Logos in the Garden of Souls (Part 3)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:18:54

I remember many years ago one of my music teachers saying that General Eisenhower—and I could have that wrong, but someone like that—proclaimed, "I only recognize two pieces of music. One is Yankee Doodle Dandy, and the other isn't." I don't quite know the context or even what he was getting at when he said that, and whether it's relevant that the tune he did recognize was patriotic, nationalistic, militaristic. But imagine or consider someone who has that kind of degree or extent of tone deafness in relation to music. They're really quite unreceptive to music and really quite unperceptive. So what they're perceiving, what they're getting from it is, for some people, staggeringly little.

Now, if such a person were to insist that there is just one tune, Yankee Doodle Dandy, and the rest of it was just random noise, or the rest of it was all actually the same thing, what would you say to such a person if they absolutely insisted that their perception there is reflective of reality? Probably in his case, he's surrounded from childhood with people who seem to be getting something from music—school teachers and others who hopefully kindly explain to him that he's missing something there.

But what if only relatively few people in the society got music? What would happen then? So there were only relatively few people to whom music was very meaningful, full of all kinds of relationships that they could hear between sounds and themes and modulations of key or pitches and harmonies and rhythms and textures. And they perceived a great deal of nuance of structure and shading, evolution and all that, and it had a huge effect on them—on their heart, on their psyche, on the body, on the soul, the meaningfulness.

Imagine if there were just a few people like that in a society where everyone else was more like General Eisenhower. Might it not be then that they were considered somehow a bit, perhaps even pathological, maybe crazy? Maybe some people would think, "Oh, they're just pretending. They're imagining something." And the claim would be, "Well, that's not real. What they're perceiving there and what they feel there, seeing these relationships, these meanings—it's not real."

For me, this is quite an interesting reflection. Is music and those relationships, the relationships between essentially just sounds, pitches, timbres—are they real or not real? It's an interesting question. Is music—and I don't just mean the fact that here's a pitch of so many hertz and this rhythm is twice the rapidity of this rhythm—I mean the whole gestalt of it, including its sense of meaningfulness and beauty and soul and all that. Is that real or not real? Is that even the right question?

Would we better ask: is it important? For some people clearly it's not important, and for others it's extremely important—music, those relationships, the meaningfulness there, the soulfulness, the

heartfulness, the effects on the body, all of that, moving it to dance, or just touching the psyche to the core, stimulating. That's not a question of reality or not reality; it's important.

And another question, rather than is it real or not real: is it soul-making? Is it soul-making? So these questions of what's important and what's soul-making, rather than what's real or not real, are more important or relevant questions for certain areas of our experience—actually for quite a lot in life.

It's also interesting to note, and I know this as someone who was a musician and studied music, that the sensitivity to music, the perceptivity, the receptivity, the understanding and the noticing and the picking up of all kinds of nuances of relationships between what is, at one level, just sound, different kinds of sound—that is developable. So the perceptivity, the capacity of perception, the capacity of the subtleties and nuance, the capacity of understanding concepts there and relationships, and even the degree of effect—all of this is developable, it's trainable.

What if we transfer that whole set of analogies around music and receptivity, perceptivity of perception and conception in relation to music and soulfulness and importance, and transfer that to the perception of nature and the perception of others in our lives or things or the cosmos? Again, we can reduce music just as you can reduce it to the physics of sound—this pitch, that frequency, this timbre with this kind of wave on the oscilloscope—but we are missing something that's more important to us, whose perception we can deepen and open and refine and enrich.

Maybe the same with nature. Maybe the same with perception of others. The imaginal perception that we're talking about, when there's an erotic relationship with music, with art, with nature, with another, with others, with a thing, an object, with the cosmos. So the whole real, not real question is a little misguided there.

And yet you can see how much what is kind of acceptable or the dominant view within a culture can tend to really hold sway and gain an authority just because it's what most people are able to perceive, or it's not what most people are able to perceive. And again, you get the converse as well in history—just the authority of those who claim to perceive something and the reality of what they perceive over those who don't.

