

A Transpersonal View of Integral Theory: Disentangling Notions of the Soul

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Abstract: This paper examines basic elements of a transpersonal view of integral theory. It begins by making a distinction about view. It then examines references to the soul in some of Wilber's works and makes observations related to aspects of the view presented there. It then presents a view of soul as a unit of awareness and explores how this view addresses a number of common issues in transpersonal perspectives. It concludes with a brief look at some implications of this view for integral theory.

Keywords: Soul, transpersonal, unit of awareness, Wilber.

Introduction

Many years ago I volunteered to teach public speaking to a grade six class at my daughters' elementary school. What I found was that they needed far more help learning to listen than to speak, so I began working with some simple relaxation techniques, and gradually built on these to help them gain better control of their attention. The culmination of this was a field trip of the imagination to give them practice at directing their attention. We decided to go to Venus, as it required sufficient imagination to do this. The next week they each gave a talk on their experiences. While some described a version of old Star Trek reruns, a few told of experiences so vivid that it was more real to them than being in the classroom.

Did these kids just have really good imaginations, or was it possible that their phenomenological reports of the degree of reality they felt during this experience was somehow based in an innocent or naïve awareness or view that allowed them to be open to perceiving reality in a radically different way?

While the transpersonal has long been a key part of integral theory and aspects of it remain prominent in some circles, a number of implications of it have in many ways been placed in the background. This is the result of an effort to allow integral theory to gain traction with a larger, more mainstream audience. This shifting of focus is appropriate, as there is no need to scare people off by confronting them with concepts that may keep them from exploring the aspects of integral theory that have practical utility for them within a more conventional or mainstream context. At the same time, there may be implications from taking a transpersonal view of integral theory that can allow for a reframing of such issues in a way that makes a real difference.

It is from curiosity about this possibility that I wish to engage in exploring the territory of what integral theory could look like from what I have called a transpersonal view. The entire scope and implications of this are well beyond what can be accomplished in this brief paper. So to begin, I will focus on laying the groundwork for articulating one aspect of such a view – notions of the soul.

A Note before Beginning

In order to do this, I would like to begin by pointing to a distinction between view and perspective that has been articulated by Bonnitta Roy (2008). It has been common to say that from an integral framework, reality is all about perspectives. In *Integral Spirituality*, Wilber (2007) writes: “This **Integral Post-Metaphysics** replaces perceptions with perspectives, and thus redefines the manifest realm as the realm of perspectives” (p. 58, emphasis in the original).

Such statements have a domain of validity, in this case a quite large one – the “manifest realm.” As with anything, there is an implicit element to such a statement. In this case we can imagine what is implicit fairly easily, as in many places Wilber also clearly talks about the

way in which Spirit is not only “the highest level in the holarchy, but it’s also the paper on which the entire holarchy is written” (Wilber, 1996. p. 38). In this sense, Spirit is transcendent of and not contained by the term manifest realm.

However one can frame reality slightly differently. Roy makes a case for showing a conflation of one meaning Wilber uses for perspective with the notion of view. Perspective is seen to; in one set of cases be related to things like methodological pluralism and in another to be like first, second and third person perspectives. In the third meaning Wilber incorporates the concepts of emptiness and form and their non-dual integration with the notion of emptiness and *view-as-perspective* and their non-dual integration (Roy, 2008). Roy goes on to say that this entails a category error, conflating epistemological with ontological meaning.

The process model, however, attempts to move from the notion of *perspective* to the notion of *view* by making a sharp distinction between the epistemological field through which the categories of knowing arise *as perspectives in a cognitive occasion*; and the ontological dimension of *view* which is a-perspectival and of a different sort entirely. (p. 3)

I draw attention to this because I wish to take a different *view* of integral theory in general, and notions of the soul in particular. This may entail looking at it from different perspectives as well, but I want to aim at maintaining some focus on the ontological (in the sense Roy (2006) uses the term in her Process Model) dimension of the topic. By this I mean that I am holding this *view* implicitly as I write and introduce the subject of inquiry here. What is implicit in my *view* is how I frame and use the perspectives being explored. As well, I will be clear up front that while this implicit view is informed by exposure to a number of intellectual and academic theories, it is primarily informed by personal experience generated through long engagement with a spiritual practice.

