means by which therapeutic interventions are made effective is a particular relationship between the individual and their therapist: the “therapeutic alliance” (Othmer & Othmer, 1994; Zetzel, 1956). It has been shown that the presence of the therapeutic alliance is a strong predictor of positive outcomes in therapy (Luborsky, McLellan, & Woody, 1985; Orlinsky & Howard, 1986). Indeed, a principle conclusion of these studies is that no particular therapeutic technique is more effective in inducing positive change than any other. What these studies do not explicitly state, however, is exactly why this is the case: because the *love* in the relationship has healed the individual and, thereby, induced them to engage in the ordeal of therapeutic change.

In other words, love can be thought of as the specific tool of psychology: “After all research on psychotherapy is accounted for, psychotherapy still resolves itself

into a relationship best subsumed by the word love” (Burton, 1967, pp. 102–103). Gordon Allport drew similar conclusions over 50 years ago: “Love is incomparably the greatest psychotherapeutic agent” (1950, p. 80). Psychodynamic therapy is probably the most staunch advocate of love in the therapeutic situation, justifying this approach based on the etiology of psychopathology:

This kind of parental love ... agape ... is the kind of love the psycho-analyst and psychotherapist must give the patient because he did not get it from his parents in sufficient measure or in a satisfactory form. (Guntrip, 1953, p. 125)

In fact, it could be argued that the only reason for engaging in therapeutic technique at all is precisely to create a circumstance within which to engage this therapeutic encounter—for *this* is what heals.

The usual understanding of love could be put like this: The conditions under which one experienced love and happiness growing up (e.g., oedipal complex) are those which allow them to experience love and happiness now, as they are replicated. As a result, love and happiness are thought to be contingent on these conditions—and these conditions are, themselves, contingent on choices made relative to them. But, in truth, these are merely the conditions on which the individual consents to release their Illusion of Relatedness—and even at that, usually only temporarily. They are merely the *conditions* under which love occurs—not the very *substance* of love.

Indeed, it is sometimes thought that the *objects* of one’s love are the source of happiness (Bacal & Newman, 1990; Hamilton, 1992). Yet, this understanding considerably overstates the case. It is not *what* you love that is the source of happiness but, rather, a far more significant gesture of submission: *that* you love—regardless of what happens as a result. And doing so puts one into the position of learning the essential lesson of spiritual life—which is not merely to be loved, or even to be loving, as might be suggested by the practice of compassion and kindness (Das, 2001; Piburn, 1993), sometimes known as karma yoga (Dass, 1995). Rather, the essence of spiritual life is literally this: *to be love*. Indeed, the essential orientation of this admonition could be thought of as follows: *Reduce your life to intimacy*. All else follows from this.

Consequently, spirituality is not about being better adjusted or espousing a better social ideal—even if for the admittedly useful purpose of getting confused and willful people to behave better. Rather, the purpose of spirituality is actually this: *enlightenment*. To access or invoke God, one must *reverse the flow* of attention and put attention not on one’s self but on God. Reversing the flow cuts out the middleman, so to speak, not only putting one in direct, immediate contact with Awareness or Consciousness Itself, but also Divine Love-Bliss. “Radical” Non-Dualism is the direct perception of reality in its ultimate and unadulterated state—

whether phenomena arises spontaneously within it or not. In this way, one is put in a most auspicious position:

At first, This Tacit, Direct Self-Realization Shines In the world and Plays “Bright” Demonstrations On the waves. ... At Last, The “Brightness” Is Indifferent (Beyond “Difference”) In the Deep—There, Where Primitive Relatedness Is Freely Drowned. And, When “Bright” Self-Recognition Rests Most Deeply In Its Fathomless Shine, The Play Of Motions Is Translated In Love-Bliss-Consciousness, Pervasive In The Water-Stand—and, Like A Sea of Blankets, All The Deep Unfolds To Waken In the Once Neglected (Now Un-Covered) Light Of Self-Illuminated and Eternal Day. (Adi Da, 2006, p. 373)

The recommendation of “Radical” Non-Dualism is to put your attention on God, for this is the source of Love-Bliss. As one surrenders and releases (i.e., transcends) their identification with the ego-“I,” the contents of the Grid of Attention simultaneously aligns with the underlying substrate of Love-Bliss. In this way, the prior reality of Love-Bliss naturally asserts its own influence, aligning the contents of the grid accordingly. In a manner of speaking, as one releases their hold on the ego-“I,” the tension within the rubber band snaps back into place. Better said, as a result of this process one’s native state is simply revealed:

The Truth (That Sets The Heart Free) Is Not That the Apparently individual (or Separate) self (or ego-“I”) Is itself Immortal and Divine ... but ... That There Is *Only* Real God (The Real, The Truth, or That Which Is Always Already The Case). (Adi Da, 2001, p. 186)

It is in this way that one’s well-being is most directly connected to its greatest succor.

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