

Humane endogenous development

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'To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.'

Nelson Mandela

Introduction

I approach the question of worldviews and endogenous development as a teacher, and as one who, like so many, is moved by widespread global violence and economic inequities. What is it about worldviews that results in the identity politics of Iraq where Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds all vote along ethnic or religious lines? Or in Darfur where issues of identity cut deeper leading to Arabs (Janjaweed and Sudanese leaders) perpetrating mass killing and rape against their Muslim brothers and sisters who are 'black Africans' from non-Arab tribes (Kristof, 2006). Or what is it about worldviews that has led to such a large and growing divide between the rich and the poor? The economist Joseph Stiglitz, among many others, has repeatedly emphasised 'market failures' that have led to a decrease of median income in the face of increasing per capita GDP, and to 100 million more in poverty than ten years ago (Stiglitz, 2005). What can I, as an educator, offer in the face of these tragic realities of today's world? I will not offer an alternative or 'better' worldview, but rather I would like to articulate here a larger perspective from which we can understand the role of worldviews in human life, and especially how one can learn to move between them, to transcend particular worldviews while simultaneously honouring each of them. I believe only in this way will the crises I have mentioned be addressed at their root.

When I turn to the task of education, I am aware that the view I have of the maturing human being profoundly affects my educational philosophy and its objectives. If I hold an impoverished view of the human and of human relations, then the education I offer will reflect that limitation. If my worldview is one-sided and static, my way of meeting the student, as well as the interpretation I give of history, politics and even science will mirror my biases. Perhaps most important of all, what view of human development do I hold? Do I allow for cognitive, social, and spiritual development as well as physical growth and information acquisition? The cognitive and social sciences have researched human development and we have much to learn from their results. In what follows I will suggest that what we now understand concerning human development and transformation can also be of great value in understanding the endogenous development of peoples and nations.

One senses that the conceptual underpinnings of international development are inadequate to guide policy properly. As in education, I believe that at its core this deficiency is a reflection of the impoverished view international development

institutions have of the human being and her or his potential. This impacts the development not only of the individual but of human societies as well. Our conventional conception of the human today focuses almost exclusively on the physical development and health of the individual, together with other material factors affecting their life; likewise the analysis of human society gives short shrift to the non-material and non-economic factors. As a result, too often policy is likewise driven by entirely material concerns resulting in interventions aimed at increasing GDP, technology transfer and the like. While few would argue against economic or physical development, far too little attention has been paid to an integrated development concept that attends to the social, environmental, cultural and spiritual dimensions of the local populations. Even within the recent World Bank Comprehensive Development Framework the factors with which I am concerned make little appearance. My interest here will be to suggest that an adequate and humane conception of endogenous development can and should be built on a more comprehensive understanding of human and societal development generally. To this end I will consider research-based contemporary understandings of psychological development of the individual, as well as recent advances in the new area of transformational learning. Against this background I ask, what might be the relevance of these insights to the understanding of international development?

Beyond puberty, adult human development is frequently ignored. The great exception to this is the contemplative spiritual traditions, which have seen the full unfolding of the human being as their perennial goal. For thousands of years these traditions have had a transformational view of humanity's development, and they have evolved many practices that promote this development. These traditional views have received support from current research in neuroscience, developmental psychology and educational studies. Neuroscience has discovered that the nervous system is capable of remarkable change, even in adult life. Such 'neuroplasticity' allows profound adaptation of the human mind. Studies of violinists and London taxi drivers both show enormous development in the regions of the brain associated with their respective vocational 'practices.' Tibetan Buddhist monks have been studied and that research convincingly demonstrates that long-term meditation can lead to remarkable changes in the activation of particular regions of the pre-frontal cortex. These are only outer reflections of inner changes that take place at a soul-spiritual level, but they do indicate that the human being is open to transformation at every level of their nature. Transformative education works with this reality.

Paralleling the idea of transformative education is the research of developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Howard Gardner and Robert Kegan. They have done extensive research into cognitive and emotional development, moral reasoning, and identity formation. In what follows I will use Robert Kegan's formulation of five increasingly complex 'epistemologies' as a framework for my discussion of both human and societal development (Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). Then when we return to the idea of transformation we will better appreciate what is transforming.

I first propose to sketch the contours of an epistemology of intimacy and participation, that is, an epistemology of love, which extends scientific and scholarly inquiry in ways that need not be viewed as problematic to academic teaching or to our research disciplines. I would then like to describe some of the main elements of a

course I have taught with an art historian, Joel Upton, at Amherst College. Entitled 'Eros and Insight,' it attempts to embody something of this way of knowing, and to take up the challenge Rilke presents to us all: the challenge of learning to love.

Content versus form

The content of education is vast, indeed infinite. Everyday more information is available, new research, political changes, and business news. All demand our attention. Education is largely comprised of acquiring this information, and in schooling the skills needed to take up and transmit information through reading, writing and mathematics. However, supporting all this content is a 'form' or structure to our cognitive and emotional life that goes largely unobserved. I am anxious to turn our attention to this hidden container or 'frame of reference,' as Jack Mezirow termed it, because I am convinced that the solutions to Darfur and economic inequality (among many problems) lie at this level of human nature and not at the level of skills or information.