The Soul in Integral Thought

Opening Position

While I have long admired the articulation of the Kosmos that Wilber presents, I have always been unsure of the degree to which it also reflects my own view. This questioning fuels the inquiry that follows into some of Wilber's explanations of the soul. Given his Buddhist background and orientation, it is not surprising that he does not place the kind of emphasis on the soul found in other traditions. However he does not negate it entirely and of course does give the transpersonal domain a good deal of attention. Here I will aim to disentangle some subtle threads of thought that may be entwined in slightly different ways between our views as a way into the *view* I wish to present of the soul in integral theory. This will then provide a foundation to later on explore in more depth the implications of this shift in view for other aspects of integral theory.

Early on in my encounter with Wilber's writings, I resonated with and appreciated his ability to make a clear, cogent case for anti-reductionism. For instance, In *A Brief History of Everything* (1996), he states:

Many cosmologies have a materialistic bias and prejudice: the physical cosmos is somehow supposed to be the most real dimension, and everything else is explained with ultimate reference to this material plane. But what a brutal approach this is! It smashes the entire Kosmos against the wall of reductionism, and all the domains except the physical slowly bleed to death right in front of your eyes. (p. 19)

I encountered this kind of reductionism while participating in the Journal of Consciousness Studies list serve where the vast majority of participants approached the subject with a clear and often explicit (at least after some prodding) assumption that consciousness was merely a byproduct of material processes in the brain – the firing of neurons, or quantum micro-tubules enacting dendritic webs in Mexican hat dances – whatever the process. There were a few who

would be willing to entertain transpersonal notions as part of the realm that consciousness could explore, but when pressed it was clear that these indulgences still had to somehow be squeezed into the materialistic assumptions of reality. This of course led to many amazingly complex and cunning philosophical juggling acts. I always thought there must be a simpler way.

These musings on a common distaste for reductionism provide one example of the many ways in which Wilber's presentation of integral theory resonates with me. To enter into the weave of thoughts around his conceptions of the soul, Wilber (1996) goes on from blasting reductionism to frame the dynamic of evolution by showing how matter is transcended and included by life and in turn by mind, soul and spirit. Wilber clearly shows that there is a kind of telos or evolutionary drive that goes well beyond simple material evolution leading to the current forms of consciousness and life we see today. There is a "spiritual opening in the Kosmos" (p. 27) that allows for creative acts of punctuated evolution. I find myself on board with this aspect of his view.

However, I also come across language that appears to me to at least imply an element of Wilber's view that I might see differently. Wilber (1996) writes that "the very Spirit within us is invited to become self conscious . . ." (p. 42). The language of "Spirit within us" presumes a notion of "us" that has at the very least mixed within it an implicit identification with the body and mind first as the "us" that Spirit is within. Shortly after this he also says: "Maybe the evolutionary sequence is really from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit" (p. 42). This appears to me to further reinforce the sequence of identifying first with the body, then the mind before notions of soul emerge. And this fits perfectly well with the flow of logic Wilber presents. In the "manifest realm" evolution proceeds as indicated above, from matter on "up." One last illustration of this point occurs in discussing a chain of dependence between these levels. "[I]f you destroy the biosphere . . . then the cosmos or physiosphere could and would

still exist. But if you destroy the physiosphere, then the biosphere is instantly destroyed as well” (p. 33). He goes on to show how the sphere of the mind, while transcending and including the body and matter, is ultimately dependent upon them for its existence.

While Wilber does not here go on to extend this to a notion of the soul, the logic is clear. If the matter, body and mind are not present to support the “emergence” of soul as a higher form of manifestation, then it could and would cease to exist. As well, we find this statement: “The genuinely spiritual or transpersonal stages of development . . . depend for their development upon all of the previous developments” (p. 150). Thus there is a case to be made that at least one thread of Wilber’s view on the soul places it as dependent upon the prior development of matter body and mind.