And oftentimes this is what you get: apart from the political issues there, you get a clash of realisms, a clash of essentially fundamentalisms. "This is true, all reality is based on this," or "This is real." Someone describes something, a mystical perception, or a spiritual perception, a magical perception—"That's rubbish, it doesn't exist." And the other person says, "They do exist, these stones really are talking to me," or whatever it is. And both are assuming, even if they're not aware of it, they're drawing on, basing their arguments on an assumption of some kind of objective, independently existing reality.

And it doesn't exist like that, or it does exist like that. But that's all that reality kind of means. And people get very charged about this—it's a heated issue, certainly in particular circles.

Some people who oppose giving any importance or place to imaginal perception, mystical perception, or spiritual perception wage a kind of secular crusade. And probably vice versa in history and at present. Someone might say, "Science shows that these things don't exist." But actually this person has not understood science and the whole scientific project. Does it show that these things do not exist? What is the range of science? What does science even purport to be qualified or equipped to investigate? What is the range of the scientific method?

The very structure of the scientific method is to leave out, deliberately, a whole slew of aspects of our being—because it's determined that's not what we're doing in the scientific method. We're paring that away. Something similar goes on with mindfulness as well. One is amputating, chopping off a whole range of other dimensions of our being, of our experience, of our ways of knowing.

A person who says something like that would do well, I think, to investigate a little philosophy of science over the centuries and especially more recently. They might question even what science says about basic realities. For example, the electron—that subatomic particle. No one's ever seen an electron. The reality given to an electron is not the reality of a little tiny billiard ball. That's a model of it. And even that model is not really the model of modern quantum mechanics and science. It has no where, no when, specifically, objectively, independently existing. The electron is no place, and it doesn't occur at any time. It has no particular velocity or mass. It's not really even a thing, as Niels Bohr said. Does it even have existence?

Don't assume that what you learned in high school and what you surmised about science and what it proves or asserts is actually the reality of what someone at the frontiers of science—a particle physicist at the edge, actually doing creative research—would hold.

What anyway is the difference between the scientific method—where I would deliberately put aside feelings, imagination, even ethical values, aesthetic values—that's the ideal of the scientific method. And it's a method, a methodology, not a fact about reality. So what started as a scientific methodology in the scientific revolution and with the Western Enlightenment actually became, over several hundred years, entrenched as an unquestioned fact about reality and existence. Strictly speaking, it's a methodology. It's one way of knowing.

Someone a little more sophisticated, perhaps, who's keen not to give much place to imaginal perceptions—either intrapsychically or in and of the world—or to mystical states of consciousness and perception, would say something else. They would know that the notion of truth is no longer philosophically respectable. If you go using words like truth, it tends to raise eyebrows in certain circles—disapproval and questioning, supercilious questioning, which is fine. But then oftentimes they avoid that word, perhaps deliberately, and make a noise about avoiding that word. But underneath, they're assuming some kind of basic existential reality or facticity, to borrow a fancy, fashionable word from modern philosophy, of our situation.

"This is our situation. We live in a meaningless, material universe of which we are—our consciousness

and our being and our complexity—an amazing evolution out of matter over eons of evolution. Consciousness is an epiphenomenon. Essentially, the world is material. There are no other dimensions, really. And it's finite. We are finite. We're faced by our death and the extinction of all that. And you're trying to pump up the imaginal or mystical perception or things that happen in meditation—ideas about something transcendent that we can open to beyond the senses, beyond materiality, all that. This is just your attempt at consolation because you can't handle the fact of our existential situation."

Of course, they don't use the word truth. They might use the word facticity or something. But the accusation of consolation seeking already assumes that this is the truth. The existential fact is what you seek consolation with respect to. So I might not use the language of truth, might hide it, but it's functioning there. And there's the clash of realisms so often in these kinds of conversations.

And a person who is drawn to investigating and opening up and exploring the imaginal and mystical states of consciousness and perception—questioning the whole assumptions about reality that are so pervasive in our modernist, materialist, and physicalist culture—can very easily embark on that kind of investigation with all their enthusiasm and openness, and yet very easily be shaken into doubt. They can be pressed into doubt just because of the pervasiveness of the dominant view in our culture.