A frame of reference is a way of knowing or making meaning of the world. Enormous amounts of sensorial and mental data stream into human consciousness, but somehow that stream is brought into a coherent meaningful whole. At first sight it may seem that such meaning-making is an entirely natural and universal process, and to some degree it certainly is. Evolution has incorporated reflexes and drives deep into the human psyche. But the way we make sense of the world is also conditioned profoundly by societal forces; that is we are socialised into a worldview that operates largely unconsciously and behind the scenes, but which profoundly affects the way we understand what we see, hear and feel. According to the Leo Apostel Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies (CLEA) Belgium, 'a worldview is a map that people use to orient and explain the world, and from which they evaluate and act, and put forward prognosis and visions of the future.' In the course of a lifetime we may shed one worldview and adopt another. For example, we may be born in Asia and learn to find meaning with a Taoist-Confucian society, and then move to Europe where we change our worldview fundamentally. In other words we can change the structure that makes meaning for us.

In addition to this, however, is a second process is also at work, one that is more subtle and, for us, important. Kegan calls it a 'metaprocess that affects the very terms of our meaning-constructing. We do not only form meaning, and we do not only change our meanings; we change the very form by which we are making our meanings. We change our epistemologies.' (Kegan, 2000: 52-53) Constructive developmental psychology shines the light of self-consciousness on these changes in epistemology.

As young people, we are often completely unaware that we live within a particular, culturally-bound way of knowing. A sudden change, for example by moving to live within an alien culture, can be an awakening experience. We discover that people within the new culture 'do not think like we do.' Whether or not we adopt the alien culture as our own is not the issue, but we become aware of the existence of alternate ways of making meaning, and these alternatives are as coherent as our own. What Kegan and other research psychologists have discovered is that there are several

stages in the way we construct meaning. That is, the very types of epistemologies we use and our self-consciousness of them can change profoundly. What is meant by this formal language will be made clear by speaking more concretely.

Kegan distinguishes five levels of 'epistemological complexity.' Our interest lies with the top three:

- The Socialised Mind
- The Self-Authoring Mind
- The Self-Transforming Mind.

The child operates from a concrete, personal point of view (stage 2). Sometime around late adolescence most youth begin to internalise the values and ideals of their surrounding milieu. They learn to think more abstractly and logically; they learn that they carry responsibilities that endure in the absence of their parents, and that may be in conflict with the values of others. In short, they become well-adjusted responsible young adults. At this point they have attained the stage of 'socialised mind.' This epistemology comes with established roles. These may include man is the breadwinner and the wife is the home maker, etc. (or the opposite). The basis of meaning-making is authored not by the individual but by society, thus the name of this level. It is essential to note that it is of no consequence to us *what* the values or mores of the society are. In a second society, the wife may be the breadwinner. What matters is that the youth has been psychologically shaped by the actions and words of his elders so that his interpersonal relations, his values, his very understanding of the world are coherent with that of those around him.

The worldview of fundamentalist Islam provides a clear basis for a meaningful life. It may well be in deep conflict with the worldview of most Americans. Both societies bring up their children to be good members of that society, that is, they are socialised to the values and views of the Islamic community. Especially in the case of fundamentalists, the values and views of the community are held to be superior to all others, even to the point of violent suppression of the worldviews held by others. All actors in the 'clash of civilisations' (or of worldviews) are at the same stage of epistemological complexity, in Kegan's language. The answer to ethnic or ideological conflict is, therefore, not to replace one worldview with another, but instead to add to it another often missing element, *empathetic understanding*. When we become self-conscious of both our own worldview and that of the other, as different as the two may be, we can awaken in us the fire of compassionate and empathetic understanding. This requires a great deal, but it is always possible. Through such a process we come to appreciate, even if we do not adopt, the worldview of the other. Later in this paper I will describe the characteristic features of an epistemology that includes within it genuine empathy, and I will relate this to the contemplative and transformative traditions of learning. Before turning to that subject, we need to take up levels four and five because self-consciousness and empathetic understanding often drive a shift in epistemological complexity.

Identity and individuality

In his powerful little book, *In the Name of Identity*, the Lebanese-born French writer Amin Maalouf examines the question of identity in our time. He is well-aware of the polar dangers of two extremes. One appears when one's identity is derived from race, ethnicity, or religion, and can all too frequently lead to intolerant fundamentalist attitudes toward those outside of one's own identity group. The consequences of this for politics, economic inequity and even violence were a tragic part of Maalouf's childhood in Lebanon. He is, however, also simultaneously mindful of the bankruptcy of the opposite extreme in which one's identity is lost entirely and society fragments. A force of social cohesion is required, but one that is not based on intolerance. He writes, 'in the age of globalisation and of the ever-accelerating intermingling of elements in which we are all caught up, a new concept of identity is needed, and needed urgently. We cannot be satisfied with forcing billions of bewildered human beings to choose between excessive assertion of their identity and the loss of their identity altogether, between fundamentalism and disintegration.' (Maalouf, 2003: 35) The basis for addressing this dilemma can be found in ourselves.

None of us is pure stock. We are all racially, ethnically and religiously mongrels – mixed breeds. My father was born speaking Polish to an illiterate mother in a working class family; my mother was a Daughter of the American Revolution from Virginia and a graduate of the elite William and Mary College. The increasing diversity within ourselves mirrors the global community of which we are more and more a part. If we can learn to live with ourselves, and I mean *all* parts of ourselves, then we can learn to live with all members of our global community. Rather than hide the interior diversity we all carry with us, Maalouf suggests that we accept it and, indeed, even use it as the basis for defining our unique identity.

