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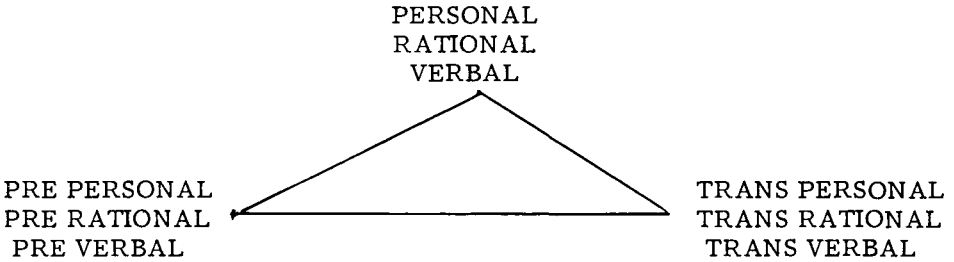
John Rowan

POLITICS AND ECSTASY

In replying to Nigel Collingwood's article, I want to acknowledge what an attractive article it is, and how much it is in the kind of area which needs to be tackled. But there is, I believe, a very important error in it, which is worth dealing with in some detail. He says that ecstatic experiences have their origin in pre-natal life. And then he says that it could either be the life of the foetus, or even the life of the blastocyst, which give us the original template on which later transpersonal experiences of bliss are modelled.

It seems to me that this is actually to distort and devalue the importance of transpersonal experiences in a very serious way. If this is all they are, then they are just illusory - an unconscious projection

which has no validity and no real meaning. Far from this being the case, it seems far more valid to look on transpersonal experiences as being of a different order from prepersonal ones. The prepersonal experience is ignorant, dumb and poor. The transpersonal experience is wise, poetic and rich. Ken Wilber puts it this way:



Any attempt to reduce one of these to the other he regards as an example of the Pre/Trans Fallacy. The normal process of personal and spiritual development takes us from the pre-personal world of the **pleroma** (the very earliest stage of development, where no distinctions or differentiations have yet been made) through foetal life, birth, childhood and adolescence to the maturity of the mental ego. And then the **same** process takes us on, if we will let it, through the biosocial bands, the existential self, the transpersonal bands, the subtle self and the causal self to Atman, to the Ultimate.

And far from it being the case that the later features are built on the earlier ones, Wilber explains how we can see it in just the opposite way, so that it is the earlier features that are built on the later ones. It is Atman which is fundamental, and all the other stages are there, one after the other, in layer upon layer, to disguise from ourselves the fact that Atman is what we fundamentally are and to which we ultimately need to return. All the things we believe we want are only substitutes for Atman, for ultimate reality.

Well, the facts are always friendly. If this really is the truth of the matter, it can only do good to be aware of the truth. Politics, like life, is largely about doing the obvious, rather than searching for the subtle or recondite. One of the worst things about politically-motivated people is their one-sidedness and their inability to listen. Often they feel somehow that they have to turn themselves into wooden soldiers whose only job is to follow orders and crush all opposition. Opposition with awareness is different from that - we fight while listening all the time, and so we can stay flexible. We never forget that those who are opposing us are also somewhere on their own

spiritual path, and usually quite genuine in thinking they are acting for the best. We never forget that they are suffering human creatures too.

And also we don't inflate them. There is a tendency in politics to see oneself as little and the other guy as big. But if we are in better touch with infinite sources of energy, we are much stronger than people who are relying on their own limited and blinkered ego. If we are in touch with a world-wide network of support, we are better off than people who have no resources beyond themselves.

Most important of all, perhaps, we don't get caught in the trap of patriarchal consciousness. This is one of the hardest traps of all to avoid, and Marx and Reich certainly didn't avoid it altogether. By seeing the development of the whole spiritual path, we can become aware of how disastrous it was in the West when the patriarchal takeover destroyed the Goddess-worship, and made us all into emotional cripples - one-sided parodies of the human. By redressing this balance, by rethinking and re-feeling this whole terrifying story, we can carry on our political struggles in a more human spirit, using all our most creative talents to enable change to take place.

And by having these enormously deep roots, we can avoid panic. Panic is the great enemy of any kind of adequate action in the political sphere. Rooted in the spiritual, we can act with a full heart - not one which has been emptied in the interests of eliminating all weakness. Being a whole person in politics is not a weakness - it is strength. Panic is paralysing or clumsy; spiritual strength acts effectively, decisively, sensitively, creatively.

This is all so new - I don't really know what I am talking about. This is something I am just beginning to see, and feel, and understand. But the books mentioned at the end may help to fill in the story, for anyone who is interested.

Politics and Ecstasy: Booklist

Coover, Virginia and others (1981) **Resource manual for a living revolution**. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

How-to-do-it workbook about nonviolent direct action and social change - many useful hints and tips.

McAllister, Pam (ed) (1982) **Reweaving the web of life**. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

An anthology of articles, poems, stories and other documents about feminism and nonviolence.

Macy, Joanna Rogers (2984) **Despair and personal power in the nuclear age**. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

The main book about Despair Work and the theory and practice which has grown up around it. Good theory and good exercises and other practical aids.

Wilber, Ken (1977) **The spectrum of consciousness**. Wheaton: Quest.

This is the book where he explains most fully about the way in which we start from the Ultimate, and gradually cover it up.

Wilber, Ken (1980) **The Atman Project**. Wheaton: Quest.

This is the one which best explains the whole spiritual map and the seventeen staging posts on the way down the spiritual path.

Wilber, Ken (1983) **Up from Eden**. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

This is the one where he tells the story of the patriarchal takeover and its disastrous consequences.

Wilber, Ken (1983) **Eye to eye**. Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday.

This is the one with the chapter on the Pre/Trans Fallacy. It also contains a number of other fascinating chapters on science, cults, etc.