This is not seen as the case for Spirit. Being the “paper on which the entire holarchy is written” (Wilber, 1996. p. 38), Spirit is both transcendent of and immanently present in the manifest realm. The key difference that the evolution of consciousness deals with is the degree of realization of the presence of Spirit. “But this *realization* is *not* given *equally* to all beings, even though all beings are equally manifestations of Spirit. This *realization* is the result of a developmental and evolutionary process of growth and transcendence” (p. 39). Thus in this view Spirit has a place that is not dependent on evolution in the same way.

Wilber goes on to frame how he sees these stages of identity arising. “But the self appropriates these rungs, or *identifies* with them, and this generates various types of self-identities” (p. 142). It could be presumed then that while not using the term soul as one of the stages of this identification, one could place it in the higher or “transpersonal” levels as the self-identity that emerges there. This places it as a kind of perspective or epistemological category in Roy’s distinction.

It could also be seen from the way Wilber lays out his evolutionary path that soul is simply a stop along the way, transpersonal in that it transcends (yet includes) the mind and body. The

realization of this self-identification arises only after successfully completing the earlier stages, although one can have such a “state” experience at any level. It is also apparent from this view that the realization of self as soul, at least in the manifest realm, is dependent upon the previous stages of matter body and mind: “We have already seen that the major stages of the self streams . . . *depend* on the competences developed by the previous stages in that overall stream” (Wilber, 2000. p. 216).

Thus while there is clearly not a reductionistic or materialistic identification with the body or mind as self and there is a clear view that soul is transcending and including the body and mind, soul is not presented in the same category as Spirit, the full realization of which only emerges at the end of the evolution of consciousness in the manifest realm. This ties back in with the notion of all in the manifest realm being made up first of perspectives. From all of the above, I perceive Wilber’s view to be that soul is a perspective we can adopt as a self-identity at the transpersonal stage of the evolution of consciousness.

A Slightly More Refined Notion

However, a slightly more refined view of the soul can also be found. Wilber’s (2000) *Integral Psychology* opens up a slightly more nuanced description of the soul’s place in the integral scheme of things. This begins in a similar vein to the above description, wherein the soul is viewed as an almost intermediary stage.

In the archeology of the Self, we are at the point where the soul has emerged from the interior depths of the mind . . . when the last layer of the Self is peeled into the purest emptiness . . . then Spirit itself, as ever present awareness stands free of its own accord.
(p. 108)

While this view of soul as a stage of development is one aspect, it is not the only way in which Wilber describes this. There is also the expansion or evolution of consciousness vein;

“your soul expands to include the entire Kosmos, so that Spirit alone remains, as the simple world of what is” (p. 108). This is followed by a long paragraph of poetic description of this phenomenon. What I notice here is that the language points to it being “your” soul. Who then is the you that has this soul? It is questions like these that lead me to discerning differences in view being present. I will attend to reframing around this below.

A little further on, Wilber (2000) adds a slightly different and more nuanced twist to the relationship of soul to the previous stages of development. In the context of his distinctions between the gross, subtle/psychic and causal/non-dual domains, he proposes that the self “might actually be *several different streams*, each developing relatively independently” (p. 125). He calls these selves the frontal, corresponding with the gross realm and made up of the stages of ego development from sensory motor to centaur (or vision-logic), the deeper psychic corresponding with the subtle realm and the Witness corresponding with the causal realm.

In this framework, “the soul (or deeper psychic) is the self that adapts to the subtle realm” (p. 126). As well, alongside the stages of development of the ego or frontal self, “the soul (the psychic subtle self) can follow its own trajectory, unfolding its own holarchical stream” (p. 126). Wilber here describes the soul as a line of self development that adapts to the aspects of the subtle realm such as imagination, reverie, daydreams, transcendental illuminations and so on.

Wilber then equates the “Self” with a capital S as the Witness, “the self that depends upon the causal line of cognition (the capacity for attention, detached witnessing, . . .) . . . and thus it is the Self that drives the transcend-and-include Eros of every unfolding” (p. 127). He also calls this the “radiant Self, the purest emptiness that can impartially reflect, and therefore embrace the entire manifest domain” (p. 127).