This strategy dovetails with Kegan's stage of Self-Authoring Mind. The individual steps back from the collective, becomes self-aware, notices the incongruities between his or her birth culture and the particular values held by him or her now. He or she 'thinks differently' from the others. In fact one notices that no one thinks quite like I do; the values held are my values alone, my path through life and the meaning I derive from it are not captured by one formula or tradition. Success in life is different for each and every person. Each individual has their own changing worldview. Kegan connects self-authorship with modernism; it is a natural part of mature adult development today, although not all attain it. Yet self-authorship brings with it the problem which Rainer Maria Rilke and Rudolf Steiner saw as the main characteristic of our age, 'solitude' or *Einsamkeit*. In his letters to the young poet Franz Kappus, Rilke wrote,

To speak of solitude again, it becomes always clearer that this is at bottom not something that one can take or leave. We are solitary. We may delude ourselves and act as though this were not so. That is all. But how much better it is to realise that we are so, yes, even to begin by assuming it. (Rilke, 1954: 50)

Here too, as individuation and self-authorship appear, a second countervailing impulse is required, namely the empathetic understanding we associate with love. Without this force, the individuation of consciousness (which I take to be a boon) can lead to the atomisation of society into disconnected, selfish monads. We need to learn how to simultaneously respect and even, in Rilke's language, 'stand guard over the

solitude of the other' as an act of love. This can become the basis for what Maalouf seeks when he writes, '... a new approach to identity... seen as the sum of all our allegiances, and within it, allegiance to the human community itself would become increasingly important... without destroying our many individual affiliations.' (Maalouf, 2003)

The moving actions of Nelson Mandela were remarkable not because of his efforts to free his black brothers and sisters from apartheid, but that even after decades of brutality and discrimination he sought to protect the freedoms of all peoples of South Africa. This was for him the true measure of freedom; not my freedom but our freedom. In his autobiography he wrote, 'Freedom is indivisible; the chains on any one of my people were the chains on all of them, the chains on all of my people were the chains on me... To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.' (Mandela, 1994: 624) Only this sentiment grants reality to the words spoken by Mandela at his inauguration. His past nemesis de Klerk was on the stage with him, sworn in as second deputy president. Against the vivid background of historical and continued racism, Mandela could declare, 'Never, never, and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another...' (Mandela, 1994: 620) With these words a country turned away from revenge and reprisal killings, and towards the patient and painful search for truth and reconciliation. This was an act of empathetic understanding, an act of love. Mandela's epistemology, his way of making meaning supported freedom for blacks and whites in South Africa.

Circles of affection

Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, not only wrote the *Wealth of Nations* (1776) but also an earlier work, a *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).¹ In the latter he considers, among other things, the views concerning moral development advanced by ancient Stoic philosophers such as the first-century philosopher Hierocles. Of interest to us is the Stoic idea of *oikeiōsis* or circles of natural affection. The word *oikeiōsis* stems from the Greek root *oikos*, which referred to the private realm of the household, and stood in contrast to the public realm of the *polis*. The moral view represented by the word *oikeiōsis* holds that our greatest affections are for those closest to us, namely ourselves and our immediate family. As one moves out from this centre to ever wider circles, our natural affections become less and less strong. We are closer to those in our city or extended family, for example, than to those who are only citizens of the same nation. We can imagine concentric circles of natural affection with ourselves at the centre, our family within the second circle, and with all of humanity represented by the largest circle. The Stoics argued that by the use of reason alone, it should be possible to collapse the circles into one another, or equivalently we could extend to the outermost circles the strength of affections normally reserved only for the innermost one. Hierocles writes, 'The task of a well tempered man, in his proper

¹ I am indebted to Fonna Forman-Brazilai's paper, 'Adam Smith as Globalization Theorist' *Critical Review*, vol. 14, (2000), no. 4, pp. 391-419.

treatment of each group, is to draw the circles together somehow towards the centre, and to keep zealously transferring those from the enclosing circles into the enclosed ones... The right point will be reached if, through our own initiative, we reduce the distance of the relationship with each person.’(Hierocles, 1987: 57G) That is, through reason we gradually come to feel for all of humanity as we feel for our mother and sister becoming thereby a ‘citizen of the world’ or Cosmopolitan.

Adam Smith admired the view offered by *oikeiōsis*, but he thought reason incapable of the mighty transformation required to convert the stubbornly selfish individual into a cosmopolitan. Accepting the Stoic arrangement of concentric circles of human affection, Smith emphasised the purely physical or geographic separation between actors over factors such as kinship (‘the force of blood’), religion and racial identity, and he viewed commerce as the primary practical means of promoting cosmopolitanism. For Smith spatial distance translated into psychological distance. We are closest in social feelings to those with whom we interact most frequently and, at least in Smith’s day, that meant with those geographically most proximate. Social capital, to use a modern term, is generated by social intimacy, and therefore physical proximity leads to the trust on which simple social contracts are grounded. I will not follow Smith’s argument further, but only say that in the absence of other means of extending our affections to larger circles, he argued that commercial self-interest, not affection, might knit together a world into a globalised economy.

Adam Smith is largely right, I feel, in his negative assessment of the powers of reason over our affections. Reasoned argument might show us the logic of moral development, but its force is too weak by far to transform us into Stoic cosmopolitans. Today, however, is not the 18th century and Smith’s emphasis on geography is no longer valid. What motivated 50,000 or more people to descend on Seattle in 1999 to protest the meeting of the WTO? CNN interviewed street marcher Carmen Nogales, who said, ‘World Trade Organization policies harm her friends in South America.’ Indeed, the protest was as much about the sufferings of distant workers in garment factories in Asia as it was about threatened environmental laws in California. Our geography of concern had changed dramatically in two hundred years. With the development of global media, the internet and inexpensive international air travel, the plight of the world is graphically brought home to us on a daily basis. International conflicts, starvation, Aids, and economic injustices are as evident to us as is our town politics, maybe even more so. I know more about the violence in Iraq than in my capital city of Boston. Psychological distance is no longer equivalent to physical distance; a better measure would be the air-time and column inches given by major media to the issue regardless of location. This raises the thorny issue of ‘spin.’ Media, government, advocacy groups and even the internet are not neutral brokers of information. Our affections and moral sentiments are open to manipulation by all of these agencies. Be that as it may, the new circles of affection have become distinctly non-geographical. My closest research colleagues are more likely to be in Europe than in Amherst, Massachusetts. The events and issues I care about most may be in Africa or the Middle East. The implications of this for the global economy and for a global ethics are enormous.

