

The Pearl Beyond Price - Integration of Personality into Being an Object Relations Approach

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Chapter One The Man of Spirit and the Man of the World

At a certain age, very early on in life, each one of us becomes aware of himself or herself as a walking, talking, thinking, feeling being—in short, as a living person. It is such a luminous discovery, but it quickly becomes dull with familiarity. Then we live our lives as if we now know what it is to be human, as if maturing were only a matter of becoming more of what we think we are already. The mystery is gone, and life becomes tedious and repetitive.

In this book we want to lift off the veil of familiarity. We want to inquire into the mystery of being a human being, a person. We want to explore the potential of being human. What is the extent of this potential? What is a truly mature and complete human being like? How will he and she experience themselves and the world, and what kind of lives will they lead?

We begin our enquiry by contrasting two poles of human experience. At one end of the spectrum is the experience of what we will call "the man of the world," the individual who is busy living a personal life, trying to find personal fulfillment, working on strengthening and expanding himself. It is an accepted and approved concern for a human being, in most societies, to seek personal happiness, fulfillment and autonomy, in the process of building a personal life, as long as it is not at the expense of others. This has become the dominant view of man in modern societies. The personal life is the core of most human activities; what is called a public life is still a personal life, related to the person, and lived for persons. In our exploration we will examine in a new light the conviction that living a personal life centered around the person is its own value and end.

Contrasted to the perspective of the man of the world is the view of what we will call "the man of spirit," which considers a higher spiritual reality to be the true and proper center of real human life. The most profound teachings regarding human nature, those of the most accomplished and liberated of human beings, of the founders of the major religions, spiritual movements and philosophical systems point clearly, unequivocally and exclusively towards the life of selflessness, egolessness and surrender to a higher reality. One teacher after another, one great religion after another, one moral philosophy after another, extol the life of spirit—in which personal life is subordinated to a higher spiritual reality—as the highest and most refined, most fulfilled and only true life for man. Humanity is exhorted to move towards making the personal life be governed by spiritual values, and towards embracing the universal and impersonal truths, which are beyond self and personality.

Thus, the main difference between the perspective of the man of the world and that of the man of spirit is that the first considers the separate personal self to be the center of life, and personal life to be its own value and end, while the latter makes a higher reality to be the center of life, and believes that the personal life must be subordinated in relationship to such a higher reality. In Luke 9:23 Christ

states: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it."

In Islam, the Koran asserts a similar stance. For example, in the following passage, the statement is that dying for God is the right course, implying that the personal life in this world is not as important:

"And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay (they are) alive, but you do not perceive.

Who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: Surely we are Allah's, and to him we shall surely return.

Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course."

The Far Eastern spiritual traditions go even farther than the prophetic tradition in denying the importance of the personal life. In the Dhammapada, a major Buddhist canon, the Buddha states:

"No one is higher than him,
who will not be deceived, who knows the essence,
who has abandoned desire, renounced the world,
and lives untouched by the flow of time."

[Translated by P. Lal, The Dhammapada, p. 72]

Nevertheless, the life of the man of the world consists largely of the fulfillment of personal desires. The personal self is the sense of being a separate entity. It is not only valued; its real existence as an entity is taken for granted by virtually everyone. This personal self has been the focus of study of Western depth psychology, ego psychology, object relations theory, developmental psychology, self psychology, etc. An eminent psychologist says in a book devoted to its study:

"While no one can agree on exactly what the self is, as adults we still have a very real sense of self that permeates daily social experience. It arises in many forms. There is the sense of self that is a single, distinct, integrated body; there is the agent of actions, the experiencer of feelings, the maker of intentions, the architect of plans, the transposer of experience into language, the communicator and sharer of personal knowledge." [Daniel N. Stern, The Interpersonal World of the Infant, p. 5]

Western psychology shares the common cultural perspective that the self is and must be the central axis of life. Its view regarding the personal self can be seen as the expression and crystallization of the view of the man of the world cast in scientific language. It considers mental health the expression of a strong, cohesive personal self with a separate sense of identity. The founder of self psychology puts it this way:

"Mental health is often defined by analysts, in harmony with the remark ascribed to Freud (Erickson, 1950, p. 229), rather loosely and extrascientifically as a person's ability to work and to love. Within the framework of the psychology of the self, we define mental health not only as freedom from the neurotic symptoms and inhibitions that interfere with the functions of a "mental apparatus" involved in loving and working, but also as the capacity for a firm self to avail itself of the talents and skills at an individual's disposal, enabling him to love and work successfully." [Heinz Kohut, The Restoration of the Self, pp. 283-284]