Another View of the Soul

I would like to take another *view* on the soul, a different nuance on the framing Wilber provides. While Wilber (2007) describes soul as a kind of intermediate stage or related as “the level made of higher mind or soul” (p. 251), it is possible to reframe it. In the more recent *Integral Spirituality*, Wilber articulates his Buddhist orientation as he describes the view that its training provides. “Buddhist training does many things, but it is particularly a state-training that deconstructs one’s identity from mere gross ego, to subtle soul (or the root of the self-contraction), and finally to no-self Self” (p. 136). I see this move as a way to indeed deconstruct identity, but will frame what remains slightly differently.

The approach Wilber takes in regard to the soul reminds me of the “neti neti” view of trying to describe God, reality, of whatever trans-conceptual nature we are pointing to. We can say that it is *not this*, and *not that* as a way of stripping away false images. While there is a logic to this approach, there is also a desire for a positive articulation. This recognizes the limitations of language and the demands of adequatio which recognizes that we must have something within us already to have a knowing of what is spoken about. A conscious awareness is one level of this – an unconscious one another – and it could be that a good articulation can bring awareness or realization to the unconscious knowing that exists. It is in the spirit of this positive approach that I will offer some remarks in this direction.

In Oxford last September, I (Reams, 2007) presented a brief paper that put forward a reframing of the concept of the soul. I opened my paper by saying this.

I have a Jesuit friend with whom I have had an ongoing conversation about the nature of the relationship between human persons and soul. What I hear from his theological perspective is that we human beings have a soul, kind of like we have a liver or a right foot. The underlying connotation is that we are this physical body and that any idea of a soul must be some kind of appendage and somehow situate itself in relation to the body.

I would argue that this did not make sense to me. I said that from my view, humans are transient and temporal (we live and die in time) while soul is eternal and various other qualities of a transcendent nature. How could the transcendent end up as an appendage of the transient? It made much more sense to me that the foundation of being human was soul, and that the relationship between soul and being human was that soul was having human experiences.

This is a simplified version of my view, but presents the essential distinction between it and the view that infuses most people's understanding of who we are. Above, I pointed to Wilber's language of "your soul" and asked who exactly then is the "you" that has this soul? In the quote above, I point to the seeming incongruity of soul as a transcendent being somehow being "had by" a body of transient nature. In the spirit of finding a simpler way, I proposed that it seems more logical that the transcendent should be that which can have the transient as an aspect of its experience.

But what do I mean by the term soul? I will define soul as a "unit of awareness." In the context of the above exploration of Wilber's view of the soul and Spirit, I find my view is simply that what Wilber (2000) calls the Witness is what I would call soul; "the purest emptiness that can impartially reflect . . . [and] the capacity for attention, detached witnessing" (p. 127), or "a unit of awareness." If I reframe Wilber's Witness as soul, then what becomes of his notion of soul? I think that his description and language of a psychic self covers it just fine. There is no need to add the label soul to the more specific description of a psychic self. Wilber's linking of psychic or subtle realms of consciousness with soul can be seen as a difference of cosmological framing between us.

There are of course many other bodies of literature that address various cosmological frameworks along these lines. Sri Aurobindo's description of a psychic being as the individual soul has seemingly influenced Wilber. Other traditions, in addition to positing the existence of

a higher self or soul, also describe a series of planes of existence that we have corresponding bodies for. Among these are Theosophy, Surat Shabd Yoga, Hinduism and the Rosicrucians. The Rosicrucians for instance describe seven such planes along with seven bodies of man. Among these and other traditions there is a variety of terminology used to describe what is meant by the term soul. For my purposes, in defining soul as a unit of awareness, I also imply that we are this unit of awareness and that all of the “bodies” described throughout such traditions, be they material, emotional, mental, subtle or psychic, are something we/soul “have.”