They might hear a talk or read a book by someone presenting the case for erasing and eradicating mystical perceptions and mystical notions and any place for the imaginal. This could happen in a secular context, in a secular dharma context, here at Gaia House, or anywhere. It's very easy now for a person to be buffeted this way and that by all the opinions flying around in the community, whether it's a smaller community or the larger community of the culture.

So a person wanting to explore and having experiences, being really touched by certain experiences—imaginal openings and perceptions, or meditative openings and experiences of all differing kinds—experiences which potentially can be really fertilizing and fertile as seeds in the psyche, in the consciousness, in the life, can very easily, because of all these different opinions and because of what's dominant in the culture, and because of a lot of the aggression that often goes with that (which itself is very interesting—why is there so much aggression bound up with this question?), be assailed by doubt, even paralyzed.

They've had these experiences, been touched by them, feel drawn to them, want to open to them. Then something happens: they hear someone give a talk or read a few pages of a book, and somehow it goes into a kind of freeze. Something gets paralyzed, or they dismiss their experiences, or they're ashamed, or they keep it to themselves and then it withers—especially when what they read or hear is quite aggressive.

The person who is being dismissive and perhaps aggressive or polemical in their crusade against these kinds of openings of perception doesn't need to say anything particularly brilliant or radically incisive or particularly new. Oftentimes all they need to do is just slowly and clearly take their time and essentially

repeat the dominant, unquestioned view of the culture to which we have all been exposed over years. Even if you grew up in a religious setting, you're still exposed to what I call the dominant view of modernism, of physicalism, of meaninglessness—of what the reality of our existential situation supposedly is.

A person can grow up buffeted by different views—this often characterizes our society—but this physicalist, flat worldview of secular modernism is something we've all been subjected to pervasively and from all different sides, loudly and implicitly. Many of these messages are really not even that obvious for years.

So all the person has to do is just slowly and clearly repeat what you've already heard, what some part of you already understands and knows, without actually making explicit the assumptions underneath that and the historical context. In a way, the power of that argument comes from the fact that it's a repetition—it's a hearing of what one already has heard before and been indoctrinated with. And there's a power from the solidarity, to borrow a phrase from Richard Rorty, just from the fact that so many people either buy into it completely or buy into it at least partially in this kind of cognitive dissonance between that and their more spiritual beliefs.

Because it's a repetition of what you've already been saturated in, and because everyone else seems to agree with it, that makes that position actually quite easy. I don't have to say or write anything particularly incisive or new. Often what happens is a kind of straw man gets set up as an opposition—an easy target. Someone like an Islamic fundamentalist terrorist, or some of the corruption in the papacy, or someone who's clearly ridiculously holding on to something out of desperate fear of their perceived existential situation and wanting consolation. It's a straw man, an easy target.

Why am I saying all this? Just to make the point again that a grasp of—and I use that word carefully—a rootedness in a carefully thought-out, structured, supportive, and generative conceptual framework, one that's to some degree reliable and robust and sophisticated and well-conceived enough, will provide stability in that kind of culture, which is the culture we are in now. We're buffeted by different opinions, often quite aggressive, having been exposed to certain points of view incredibly pervasively, literally inundated by that view, so that we don't even consider it a dogma because it's so pervasive. It's like a fish not recognizing the water it's swimming in.

But a grasp of, a rootedness in, a use of, an implementation of, an incorporation of a careful, supportive, and generative conceptual framework brings a degree of stability, a degree of clarity and orientation. It gives a kind of foundation, and actually will open up experiences further. So those experiences that are potentially fertilizing as seeds can actually be that—they can actually fertilize the psyche, the mind, the heart, the being, the body. This is for the soul that wants soulfulness, that wants soul-making. Admittedly, and I'll come back to this, we want that—human beings seem to want that to different degrees.

This is partly why a conceptual framework is really important: the entertaining of concepts and

conceptual frameworks, deliberately, consciously, rigorously even.

We've said that part of what must be included in a conceptual framework is this whole unpacking or explanation of the process of soul-making, based on phenomenologically noticing and delineating different kinds of movement of desire. Drawing out this distinction of eros and what's involved with that and where it goes, just from observation of what is involved for us, for the psyche, for the citta, as human beings in our life. And then exploring and explaining the dynamics of that soul-making process—eros, psyche, logos in its expansion because of the pothos that we've talked about. In some way or another, part of the conceptual framework needs to draw that out and give it a conceptual grounding and structuring that's fertile.