The importance of the self for object relations theory in terms of understanding psychopathology can be seen in the words of James Masterson:

"However, this additional dimension of a focus on the self (defined as an intrapsychic entity), when kept in concert with the other perspectives of developmental object relations theory, can lead to a broader, more inclusive and comprehensive concept of the borderline and narcissistic disorders as disorders of the self." [James F. Masterson, *The Real Self*, p. 19]

An important part of our exploration in this book will be to study in detail and in depth the findings of depth psychology, especially those of object relations theory, and relate them to the spiritual perspective of the man of spirit. In fact, such findings will aid us tremendously in understanding the various levels of the spiritual view of man, as we will see in subsequent chapters. In this chapter we are describing in some detail the perspective of the man of spirit because it is less known or understood. In Chapter Two, we will focus in more detail on the perspective of the man of the world and its center, the personal self, by discussing how it is understood by object relations theory.

The man of spirit not only subordinates the self to a higher reality, but sometimes goes further to deny its fundamental existence. The highest realization in Buddhism, for instance, is that ultimately there are no separate, independent and intrinsically existing persons. The Buddha repeatedly stated this as in the following passage from the Diamond Sutra: "It is because no Bodhisattva who is a real Bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being or a separated individuality." [Translated by A. F. Price and Wong Mou-Lam, *The Diamond Sutra and The Sutra of Hui Neng*, p. 26]

Lao Tzu, the legendary founder of Taoism in China, the reputed author of the *Tao Teh Ching*, equates trouble with the belief in the individual self; in one of the stanzas in the book, he observes:

"People are beset with great trouble because they assert that there is an individual self. If they take nothing personally, then what can they call trouble?"

[Translated by Ni Hua-Ching, *Complete Works of Lao Tzu*, p.9]

These two approaches to human life are diametrically opposed to each other. The most well-known profound teachings about human nature point one way, and humankind in general is going another way, or at least so it seems.

The contradiction between the two perspectives is not only an appearance; it is quite real and has far-reaching consequences for human life and for the course of human evolution. They are divergent paths, each with its own values, aims and consequences.

One might be tempted to believe that the spiritual teachings are simply the opinions or beliefs of certain individuals or religious systems, which are not meant to apply to all people. But this is far from the truth. All major spiritual teachings stress impersonality, universality, selflessness, egolessness and the denigration of the personal. It is true that the various traditions differ in their emphasis and outlook; but they all extol selflessness, egolessness and the surrender of personal life to higher reality. The Far Eastern traditions generally see the ultimate human nature as impersonal and universal. Enlightenment, and hence, liberation and fulfillment are seen to be the consequence of realizing that the individual is a

mistaken idea and that his true nature is the ultimate truth, whether that is seen as God (Hinduism), Tao (Taoism) or the Void (Buddhism).

The prophetic religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) consider the human being an individual soul who needs to live a life of surrender to God's will, egolessness, selflessness and virtue. Reward is understood to come in the afterlife. Jesus Christ, in his Sermon on the Mount, makes this clear:

"Happy are you when men insult you and mistreat you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. Rejoice and be glad, because a great reward is kept for you in heaven." [The American Bible Society, The New Testament, p. 9]

However, the mystical side of the prophetic tradition tends to be closer to the Far Eastern view of the ultimate nonexistence of the person. Mystical Christianity conceives of God as the ultimate ground and being of the individual, as the following text clearly indicates:

"He is your being and in him, you are what you are, not only because he is the cause and being of all that exists, but because he is your cause and the deep center of your being...

And thus, also, he is one in all things and all things are one in him. For I repeat: all things exist in him; he is the being of all." [Edited by William Johnston, The Cloud of Unknowing, p. 150]

This view of the oneness of all existence in God indicates that the existence of a personal self is not ultimate, and that salvation is the realization of this oneness. The great Sufi author, Ibn 'Arabi, goes even farther and asserts that there is nothing but God:

"And for this the Prophet (upon whom be peace) said: "Whoso knoweth himself knoweth his Lord." And he said (upon him be peace): "I know my Lord by my Lord." The Prophet (upon whom be peace) points out by that, that thou art not thou: thou art He, without thou; not He entering into thee, nor thou entering into Him, nor He proceeding forth from thee, nor thou proceeding forth from Him. And it is not meant by that, that thou art aught that exists or thine attributes aught that exists, but it is meant by it that thou never wast nor wilt be, whether by thyself or through Him or in Him or along with Him. Thou art neither ceasing to be nor still existing. Thou art He, without one of these limitations. Then if thou know thine existence thus, then thou knowest God; and if not, then not." [Ibn 'Arabi, "Whoso Knoweth Himself...", pp. 4-5]

As we see, these teachings are unanimous in their evaluation of personal life as less important than some "higher" realm. What does this mean? Does it mean that the majority of humankind are completely astray, are so wrong and ignorant and completely out of touch with their nature that they go in the exact opposite direction from where they should be heading?

Many people, of course, believe just that: that the life of the world is antithetical to the life of spirit and truth. In fact, most of the great teachers have stressed that the life of the world is not the religious or the true life. But let us not hasten to conclusions.

It is possible, of course, that the majority of humankind are astray, are on the wrong path to human fulfillment. However, this does not explain why they are all on the same path! Why is it that all humans are pursuing personal happiness, wanting to lead a personal life where self and individuality are valued and

cherished? In other words, if the ultimate goal of the human being is the universal impersonal truths of Spirit, why is it that all humans end up with an ego, with a self and a personality? Can it be just a mistake, a colossal mistake? And if it is, then why is it made so universally?

In this book, our interest is to understand the nature of the human being in a comprehensive way, a way that makes sense of the normal experience of most individuals while retaining the deepest insights into human nature, as seen in the most profound spiritual discoveries of mankind. We will introduce an understanding about human nature by contrasting the view of the man of the world, the usual perspective of most people who take the person and the personal life to be the center of human nature and concern, with the view of the man of spirit, the spiritual perspective of most religions that man's nature is ultimately spiritual, and human life must be governed by selflessness and egolessness. The most extreme position of this latter perspective is that self and individuality do not have an ultimate or real existence. This extreme position, although not shared by many spiritual groups, nevertheless remains a common and central contention for the most advanced teachings of most spiritual traditions, especially the mystical ones. More specifically, we will contrast the experience of most people that they are separate individuals, entities in their own right, with the contention of many spiritual traditions that the ultimate reality is a state of oneness of being and unity of existence, and explore the relationship between the two.

We are well aware that not all people who are interested in spiritual life consider the ultimate reality to be that of oneness or unity. The spiritual perspective covers a wide range, from the religious perspective of living a life according to divine commandments, to the spiritual one of finding a connection to a higher reality, to the mystical view of uniting with God or realizing the oneness of existence.

In this study we will focus on the second and third views as the purest expressions of the man of spirit, and will use them in our contrast with the view of the man of the world. Which one of these we will be using at each point will be obvious from the context, when not stated explicitly. So in developing our understanding of what a complete human being is, we will contrast these opposing points of view, that of the man of the world who believes in the reality and centrality of the personal self and that of the man of spirit who considers such a personal and independent self not to have any ultimate value or reality.

Some might believe that these perspectives are not dichotomies, that one can be a self and a person and live a personal life in a spiritual and universal way. This is in fact the perspective of most individuals who are either at the beginning of their inner journey, or are among the many people who consider themselves religious. We are here using "religious" in contrast to "spiritual." It is, furthermore, the social ideal of most human societies. However, regardless of the merit or truth of this perspective, it is still not the view of some of the most advanced teachings. These teachings make it very clear that to live a true and spiritual life is to abandon self completely. In fact, many teachings assert that there is no self in any real way. The Buddhist teachings, especially, emphasize this "no self" perspective. The Dalai Lama, the head of Tibetan Buddhism, writes:

"As I may as well emphasize again, the teachings of no-self-soul is upheld by all schools of Buddhist thought since all alike recognize the atman-view that is

adhering to belief in some permanent soul-entity, as the root of all trouble." [The XIVth Dalai Lama, *The Opening of the Wisdom Eye*, p. 94]

Others might jump to the conclusion that maybe it is possible to live a selfless personal life; that is, to be a human person, living a true personal life of work, love and knowledge, but without having a self. But even this hope is dashed when we inquire deeply into some of the profoundest teachings. Selflessness means egolessness, which means absence of the person. The late Nisargadatta Maharaj, one of the most profound Hindu Vedanta teachers in India, puts it this way:

"There is no such thing as a person. There are only restrictions and limitations. The sum total of these defines the person.... The person merely appears to be, like the space within the pot appears to have the shape and volume and smell of the pot." [Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, *I Am That*, p. 204]

These teachings unequivocally state that the universal truth or the impersonal spirit is just that; there is no self and no person. They are not saying necessarily that personal life is bad; what they are stating is something much more fundamental. The assertion is that there is no person or self, which negates the existence of a person who can have a personal life. According to this perspective a personal life, i.e., the life of a person, is false; it is unreal, only an illusion. Enlightenment then is seen as simply seeing through this illusion.