To expand the context for my own view of this, I will briefly examine some of my previous writing in this area. Earlier, I (Reams, 1999) defined consciousness as “soul’s relationship with embodiment” (p. 318). This was in the context of embodiment seen in terms of Bohm’s (1992) notion of thought as a system, where thought contained not only thinking and the mental realm, but also the emotional and physical aspects of our existence. While this framing focuses on the personal domain, it can also be related to the larger framework of domains or planes of existence described above. Thus embodiment can also refer to the physical, emotional (astral/vital), akashic (causal/memory/lower mental), mental, etheric (subconscious or intuitive) realms, domains or planes. All of these are conceived of as being within the worlds of duality, and thus qualitatively different than the non-dual realms.

In my article I framed soul as “what has been described as one’s higher self, spirit, transpersonal beingness, or the essence of our lived experience” (p. 318). The quality of this essence was seen as non-dual, thus not contained within, or dependent upon, the entire realm of duality. It is also the “I” of our direct unmediated experience and awareness in Deikman’s (1996) description of self as awareness. I wrote:

Deikman (1996) talks about this as “the subjective sense of our existence” (p. 350). He equates “I” with awareness. He distinguishes between I and self, saying that “This ‘I’

should be differentiated from the various aspects of the physical person and its mental contents which form the ‘self’” (p. 350). He goes on to note that “our sensations, our images, our thoughts – the mental activity by which we engage and define the physical world – are all part of the observed. In contrast, the observer – the ‘I’ – is prior to everything else” (p. 352). For Deikman, who we are is awareness, the “I” that observes, and experiences the content of our consciousness. . . . To say that awareness is this ground of consciousness, and that “I” is this awareness, goes beyond traditional ways of framing the issue in substantial ways, as Deikman notes by stating; “Knowing by being that which is known is ontologically different from perceptual knowledge” (p. 355) (pp. 313-4)

This discussion aims to clarify the central distinction I wish to make – between who we are as being soul (*having* human experiences), with the nature of soul being a unit of awareness, and those aspects of our experience within Wilber’s “manifest realm,” the realms of duality, the contents of consciousness, objects of awareness etc. The distinction made in the end quote from Deikman will be explored further below by relating it to the distinction Roy (2006) makes between the cognitive nature of what arises in the epistemological field and the ontological dimension of being.

Other Issues of the Soul

To further examine some of the issues that arise in various uses of the term soul, I will turn to other explorations of the topic and related elements. One aspect of how soul is conceived entails assumptions that intertwine implicit concepts from a reductionistic or materialistic view, such as described above, with those of the implicitly transcendent notions of soul. This often focuses around trying to determine what soul “is.” That is, what kind of “substance” is it? It can also entail a host of other questions that arise, such as how could an *individual* soul

exist? Isn't soul made up such that it must be some kind of collective entity, maybe a worldsoul?

One place I will draw on to illustrate some of these questions is Kelly's (2008) recent approach to the topic of the soul in *Integral Time and the Varieties of Post-Mortem Survival*. While his main focus is on the temporal aspects of the topic (which is a fascinating and worthy exploration all in itself but beyond the scope of this paper), he approaches the notion of the soul by bringing in Fechner's "'daylight view,' which is to say a way of 'seeing' the inherent luminosity or self-radiance of being which we are, and which surrounds and permeates us" (p. 14). This description of luminosity is similar to Wilber's "radiant Self" which as noted I have reframed from the Witness to soul. Kelly goes on to say that: "As Fechner sees it, therefore, the individual soul survives the death of the body in the form of a continuing experience of personal identity which, without losing its specific individuality, nevertheless finds itself in a more 'clear and conscious'" (p. 14). From this description the transcendent of the body nature of soul is clear, and there is a "personal identity" involved in this.

I have long thought that the aversion to allowing any kind of individuality to be applied to conceptions of soul arises primarily from the need to deconstruct the identification of individuality with a separate sense of self as the ego. If one can disentangle the concept of individuality from ego, then it could be applied to soul as a unit of awareness. The unit is individual – its qualities of being do not take the form of separateness, but of wholeness. (See Reams and Roy, 2007 for a detailed description of wholeness).