Another aspect of the conceptual framework needs to be this non-separation of the citta—which includes the soul, what we're calling soul—non-separation of the mind, heart, soul, consciousness, citta. There's a non-separation of the citta and whatever we sense of reality, or whatever reality is. Implied in that, or included with that, is the emptiness of all things and the whole notion of ways of looking.

Way of looking is an aspect, or a mode of being of the citta at any time. So all that—this non-separation of citta and reality, and...

The emptiness of all things and the notion of diversity of ways of looking that are available to us. All that needs to be an aspect, an element, woven into the conceptual framework which is said already.

So that mindfulness is not and does not expose reality as it is, things as they are. It does not expose what is. Mindfulness does not bring us into an encounter with something called life—as someone put it, life "exorcised of the tumor of metaphysics." Mindfulness is just one way of looking, wrapped up with a certain conceptual—well, actually quite a lot of concepts wrapped up in mindfulness, in the experience, even of bare attention. It's one way of knowing. Great, it's fantastic, wonderful—it's one way of knowing. Actually probably it's more than that. Really implicit in what the Buddha meant by mindfulness is there's already a range of ways of knowing.

But what we want, what we need, what the conceptual framework needs is to open, open the ways of looking with this different, more sophisticated idea of reality and the non-separation of the citta, including the soul, and reality. Emptiness of all things and the ways of looking, all kind of implicit together in that.

So an idea that I already mentioned, an idea like participation. This is a concept. It's also a perception that I can have. It's an experience, if you like. It's an imaginal perception. But where does imaginal perception shade into what we wouldn't consider imaginal perception? We would just consider perception. But an idea like participation, for instance, that this mind, my mind, in its depths is, if you like, rooted in or participates in the mind of the cosmos. Not that it's just one with, but it participates in the mind of the cosmos. It expresses the mind of the cosmos, the divine mind.

Or that my imaginal faculty, the images that come to me, the images I perceive, either so-called

intrapsychic or of the world, these too are the imagination of the divine, or the Buddha nature, or whatever. So I participate in the Buddha nature through my imaginal perception. Or again, the eros that I feel, and all that whole range and all the directions of my eros is—we've said this a few times—I have the sense that I'm participating in the divine eros, in the eros of the Buddha with his consort, the consort with the Buddha. However we frame it, there's some sense of this, of what I experience at one level as mine, is at another level mirroring, echoing, rooted in, originating in and participating in the divine eros, the divine imaginal faculty, divine imagination, the divine mind.

So that idea of participation, or the set of ideas that we might call participation, is an idea or a set of ideas that actually supports and stimulates soul-making. It brings more eros, more psyche, more image, gives imaginal dimension, opens imaginal dimension, and a stretching and a complicating of the logos, of the idea. So we get ideas, as we said, that actually support and fertilize the soul-making process. And therefore it is a valuable idea. Why? Because it stimulates soul-making. It supports and stimulates and gives this more dimensionality to the soul-making movement and dynamic. Therefore, it is valuable. And therefore, it is valid. It's valid because it's valuable. Those words are actually related etymologically. It's valid because it's valuable, and its value is that it stimulates what the soul loves, soul-making. It stimulates that beauty, that richness, that opening, that fertility, that creativity, that discovery, all of that, and the multi-dimensionality of that.

This idea of participation, which is, if you like, part of our set of ideas—this set of ideas called participation is part of a larger set of ideas which forms our conceptual framework, or may be part of our conceptual framework. But participation as a set of ideas also includes the understanding that we're not dealing with anything that has an independent existence. So we participate in perception. We participate in the world that's perceived, in the very perception of it. We participate in the divinity. We participate in actually anything. And so it has inherent, if you like, intrinsic to the very idea of participation is the realization that things are empty, that there are ways of looking, that our ways of looking are actually participatory. So what is seen, the way it appears and the way of looking, there's no independent existence implied in that.

So say, this idea of participation in the divine, is that—are you saying that's ultimately true? First of all, it's not necessary to the soul-making that we believe it's ultimately true.