I would argue that Adam Smith’s hope for a ‘commercial cosmopolitanism’ has failed. The global economy has indeed brought us closer together as an interconnected and diverse community of nations and peoples, but the trust or social capital that

underlies all economic and human transactions will only be as strong as the circles of affection that we cultivate. The massive economic inequities and corruption so prevalent today will only be redressed on the basis of something akin to the Stoic ideal of *oikeiōsis*. If reason is too weak a force to effect the transformation, what measures are left to us? This is the point at which the idea of transformative and contemplative education can make a real contribution.²

Transformative and contemplative learning

The way we know today is largely based on a scientific worldview that sees the objects of knowledge as separate from the knower and as open to reasoned analysis. We usually frame ideal knowing as objective, that is to say, without the involvement of the human subject. Such framing has consequences. In a 1993 talk at Berea College, the prominent American educator Parker Palmer pointed out that ‘every way of knowing becomes a way of living, every epistemology becomes an ethic.’ He argued that the current epistemology has spawned an associated ethic of violence. Surely, science has brought enormous advances, but we cannot turn away from the central fact that the modern emphasis on objectification predisposes us to an instrumental and manipulative way of being in the world. As Parker suggested in Berea, our way of knowing does, indeed, grow into a way of living. The implications of this position are large. While I am emphatically *not* calling for a roll-back of science, I am calling for resituating it within a greater vision of what knowing and living are really all about. Adam Smith may well have been correct, but in addition to rational analysis of my moral situation, a deeper and more contemplative approach exists that can work profound transformations on the human being. This re-imagination of knowing will have deep consequences for education, consequences that give a prominent place to contemplative pedagogies. Indeed, I hope to show that contemplative practice can become contemplative inquiry, which *is* the practice of an epistemology of love in place of objectification and separation. Such contemplative inquiry not only yields insight (*veritas*) but also transforms the knower through his or her intimate (one could say loving) participation into the subject of one’s contemplative attention. Contemplative education is transformative education, and I believe the transformation leads precisely to the Stoic ideal of a collapse of the circles of affection.

I view the scientific stance as a symptom of the more general psychological and spiritual malaise I have earlier called solitude. Solitude is the mirror side or inevitable correlate of an increasingly strong development of self and personal identity. As individuals separate from ethnic groups, and as women gradually become authentic individuals, so also does the force and comfort of the collective diminish. Our search for individual identity has the accompanying downside that we dis-identify with other people, groups and with nature.

² The following section is based on a paper given at the Columbia University conference ‘Making Peace in Ourselves and Peace in the World,’ February 2005, and is forthcoming in Columbia’s *Teachers College Record*.

While much has been gained through this process of individuation, achievements which we should not lose, if left to go on indefinitely, we logically end up with a collection of selfish monads. I am convinced that the countervailing force to such fragmentation is not mutual self-interest or rational economic action that maximises utility (as Adam Smith and the economists would have it); rather I believe that genuine empathetic relationships can be and are established between and among us. Increasingly these connections are not between tribes or ethnic and religious groups; they are between self-authoring individuals. Healthy human relationships do not happen automatically; each of us must cultivate them intentionally. Nothing in this realm is given for free.

The same logic holds true for our relationship to the environment. We no longer grow up grooming horses and harnessing draft animals on the farm. In New York City you can go for days without ever walking on the earth. Our relationship to nature must likewise be intentional. The practice of contemplation is an important part of that intentional stance, one which can lead to sustained empathetic relationships.

Having made the intentional turn from isolation to empathetic connection, we are prepared for a contemplative way of knowing, one whose relationship to love will, I think, grow increasingly obvious. What are the features or stages of contemplative inquiry?

- **Respect** – When approaching the object of our contemplative attention, we do so with respect and restraint. Concerning the relationship to the beloved, Rilke maintained that ‘a togetherness between two people is an impossibility.’ (Rilke, 1975: 28) Instead of an easy fusion with the beloved, Rilke insisted that ‘love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other.’ (Rilke, 1954: 45) Likewise, I feel that the first stage of contemplative inquiry is to respect the integrity of the other, to stand guard over its nature, over its solitude, whether the *other* is a poem, a novel, a phenomenon of nature, or the person sitting before us. We need to allow it to speak its truth without our projection or correction.
- **Gentleness** – Contemplative inquiry is gentle or delicate. In his own scientific investigations, Goethe sought to practice what he called a ‘gentle empiricism (*zarte Empirie*).’ (Goethe, 1988: 307) If we wish to approach the object of our attention without distorting it, then we must be gentle. By contrast, the empiricism of Francis Bacon spoke of extracting nature’s secrets under extreme conditions, putting her to the rack.
- **Intimacy** – Conventional science distances itself from nature and, to use Erwin Schrödinger’s (1956/1967) term, *objectifies* nature. Ideally, science disengages itself from phenomena for the sake of objectivity. Contemplative inquiry, by contrast, approaches the phenomenon, delicately and respectfully, but it does nonetheless seek to become intimate with that to which it attends. One can still retain clarity and balanced judgment close-up, if we remember to exercise restraint and gentleness.
- **Vulnerability** – In order to move with the other, in order to be gentle in the sense meant here, in order to participate in the other truly, we must be confident enough to be vulnerable, secure enough to resign ourselves to the course of

things. A dominating arrogance will not serve. We must learn to be comfortable with *not* knowing, with ambiguity and uncertainty. Only from what may appear to be weakness and ignorance can the new and unknown arise.