As we have mentioned, this is the teaching specifically of the Far Eastern spiritual traditions, those of Buddhism, Taoism, Zen, Vedanta and the various forms of Hinduism. In the prophetic tradition, the Hebraic-Christian-Islamic teachings, the emphasis is not on the unreality or absence of self and personality, but on negating their importance and the importance of a life based on them. We will see later on that the prophetic tradition does give some value to personal life, but personal life is meant in a sense different from that of the man of the world.

There are, of course, those who believe in the "true self" or the eternal soul. But the true self is not taken usually to be personal. It is seen as infinite and boundless and impersonal. It is certainly not the personal self of the man of the world. In the case of the various teachings of Hinduism, self is equated with the Impersonal Spirit. The self is usually referred to as the "atman," and the impersonal spirit as the "Brahman." Mircea Eliade, in his comprehensive study of Indian spiritual systems, writes about the Upanishads, one of the main spiritual texts: "The great discovery of the Upanishads was, of course, the systematic statement of the identity between the atman and the Brahman." [Mircea Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality, and Freedom*, p. 114]

A common resolution of the contradiction between the perspective of the man of the world and the man of spirit that many people complacently live with is that human beings are persons who can sometimes experience eternity, universality and impersonal spirit. These people usually take the view that they are the ego which sometimes surrenders to a larger or more universal reality. But according to the teachers who say that the true reality is impersonal and devoid of any hint of ego or personality, we are the impersonal and universal spirit or Being, always and forever. Sometimes we take ourselves to be a person or an ego, but this is a transitory mistake.

Some people accept these profound teachings as true, but, unable to resolve this contradiction, continue to live a personal life, which they believe is somehow

false, in the hope of one day transcending it into the universal impersonal realm. And some actually do transcend the person and the personal life, or so they say.

This, however, does not resolve or eliminate the contradiction. Living the impersonal life of universal truth is clearly possible, as has been demonstrated by some of the above quoted teachers. But this does not explain away the question of ego, the pursuit of personal happiness and the belief in personal life. Transcending a situation is not necessarily the same as resolving it.

We see that it is possible to live a transcendent, impersonal and universal life. But what does this mean about being a human being? What is a human life then, from this perspective? Is it just a way station, a meaningless gap full of suffering between our origin as the absolute reality and the final realization of the same reality? This is exactly the import of many of the teachings.

But what an absurdity to think that we come from an absolute reality of impersonal truth, live a personal human life of suffering, and then go back to the selfsame absolute reality.

Of course, in the state of absolute impersonal transcendence there is no concern and no question about the contradiction. The mind is silent. There is stupendous peace and wordless contentment. This is taken to be the answer by some teachers; there is no question, so no answer is needed. Still, this not a true resolution. A true resolution must satisfy all parts of the human being, including the mind. A state of impersonal peace and stillness is not the answer. Whenever the mind is there the question is there too. The answer, if there is one, must be at all levels, and must satisfy all parts of the human being, even his logic, if it is going to be a complete answer.

This is not to reject or devalue the truth of impersonality and universality. This truth remains the ultimate reality, the absolute nature of man and of all existence. Still, we are exploring human nature and human existence in order to understand human life in its true perspective. We put our inquiry so far in the form of a question: is it possible to understand ego and personality in a way that gives a meaning to the orientation of most of humankind, without contradicting the spiritual perspectives?

The perspective of most spiritual teachings is that ego is a falsehood, and hence it must die for there to be truth. We will show that this is true, but that it is not the whole truth. We will show that the ego, with its sense of self and personality, has a truth hidden within its nature, a truth that is not necessarily visible from the transcendent and impersonal state. We will show that ego is a reflection of a truth, an attempt to imitate an absolute and eternal reality. In fact, we will explore how ego is nothing but a failed or aborted attempt at a real development. We will show that ego is a reflection, an imperfect one indeed, but still a reflection of true reality, the reality of the true human being. We will see that by understanding ego, rather than transcending it, we can understand and actualize the reality of what it is to be a human being. Only through this understanding and realization can we see what human life is.