A lot of people find this very hard to understand. I think it's intrinsic to a certain depth of soul-making, because we realize image as image, can actually also realize, if you like, idea as idea. I don't need to believe that something is ultimately true in order for it to have its power, its efficacy, its capability and potency to open and to seed and fertilize our experience, our perception, our understanding, our heart, our soul, our minds, and our lives.

Actually, if you go into this whole question of participation, the very question "is it ultimately true?" crumbles because of what the idea is in itself. If we turn it the other way around, to claim the independent

existence, the separate existence of anything—separate from the way of looking, independent of the citta—I would say that is definitely not true. Any attempt at doing that so far in the history of humanity has been pretty seriously questioned. What one finds is that it's actually very hard to construct a coherent conceptual framework on a ground of solidity, on a ground of independent existence.

The attempt, for example, in physics to derive everything from the basic building blocks of matter just comes round again, or so far has just come round again to questioning the reality of those building blocks—the independent reality, independent of the way of looking. We can't find them as independently existing things, independent of the way of looking. Nagarjuna showed this even relative to Buddhist atomism—a brilliant critique exposing the impossibility of constructing a coherent conceptual framework on realist grounds. And again, in modern Western philosophy in recent years.

From different directions, it's almost like to have a grounding in a conceptual framework that actually has the effect of solidity, our ground needs to be not solid. You understand? We can't get away with claiming the independent, separate existence of anything and claiming that's the truth—that things exist independent, separate from the way of looking.

This idea, this set of ideas we're calling participation, also intrinsically implies the observation or acknowledgement that the way of looking both discovers and grants sacredness to something. We don't just discover it. We grant it. The way of looking grants it. We create it—whether it's an image or eros or whatever. That whole admission and observation is not a problem within the idea of participation.

To me, there's a more sophisticated ontology and epistemology and cosmology, in fact metaphysics, wrapped up in something like the idea of participation, which can sound at first sight like just abstract metaphysics with no grounding in anything real at all. So go into these things. Actually really question. Dare to question.

There's a kind of pragmatism here, which again is quite a popular word in modern philosophy, that essentially states you can believe what works for you. There's a pragmatism of approach and of conceptuality here, but it's actually one that opens possibilities—possible new ways of looking, or the possibility of new ways of looking—and actually implements them, opens orientations, opens experiences, opens the living, and opens the field of life for us, the field of our existence, the sense of existence, in ways that we actually move through.

Sometimes what you get is what's called pragmatist philosophy, but all it does is revert almost by default back to whatever was the default concept or ideation of ontology, epistemology, cosmology—basically the default hidden metaphysics there. Can we have something actually that's pragmatic? I mean, really practical. An idea or a set of ideas that is actually practical, that we live, that opens perception, opens experience, opens ideation, opens the heart, opens all that soul.

What is needed, I would say, is some kind of conceptual frame, which means some set of connected ideas

that supports an ongoingness, a potential ongoingness of exploration, inquiry—supports the opening of frontiers, creativity and discovery in all domains and in all aspects of our being. And even those domains and those aspects of being can also get opened and increased. In other words, we discover domains, and we discover aspects of being, or we create them, or both. They are opened for us, where before we had no sense that there was even that domain of being, and that aspect of our existence.

Some conceptual framework, some set of connected ideas that will support this fecundity of exploration, expansion, opening—this infinity of domains and dimensions and aspects of being, of existence. Not just the intellect, certainly not. Not just the heart, not just the body, but the artistic, all of this, the soul.

Soul—what do you mean soul? It's a domain of being. The way these open up—like what the body can be, what the heart can be, what the intellect can be. In other words, how it can be conceived, not just the range of experiences there. And so opening up also, with all that, a kind of potential infinitude of interpretations. Back to this hermeneutics—that existence, life, world, cosmos, being, humanity, body, all of this, materiality—there's an infinitude of potential interpretations there. It's not constrained. It's not constricted. Through the participation itself, we're creating, discovering interpretations. That is, if you like, the nature of existence. The nature of the cosmos is not limited.

Infinite interpretations. The garden of infinite interpretations. The orchard of infinite interpretations.