- **Participation** – Gentle intimacy and vulnerability lead to participation by the contemplative inquirer in the unfolding phenomenon before one. Outer characteristics invite us to go deeper. We are open and so move and feel with the natural phenomenon, text, painting or person before us; living out of ourselves and into the other. Respectfully and delicately, in meditation we join with the other, while maintaining full awareness and clarity of mind. In other words, contemplative inquiry is experientially centred in the other, not in ourselves. Our usual preoccupations, fears, and cravings work against authentic participation.
- **Transformation** – The last two, participation and vulnerability, lead to a patterning of ourselves on the other. What was outside us is now internalised. Inwardly we assume the shape, dynamic, and meaning of the contemplative object. We are, in a word, transformed by contemplative experience in accord with the object of contemplation.
- **Bildung – Education as formation.** The individual develops, or we could say is sculpted through contemplative practice. In German, education is both *Erziehung* and *Bildung*. The latter stems from the root meaning ‘to form.’ The lineage of education as formation dates back at least as far as the Greeks. In his book *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, the French philosopher Pierre Hadot writes of the ancient philosopher, ‘the goal was to develop a *habitus*, or new capacity to judge or criticise, and to transform – that is, to change people’s way of living and seeing the world.’ (p. 274) Simplicius asked, ‘What place shall the philosopher occupy in the city? That of a sculptor of men.’ (Hadot: xiii). Or as Merleau-Ponty put it, we need to relearn how to see the world. In an essay on science, Goethe declared that, ‘every object well-contemplated creates an organ of perception in us.’ (Goethe, 1988: 39) Parker Palmer’s important work also centres on education as formation.
- **Insight** – The ultimate result of contemplative engagement as outlined here is organic formation, which leads to insight born of an intimate participation in the course of things. In the Buddhist epistemology this was called ‘direct perception,’ among the Greeks it was called *episteme*, and was contrasted to inferential reasoning or *dianoia*. Knowing of this type is experienced as a kind of seeing or direct apprehension, rather than as an intellectual reasoning to a result.

Finally, contemplative inquiry is neither dispassionate analysis nor disembodied asceticism. Throughout all its stages there moves a lively, open excitement, a calm longing that animates our interest and keeps us attentive and engaged.

To help us understand the features of contemplative inquiry, I would like to use two citations, one from Goethe, a second from Emerson.

There is a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory. But this enhancement of our mental powers belongs to a highly evolved age. (Goethe, 1988: 307)

In this passage Goethe highlights for us several features of contemplative learning. First, it is experiential learning. What Goethe terms a ‘delicate empiricism’ is also deeply participatory; it makes ‘itself utterly identical with the object.’ Theory (from the Greek root meaning ‘to behold’) is not understood here as ratiocination, as deductive logic, but as I have already stated, as a high form of seeing, what Goethe elsewhere terms ‘aperçu.’ We know by virtue of connection, not disconnection, because we are identical with the object of our attention. Goethe fully recognises that such non-dual awareness is far distant from where we begin, but education is concerned with precisely the enhancement of our mental powers in this direction, with the journey from blindness to seeing.

The second citation comes from Emerson’s essay: ‘The Poet’ where he writes, *This insight, which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees, by sharing the path, or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucent to others. The path of things is silent. Will they suffer a speaker to go with them? A spy they will not suffer; a lover, a poet, is the transcendence of their own nature – him they will suffer. The condition of true naming, on the poet’s part, is his resigning himself to the divine aura which breathes through forms, and accompanying that.* (Emerson, 1926: 278-279)

In Emerson’s universe, the poet is a lover who is capable of ‘resigning himself’ to that which breathes through the forms of nature. He possesses what I have called the capacity for vulnerability, which leads to insight as a high form of seeing called Imagination. In this way the poet distinguishes himself from the spy, and nature consequently permits the poet to give voice to her nature: true naming.

These then are the features of contemplative inquiry and transformative learning. Such an education brings nearer that which had been remote to us, and that which had been alien is now familiar, that is like family. By these means we have taken a significant step towards the Stoic ideal of *oikeiōsis*. The epistemology of separation reinforces our disconnection from the natural environment and from our fellow human beings (especially if they do not look like us). An epistemology of love draws us towards one another, involves us in the other’s world, we participate in their experience, we suffer their suffering and so know compassion not only as an sentiment but as a potent force of moral insight.

The Buddha and the Christ both taught and modelled a spiritual practice that extended the circle of affection normally reserved for family to all humanity, even to one’s enemies. In his sermon on the mount Christ said, *You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if your salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?*

Extend your circle of affection beyond brethren even to your enemies, says Christ.

Within the Buddhist tradition the practice of *metta* or ‘loving kindness’ puts into the form of a meditative exercise a comparable demand of the Buddha. In the Metta Sutra, the Buddha is reported as saying that we should wish for all sentient beings that which we wish for those closest to us.

*Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at well.
Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born,
May all beings be at well!*

In the loving-kindness or *metta* meditation we begin with ourselves, and meditate the phrase, 'May I be happy, joyful, loving and peaceful.' This phrase is repeated and attended to with an open heart directed toward our self. After a time, a second person is called to mind; it should be someone close to us, a family member or dear friend. With them in mind we likewise meditate the phrase, 'May you be happy, joyful, loving and peaceful.' Having held them in mind for some minutes, repeating the meditation, we turn to a third person. In this case it is someone to whom we have a neutral relationship. To this relative stranger we also wish wellness, meditating the phrase, 'May you be happy, joyful, loving and peaceful.' Finally, we select someone who is difficult for us, an enemy. With open heart and generous attitude, we strive to offer them also the blessing, 'May you be happy, joyful, loving and peaceful.' To do this final part of the meditation can be extremely difficult. As difficult as it may be for us, we can remind ourselves of other situations far more demanding. In his Truth and Reconciliation Commission the Rev. Desmond Tutu asked those who had suffered horrible crimes against them to listen to the confessions of the perpetrators and to find it in their hearts not to forget but to forgive. Many, many were able to do so.

Whether Stoic philosopher, Asian teacher or Jesus, the goal is identical, to love one another. Indeed, conventional reasoning is too weak to do the work of expanding our circles of affection, as is conventional education of the intellect. Neither go deep enough to effect a genuine transformation of the human being, one that is capable of bringing about empathetic understanding of others, much less love. Our very ways of knowing, our epistemologies must shift, and this requires a contemplative and transformative form of education. When we consider what the world needs now, when we ask what can we do to meet the horrors of Dafur, and to redress the economic inequities between North and South, I think nothing is more urgently called for than this transformation. Education, peace-building, environmental research, health care, and economics, are practical fields of action that can either be shaped by an epistemology of separation or by one of connection and love. As should be clear, in this instance the so-called developed countries of the North have as much to learn as those of the South. Indeed, if we look at recent history it is in Asia, Africa and South America that we find the leaders in the transformative work I have described: Rigoberta Menchú Tum of Guatemala, Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, José Ramos-Horta of East Timor, the Dalai Lama of Tibet... The leaders of this revolution in human consciousness seem to emerge wherever suffering is greatest. Perhaps it is exactly the unbearable suffering they have endured that breaks them open, dispels fear, and sheds a healing light on everything they touch.

Eros and insight

The art historian Joel Upton and I have twice taught a course at Amherst College that attempts to explore the relations between love, knowledge and contemplation. The course is secular with little reference to techniques of meditation that are taken from religious tradition. Two of the readings are from the Western spiritual traditions (the Beguine Marguerite Porete (d. 1310) and the Trappist monk Thomas Merton), but the remainder are from scientific, philosophic, artistic and literary sources. Last year's group was a class of 30 first-year students from surprisingly diverse backgrounds, racially and economically.

We learned from experience to start with the knowledge pole of the course. Discussions concerning love require trust as well as sophistication, both of which take time to engender in a class. We adopted a slower, more reflective pace for the course. Readings were short and powerful; we asked students to spend time with them and appreciate their force. Papers were very brief (one-page, except for the final paper which was longer), and we required the students to turn in three drafts. Directly and indirectly, we asked them to live the class materials, all of it: the readings, the lectures, our many conversations, the meditations, and their writing. Step-by-step, and one-by-one, we asked them to become increasingly vulnerable to the content of the course and to participate fully. Parallel with the course material, we also engaged students in a series of contemplative exercises. I would like to spend the remainder of my time on these exercises.

I should mention that students quickly realised that Eros and Insight was like *no* other course at Amherst. Several students told us that they had given up on education, becoming cynical about it in high school. They learned to perform whatever was asked, even if it failed to connect to their lives, their deepest questions and most intense longings. Big jobs with big salaries were the material carrots for high performance, and Amherst was merely a means to that end. Set the bar anywhere, and they would jump over it, not out of sincere interest, but because they were smart and well-trained. It took time to win them over, to reawaken in them the root aspiration they all have, which is not primarily about education as an instrument for wealth acquisition. Instead, it is about transformation, development and becoming all they can be. In my 25 years of teaching, Eros and Insight was the most gratifying teaching experience I have ever had. I am especially grateful to the students who trusted us to lead them into new territory and experiences.

The first class

We told them, 'This is the first day of your new life. You have gotten into Amherst College; you are no longer at home; what will you make of this precious life which you begin today?' Then we handed out passages from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854/1966) and Simone Weil's *Gravity and Grace* (1947/1987).

- 'I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.' (p. 61) Here an initial theme of

the course is introduced. What does it mean to go to the woods? Thoreau sought a place apart, in order to live mindfully and deliberately. We will do likewise, setting apart times to be mindful and deliberate, in order that we too can learn to discern the essential facts of life. In the rush of our lives we too often pass them by. As part of the class we will periodically pause, be silent, reflect, and in this patient, quiet way we will learn.

- In Thoreau's (1854/1966) description of the morning we met a second essential theme of the course: becoming awake. 'The millions are awake enough for physical labour; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?' (pp. 60-61) The students had been admitted to Amherst because they proved they could handle intellectual exertion, and what more remained? By the end of the hour, many longed to waken to a poetic or divine life, and so truly be alive.
- Simone Weil (1947/1987) writes of the ubiquitous power of gravity, which is everywhere and orders all things – except grace. Grace alone defies gravity's grasp, but it requires special conditions in order to appear. Weil says, 'Grace fills empty spaces but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it.' (p. 55) Simone Weil evokes the powerful importance of silence, emptiness, openness, the Void. Meditation helps us enter the space of silence and to foster the openness into which grace can appear.
- Quite naturally our conversation with the students moved to a final series of slides showing a Zen garden and a pond with ripples: Basho's (1686/1967) haiku, and their first meditation exercise of five minutes of silence, ended the class.
Breaking the silence
Of an ancient pond
A frog jumped into the water –
A deep resonance.
- The students were to continue the exercise with silence on their own. We assigned a single one-page paper of pure description on the stages and experience of meditating silence. No flights of imagination, or sophisticated scientific or philosophical analysis – only simple, attentive, deliberate, and descriptive prose.