Kelly (2008) goes on to note that "it is important to distinguish between the belief in a soul *substance*—which, at least in the way it is normally pictured, exists in the same space-time as the body with which it is associated . . ." (p. 23). This issue of substance related to soul is found again as he says "therefore, we must be able . . . to conceive of the nature of the soul . .

. in a way that does not depend *solely* on the image of a single soul substance journeying through time from body to body” (p. 24). This is for me one example of how an assumption implicit within a materialistic view gets entangled with or projected onto conceptions of soul. Positing soul as a unit of awareness avoids thinking about it as any kind of substance. Substance, as Kelly points out, is assumed to be related to material space and time such as found in the physical body. Identification with the body gets carried over into notions of the soul, bringing with it the assumption that soul must consist of some kind of substance, however subtle. This may also be related to Wilber’s positioning of soul in relation to the subtle psychic realms, which are understood as also being of substance, but of a much more refined nature. This is different than Wilber’s causal or non-dual realm which has a qualitatively different nature that could in one way be distinguished as not having any quality of substance.

The Epistemology of Not Knowing

So far I have examined issues of individuality and substance in relation to soul. (I choose here to avoid the use of the definite article “the” prior to the term soul. It connotes a host of linguistically embedded qualities that I feel do not fit with the conception being presented). I would now like to explore some epistemological issues. I will begin by examining Roy’s (2006) *A Process Model of Integral Theory* which presents a relevant distinction for my purposes. In my dissertation (Reams 2002) I had a section on “The Epistemology of Consciousness” that was my attempt at that time to describe what I felt was a different kind of knowing than conventional rational analytical knowing. I framed this in terms of a transpersonal approach, and in hindsight perceive that I was aiming to describe a different quality of being (soul) and the manner in which “knowing” occurs. Currently, I have been talking about the epistemology of not knowing as a way to point to this distinction.

I found that Roy's Process Model makes a distinction that is useful in illuminating the view behind this epistemology of not knowing. She distinguishes between an Epistemological Field and the Ontological Dimension. She articulates the Epistemological Field through the following.

The Process Model suggests that *everything* that arises through the dynamic interplay of complementary forces—everything that is generated in this dynamic field, being composed of dualistic categories, has this dualistic nature. . . . *If there is non-dualistic, non-conceptual thinking* then it must arise through another kind of process—and the Process Model reveals an entirely new dimension. . . . The Process Model suggests that conventionally structured experience—including the experience of thinking—is constituted by these fundamental valences, with their four complementary vectors (forces, aspects). The dynamic field in which all this takes place—represented by those fundamental valences, is considered to be the Epistemological Field, because it generates the ways in which we know reality. (pp. 126-7)

While this Epistemological Field describes how we know in cognitive or conceptual terms, there is also a possibility for a kind of “knowing” that does not fit into the categories described here and thus would be more of a “not knowing.” The domain in which this kind of not knowing arises and the kinds of qualities it has are described to a degree by Roy's (2006) description of the Ontological Dimension. What follows some are brief excerpts that describe central aspects of this distinction.

[T]he first and foremost difference is that unlike the Epistemological Field, where the forces are complementary, the anterior and posterior vectors of the Ontological Dimension are entangled. I use the term “entangled” to convey the characteristics of temporal simultaneity and spatial non-locality; but also to contrast it with the dualistic, trade-off characteristics of complementarity. Entanglement entails omni-directionality,

coherence (unity) of event histories and the like. . . . In other words, the relations among complementary forces in the Epistemological Field create a local point of view, situated in a sense of “here and now.”

The ontological dimension provides no such spatial or temporal benchmark. The anterior is related to the posterior not as a “before” and an “after,” but as a single simultaneity; a resonant and coherent temporal unity. . . . On the other hand, a peak (peek) experience of a higher state of consciousness is an Ontological event—when I have a glimpse of the subtle ground of reality, I experience it both as having come to that realization in time but also as having re-remembered it as always already having been. The Ontological now is significantly different than the epistemological here-and-now; there is a kind of collapse in the feeling, or apperception of time in the ontological now. (p. 130)

This description highlights a few aspects of the qualities of knowing associated with the Ontological Dimension. They point to aspects like non-locality, non-temporality, (similar to Kelly’s (2008) inquiry noted above), and state experiences. She goes on to further explain the differences in knowing between the two.