Infinite interpretations, by the way, doesn't mean that any interpretation goes or that any interpretation is just as good as any other one. If you know your mathematics of infinity, there are different kinds of infinity. So you can still have infinite interpretations while not exploring a whole other infinite set. It's the nature of infinity. There are infinite even numbers and there are infinite odd numbers. So you can have infinite soul-making interpretations and helpful interpretations, and infinite unhelpful interpretations.

Only this kind of conceptual framework, to my way of thinking, would be philosophically viable, legitimate, and defendable. But more importantly, only this kind of conceptual framework can satisfy soul. Only a framework that's this fertile, that supports this ongoing expansion, complication, dimensionalizing—creativity, discovery, interpretation—can satisfy soul.

What if we play with the idea of placing soul-making—this movement of eros that stimulates the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, expansion, complication, widening, deepening, enrichment—as a conception that can form a base for other explanations of all kinds of things? Taking soul-making as something basic. Simply saying the soul wants, it has erotic desire for soul-making. It wants soul-making, the expansion of soul-making, the growth of soul-making, the movement of soul-making in all directions and domains, potentially infinitely, eventually.

There's a movement in time here, a becoming. It may happen in fits and starts, with blocks and then explosions and walls crumbling, or just gradual expansion. If we say something basic—it sounds really simple—the soul wants, has an erotic desire for the expansion of soul-making in all directions and

domains eventually.

The soul-making in regard to the self, in regard to the beloved other or others, in regard to the world becomes potentially equalized, because the soul wants that soul-making expansion in all directions and domains. This is its natural, organic movement. So as imaginal and erotic objects, the other, the self, and the world are equalized, balanced there. They're all filled out. The soul-making movement is happening in all those directions.

But also in the domains or directions of body, heart, mind—all these are expanded too. The soul wants all these to be expanded: what the body is, how it can be perceived, what it means, what it can do, what it can feel, what it can sense, its ways of knowing, the heart, the mind. Not that one is blocked or stuck or cramped. That would be a blocking or cramping of the whole eros-psyche-logos process, the whole soul-making movement.

Problems arise when one of these directions or domains or aspects of being is blocked as an avenue of soul-making, or there's a stuckness there, or it's cramped—when the logos or the image is rigidified. Or there's an imbalance because one side is blocked, one direction is blocked, one aspect or domain is blocked.

For example, there's not the inclusion of the self as being filled out by imaginal perception, or there's a preoccupation with the self without attending to the other as an imaginal object, erotic object. Or the world is not included. What happens to our relationship with nature when we lose the eros and the sense of dimensionality of the natural world? What happens when we objectify another—when they lose that dimensionality, when we lose the eros there? Maybe there's still attraction, as we've talked about before, but somehow I've objectified them.

What happens if our notion of flesh or materiality or the body is not allowed—if the soul-making erotic involvement with flesh, with body, is not permitted in some way? Then our sense and our concept and our perception of flesh and body is stuck at one level—maybe one-dimensionality. It is this. It's good for that.

It's not good for this. It's this or that. And to me, this presents a fascinating exploration—an invitation to play with the idea of placing soul-making as a truly fundamental movement in our entire approach to psychology, spirituality, and path.

Consider, for instance, how we might reconsider human developmental psychology through this lens. I won't delve deeply into this now, but I'll offer something as a starting point for future exploration.

Freud regarded pleasure-seeking as the fundamental drive of human beings—this was what eros meant to him. Problems arose when these drives for pleasure, often sexual and oriented toward sensual gratification, were blocked or inhibited by the demands of culture, society, and parenting. His entire developmental psychology placed what he called eros—this pleasure-seeking principle—at its foundation.

Half a century later, Douglas Fairbairn, a Scottish psychoanalyst in the Freudian lineage working within what's called the British Object Relations School, proposed something different. He argued that the fundamental movement is object-seeking, which he termed libido rather than eros. For him, what the infant truly seeks is an object—the other. The fundamental drive is to connect with others, not, as Freud suggested, the gratification of sense pleasures or the reduction of tension in the pleasure drives.

Fairbairn proposed this libidinal drive as the primary force, alongside what he called an anti-libidinal drive—a protective mechanism that develops to shield us from the disappointment and pain of rejection or unavailability of the objects we seek. These dynamics can become internalized in complex ways within his theoretical framework.