Sustained attention

The second exercise is on sustained attention and the cultivation of the so-called 'afterimage.' Any sense object will do, but take a bell sound. The meditation has three phases which we perform, and a fourth that is grace.

- Sound the bell three times. Listen intently to its form and timbre.
- Even after the bell sound has died away to outer silence, we possess the memory of the bell sound. We can re-sound the bell inwardly. Do so. Listen to its inner reverberation, again and again.
- The third phase is that of silence. Allow the memory of the bell sound to fade, releasing all sound, and opening the attention wide. The appropriate mood for

this state is wonderfully characterised in Lao-Tzu's (c. 500 B.C.E./1988) *Tao Te Ching*

The Master doesn't seek fulfilment.

Not seeking, not expecting

She is present, and can welcome all things. (p.15)

- The fourth phase is not enacted by us, but may presence itself in the silent space thus prepared and sustained. In Buddhaghosa's (AD 350/1975: 143-204) description of the so-called ten *kasinas* or devices (earth, water, air, fire, four colours...) this is called the 'afterimage' phase. During this phase the inner aspect of the bell sound, or other sense experiences used in the same way, arise in the silence or void.

Maintaining openness

True single-pointed attention is, by definition, oblivious to everything outside the immediate field of attention. Contemplative inquiry moves out from sustained, focused attention to open attention. When we release the bell sound we already are approaching this stage of practice. However, it can become the main feature of the exercise by using relationship as the focus of attention. Any comparison will do, but one we have used is the simplest value-scale exercise common to artistic training. Giving the students paper, brush, and black and white acrylic paints, we ask them to make a graded sequence of grey squares that move evenly from white to black.



We use this and other comparison exercises to cultivate a sense for relationship and the inner discernment of difference, which we see as the first feature of contemplative *cognition*. One moves from single states of awareness to the direct perception of differences and similarities. This is a key moment. If we intend to connect contemplation to knowing, to *veritas*, then we must articulate an understanding of contemplative practice that moves from the psychological and health benefits of meditation (which are great) to its cognitive dimensions.

Sustaining contradiction

The fourth stage of contemplative inquiry proved especially challenging for our bright Amherst students. Whenever they have been thrown a problem, they want to solve it. If they encounter a contradiction, they resolve it. Reality is often resistant to this approach, and for good reasons. I lectured them about wave-particle duality in physics and Joel spoke about the artistic tension produced by antagonistic elements in great works of art. We sent them to the art museum in pairs to look at particular portraits

which had the strange habit of looking back. We put one student on one side of the gallery and another on the opposite side. The painting looks at each; it looks in two directions simultaneously. Impossible. The 15th century cardinal Nicolas of Cusa (1453/1960), who recommended this exercise to his monks, called this and similar phenomena a coincidence of opposites. Think about it, hold the contradiction and instead of resolving it, sustain it – practice sustaining contradiction!

But the deep significance of cultivating a consciousness that can sustain contradiction was appreciated only when it came home to our students during one of our informal evening conversations. Several of our racially mixed and ethnically diverse students began to speak about the irreconcilable complexity of their own lives that had caused them great uncertainty and personal suffering for years. Were they Chinese or American, how did the Haitian home they had just left (so full of life, spoken Kréyol and deep religiosity) relate to the life of the pristine mind and raucous campus life they were pursuing here at Amherst? Were they betraying their lineage? Did they need to decide between their contradictory identities? How could they? Their very lives required them to sustain a huge contradiction. As the Lebanese-French writer Amin Maalouf (2003) has put it, it is precisely through the irreconcilable complexities of our lives that our identity emerges. When we deny that complexity, as a society we quickly decompose into warring ethnic and religious factions vying for dominance.

Developing self-love

Only when we reached this turning point were we and the class ready to speak of love explicitly, because the architecture and life of love is animated by impossible contradictions. We long to be one with the beloved without in the least damaging or distorting her. We study the troubadours and their *chansons* which repeatedly sing of love's contradictory nature, as these lines from Arnaut Daniel (n.d.) of the thirteenth century show.

*I never held but it holds me
all the time in its bail Love
and makes me glad in anger, fool in wisdom
as one that never can fight back,
because a man that loves well, cannot defend himself.*

Love is at once painful and joyful, a 'sweet sorrow.' Love can begin with ourselves, accepting and even delighting in the contradictory elements out of which we are composed. Am I a scientist, a poet, or a spiritual seeker? Yes, to all of them. The structures of our institutions of higher education belie this complexity. At best they struggle to capture it through interdisciplinary conversations between representatives from different disciplines. These often play out like negotiations between nations or ethnic groups at the UN. More is required, much more, if we are to integrate these diverse elements without dissolving them, and it starts by leveraging the contradictions in ourselves. This can only happen if we love the contradictions, and so love ourselves.

Developing love of others

The well-known Buddhist loving-kindness meditation allows one to gradually widen the circle of one's compassionate and loving attention. Starting from oneself, we then go on to someone close (a friend, relative, spouse). We wish them peace, joy, well-being... We continue to widen the circle of our loving attention still further to those we do not know well, wishing them also peace, joy and well-being. And finally we choose someone who is troublesome and difficult in our life. Even to them, we wish peace, joy and well-being.