The second difference is that reasoning from the Epistemological Field is inherently dualistic, indeterminate, and unsolvable; it is a kind of reasoning that creates infinite complexity. This accounts for the quintessential characteristic of that field, which is unlimited movement. “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” is an impossible question. Questions are not solved in the ontological dimension—they simply don’t arise there. . . . This is a simple analogy, but many of our deepest spiritual questions, questions of involution and evolution, the nature of unbounded wholeness, the infinite regressions of the self, and the like, come to us in a similar fashion. (pp. 131-2)

It has been said that questioning is a characteristic of the mind and mental domain or plane of reality. For soul, questions are not relevant. As Roy says, they simply do not arise. The “not knowing” occurs in this ontological domain, and not in the relative cognitive epistemological domain. She goes on to make three points that help make clear some of the ways the Ontological Dimension is different.

1. The ontological does not contain the epistemological, nor vice-versa; neither should it be imagined that the epistemological somehow arises from the ontological, or vice-versa. Neither can be seen as a greater whole or lesser part in relation to the other.
2. It is a common mistake to construe the ontological as being an interior state, relative to the epistemological, but the relations of interiority-exteriority are strictly epistemological relations.
3. An ontological understanding cannot be elucidated in a narrative form that benchmarks or fixes a starting point. . . . An experience of ontological discovery comes simultaneously with an experience of re-remembrance. In addition, it cannot be the case that the ontological comes before (in time), nor after, the epistemological. (p. 133)

For me, all of this suggests that the Ontological Dimension as described here is characteristic of the domain of soul. The epistemology of not knowing is a description of the mode of knowing of soul and the qualities of how soul as a unit of awareness operates.

Conclusions

What follows from this is that as this individual unit of awareness we enter into the domains of duality, which are constituted by characteristics from the Epistemological Field. Thus the planes of existence referred to above are contained within this field and as soul we take on the appropriate sheaths of subtle and psychic “bodies” even down to taking on a physical body as a means of experiencing in these worlds. The “we” that experiences is able

to, through these bodies, be present to and engage with other souls and the natural worlds that exist in these planes.

In looking for a “simpler way” to explain the many aspects and implications of transpersonal experiences, as well as many aspects of life in general, the elegance of Occam’s Razor comes to mind. From the complexities of our attempts to try and understand the transpersonal from a human view, the simple but powerful shift in view to being soul and having a human mind/body allows these complexities to dissolve.

There are many implications for how this view impacts integral theory. Some are compatible with existing articulations of it while others may throw a different light on the subject. Some brief examples of these include; our ideas about stage development and the possibilities inherent within a given lifetime or the emergence of pathologies framed as karmic manifestations. How we chose as soul to grow from our experiences in this lifetime (Hillman 1996; Newton, 2000) can be seen to impact where, when and how we manifest circumstances in our life, whether it is as parents, culture, traumatic experiences etc.

Another aspect of this is to view ego development as spiritual unfoldment. The perils in this could be to presume higher cognitive development equaling higher spiritual development. A transpersonal view might offer a wider frame for this, showing how our stage of cognitive development within any given lifetime might also simply be a contingent choice available from a range of experiences available based on our much larger frame of growth and development as soul.

The transpersonal view of integral theory I aim to present is based on the foundation laid out in this article of making explicit the *view* that arises for me from taking the transpersonal as primary. Seeing self as soul having human experiences in physical, emotional and mental bodies and defining soul as a unit of awareness allows the groundwork to be laid for future explorations of the implications of this view for integral theory.

It is hoped that the articulation of this view laid out here finds a kind of phenomenological resonance in the souls that read it, much like the grade school children described in the opening who possibly had more than just good imaginations. In aiming to perceive reality in a different manner than many of the more dominant and deeply embedded mental or epistemological structures, I have aimed to open a space for the possibility of this kind of leap of imagination.

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