We will see that this truth that ego tries to emulate is what most people are seeking in their personal life, and that realizing this truth of what it is to be a human being is the aim of humanity.

Humanity is in a sense astray, but there is a pattern to this way of existence which, when understood, reveals the true nature of the human being. Only this

understanding will heal the schism and resolve the contradiction. The true human being, what we will call the Personal Essence, is the resolution of the contradiction. It is the integration of both points of view.

From our point of view, the man of spirit has half the truth, and the man of the world has the other half, concealed behind a reflection that is taken to be the truth. In our exploration we will discuss some of the eternal truths, which are known in some of the spiritual traditions, and are not revealed, but instead kept as precious secrets, given only to those who genuinely seek.

However, we will sometimes use the modern language of psychology, and the findings of ego psychology and object relations theory, to convey these truths in a manner appropriate to our time.

The approach we are giving here can be seen as radical from the above points of view. The Personal Essence, which is the subject of this book, is neither "spiritual" nor "worldly." It is the true human being, the personal presence that is devoid of falsehood, without being impersonal.

This is not envisioned as possible by many spiritual teachings, although it is not the personality of ego. However, it is what makes the nature of ego and its concerns intelligible.

An important consequence of the understanding of the Personal Essence is a new perception of the life led by most people, the perception of a spiritual truth or an essential element in the heart of all ego strivings. This means that in fact most of humankind are not astray in the usual sense of the word, but are after something real and precious. The difficulty lies in the fact that they do not know how to find it.

The qualities of the Personal Essence are those of fullness, autonomy, competence, respect, dignity, integrity, excellence, maturity, harmony and completeness, among others. There is very little knowledge and guidance in the modern world about how to develop into such a true human being. The result is that most of us settle for an imitation or an incomplete development, which is the personality of ego.

Understanding that ego is a reflection, or an imitation, of a true reality makes it possible to connect to this reality. One need not go the usual spiritual route of abandoning one's personal life and the values of that life, but rather one must look deeply into those values and explore the true reality that they are approximating. Most people are not willing to abandon their personal life for a spiritual quest, not merely because of attachment to ego, but because they sense a truth in the values and aspirations of personal life. For such people, the overwhelming majority of humankind, understanding the reality underneath ego is a more accessible means of spiritual development than the traditional methods striving after impersonal reality. This is not only because in this method they do not have to abandon their personal lives and aspirations, but also because this path reveals the deeper values and truths of those aspirations and strivings toward actualization.

The path of the Personal Essence not only brings about the development of the real human being, but also opens an easier way to the realization of the impersonal universal reality. The reason that realizing the life of the Personal Essence is a more accessible path for human beings than the realization of the absolute universal reality is that the ego is a reflection of the Personal Essence, and hence ego can be used as a stepping stone towards it. The reason the realization of

the Personal Essence makes entrance into the universal and impersonal realms much easier is that these realms are part of the natural and spontaneous development of the Personal Essence.

The Personal Essence allows us to see the meaning and the potential of a fulfilled human and personal life, a life of truth, love, dignity and harmony, which includes the usual human concerns of work, family, creativity, accomplishments and enjoyments of all kinds.

One of the few teachers who has seen this possibility and given it its due importance is the Indian teacher and philosopher Sri Aurobindo, who was not satisfied with his transcendent and impersonal states of enlightenment, and who worked towards the actualization of a liberated human life. Writing about Sri Aurobindo and his work, one of his students says:

"It is not enough for us to find our individual centre without the totality of the world, or the totality of the world without the individual, and yet less to find the supreme Peace if it dissolves the world and the individual—"I do not want to be sugar," exclaimed the great Ramakrishna, "I want to eat sugar!" And without the individual what meaning would all the marvelous realizations have for us, for we are no longer then." [Satprem, Sri Aurobindo, or The Adventure of Consciousness, p. 177]

This book is an exploration of the Personal Essence—its nature, and its relation to the ego and to the transcendent impersonal reality. Our method is the realization and development of the Personal Essence through the understanding of its reflection, ego. The presence of ego points to the reality of the Personal Essence, just as the existence of false gold indicates the existence of true gold.

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