By this time we are reading Plato's *Symposium*, his great dialogue on love. Love, as taught to Socrates by Diotima, is not only practised toward other persons, but also toward beauty in nature and toward the great institutions that embody our highest ideals. Ultimately we love the ideal forms that are reflected everywhere throughout the beautiful in both natural and human creations. The 'ladder of love,' however, leads not only up to the realm of pure forms, but it also descends to the mundane. The closing pages of the dialogue in which the drunken Alcibiades describes in love of Socrates, and dares to speak of the noble life of Socrates, these are testimony to a life lived in love for his students and for his fellow Athenians, as well as the eternal ideals of truth, beauty and goodness, a love which was repaid with a glass of hemlock.

Love of the deed

An important figure in our course at this point is the Beguine Marguerite Porete who lived and died around 1310. In her book the *Mirror of Simple Souls*, Porete (1290/1993) used the new language of *fin amor* as sung by the troubadours in Old Provençal to describe her *amor de loing*, her 'love from afar.' In her case her distant love was not for an earthly companion but for God. Through the intensity of her love for her beloved, she realised that true moral action was not guided by the rules of what she called 'the church of the little,' but by the great church of love. In place of the theological Virtues, from which she declared herself free, she espoused action guided by love alone, quoting St Augustine (A.D. 416/2004): 'Love, love and do what you will.' Her espousal of love as the true guide for action brought her into conflict with certain bishops within the Catholic Church of France. As a result she was arrested, imprisoned, and tried before the Inquisition in Paris. She refused to recant her love and views, and was thus condemned to die by fire for 'The Heresy of the Free Spirit.' At her execution all cried when they saw with what quiet nobility she met her death.

Students are deeply moved by Porete's valiant, though tragic life. We ask them to meditate on Augustine's line, 'Love, love and do what you will,' which was at the heart of Porete's life, and to write on how Eros and insight are here raised to a form of contemplative knowing. After all, Marguerite Porete knew something so surely that she could stand silently and confidently before the greatest scholars of the Paris Inquisition without wavering. Loving love had granted her an insight or *aperçu* for which she was willing to die. To do otherwise would have been to betray her beloved.

Re-imagine your education

Our final assignment to our students was to re-imagine their Amherst College education in light of Eros and insight. They had studied Kepler and Rembrandt; they had read Oliver Sacks, Niels Bohr, Barbara McClintock, Albert Einstein and Werner Heisenberg. They had read the troubadours, Merton, Rilke, T. S. Eliot, and Plato on love. In addition they had meditated on silence, attention, openness, contradiction, self-love, love of others, and love of the deed. What, we asked, should education – their education – be in light of all this? This was their final paper assignment: redesign your Amherst education in light of Eros and insight, in light of the relationship between love and knowledge.

Upton and I ended *Eros and Insight* with an image suggested to us by a pair of students in our initial offering of the course. In its simplest form, the visual metaphor is a doorway or entry composed of two posts with a lintel spanning the space between them. The two posts are a visual metaphor for the course's two parts: Eros and insight. As our students pointedly recognised, Eros can quickly be debased to lust, but insight can also be diminished to instrumental reasoning alone. Yet Eros can also be enhanced to become the lintel of love, which seems to imply that the enhancement of insight becomes love as well, a knowing that is also a loving, an epistemology of love.

In this manner, as it turns out, the task first put to us by Rilke, learning to love, is also the task of learning to know in its fullest sense. Karl Jaspers (1957/1974) quotes Nicolas of Cusa concerning the highest form of human knowing, saying: 'knowledge is here identical with love and love identical with knowledge.' (p. 51) An epistemology of love is not a flight from reason to sentiment. The academy has nothing to fear from contemplative inquiry; indeed, such inquiry is in some measure already part of a covert curriculum that educates for discovery, creativity, and social conscience.

As contemplative educators, I believe that we are all engaged in an important project, one with a long tradition. The project of ancient philosophy was to live a right life, to embody virtue not only legislate it, to engender creativity and the capacities for insight, not only memorise formulae and works of art. As Hadot (1995/2002) puts it, the ancients' education was 'a course of training which would make them simultaneously contemplatives and men of actions – since knowledge and virtue imply each other.' (p. 90)

In his final paper for *Eros and Insight*, Rajiv (not his real name) confessed that he was now unsure what to tell his parents about his career plans. His mother was a nuclear physicist and his father was a neurosurgeon. They expected a six-figure salary for him immediately upon graduation, and prior to the course he had gone along with their expectations. In his final paper he wrote, 'How do I tell them that now the only thing I want to be in life is a lover?' Given his formidable talents, I feel confident that Rajiv will succeed outwardly, but I hope he remembers to live deliberately, to cultivate silence, attention, and relational awareness, and even to sustain contradictions. Then he will be vulnerable to and participate in the mysteries that are everywhere around him. He will move from being a spy to being a lover whom nature will accept. In the process, he will reform himself, shaping organs for cognition, for a high kind of seeing that can constitute true theory. The ethic associated with this epistemology is one he can live by. Since at this highest level, which is the level of deep contemplation,

knowing and loving are one, his actions will be virtuous and his words true. He will, in some measure, have accomplished the greatest and most difficult task of all, that for which everything else is but a preparation: he will have learned to love.

The course I have described is but one of hundreds now being taught around the United States in which a wide range of contemplative practices are being used to explore the benefits to students of a more contemplative pedagogy. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society's Academic Program has acted as a leader in this important work for the last ten years. For details see www.contemplativemind.org.

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