Contemporary psychology often considers another model entirely: the notion that in the womb there existed a state of oneness and wholeness, a non-differentiated oceanic bliss of unity with the mother. Birth then becomes a trauma of separation into differentiated being, a shock to the system. The construction of self-sense becomes a force for coherence and delimitation—creating boundaries whose function is to protect against dissolution back into that primordial oneness, which carries the memory of birth trauma.

Meanwhile, ego psychology sets as its fundamental achievement the development of a well-boundaried, coherent self—this becomes the marker of psychological health and maturity.

What intrigues me is this question: What if we conceived of eros, as we've been exploring it, and soul-making as the fundamental drive? This would mean something more than Freud's pleasure-seeking, and it would also differ from Fairbairn's object-seeking, even though his focus on connection sounds remarkably similar to our understanding of eros as the desire for deeper connection.

The crucial difference lies in how we conceive the object itself. Fairbairn's object—what the child or infant seeks—is assumed to be fixed, well-defined, stable, and limited. Admittedly complex, yes, but not infinite, not full of potentially infinite imaginal dimensions, not possibly divine.

In our exploration, eros is not equivalent to a movement toward oneness and dissolution that must be defended against. Rather, eros organically creates and retains otherness—maintaining some degree of separation and distinction between self and other. Kohut's ideal of the well-boundaried self need not be fundamental either; it simply becomes part of what naturally happens in the soul-making process, as eros creates some sense of division and boundary.

I'm only touching on this to open possibilities for future investigation. The distinctions may seem subtle, but I believe they're quite significant. We've become so accustomed to thinking about developmental psychology in established terms that they've become almost entrenched. But what would happen if we placed eros and soul-making, as we've been exploring them, at the center as the fundamental drive?

What would this imply for constructing a developmental psychology? How would we understand various human pathologies in relation to this framework? Our conception of the object that the soul seeks differs

from Fairbairn's understanding, and our sense of self certainly differs from Kohut's achievement model.

Implicit in our exploration is the recognition of image as image—all of this as part of the natural soul-making dynamic. The question becomes: which aspects get blocked, at what point, and in what direction?

So the soul-making movement doesn't lead to a dissolution of the self or a reification of the self. It's really important to have a sense of a real self before you can let go of it. But is that really the problem? The soul-making process doesn't reify self or object, but that might be a stage in the soul-making process. These aspects of the other—objects conceived less dimensionally, less imaginatively pregnant—might just be a stage. And Kohut's achievement of the psychologically-boundaried, coherent self might just be a stage of the soul-making process as well.

I'm simply playing with something here, but to me it's quite an interesting avenue to explore. So much of what we consider, or what modern psychology considers to be the self—and there is quite a range in that conceptualization—reveals how relative it is to Western modernist culture, as I mentioned before.

Ernst Cassirer wrote a whole series of books called *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. He describes the Bataks of Sumatra, for whom the self existed in relationship with a spirit particular to that individual—I believe it was called a Begu. This spirit dwells within the person but not really, separate from their ego, separate from their "I." All kinds of conflicts can arise—the person wants one thing, the ego wants one thing, and the spirit wants another. Yet there's a power that this spirit possesses in determining the character and even the future of that person.

This is not the coherent, unfragmented self of Kohut, yet it was regarded as normal, as what a person naturally involves. Certain notions of what constitutes psychological health are simply products of modernist Western culture, which we mistake for reality and rarely question.

If we consider developmental psychology more deeply, we tend to think the past causes the present—causality runs linearly from past to present. We look for first causes, conditions, environment, trauma, and trace everything moving from past to present. But what if causality actually opens into a much broader sense of causation? What if it doesn't just come from the past, but we are also called toward something in the future? What if causality also emerges from the present, through dependent origination? And what if what's truly causal extends beyond what manifests simply on a material level in a purely human dimension?

The Bataks' notion of a non-material entity being quite causative raises profound questions. What do we need? What is actually served, and what is lost when we constrain our notions of causality—not just notions of self, but our entire understanding of what constitutes healthy thinking, healthy selfhood, and psychological well-being?

When we consider various pathologies that can occur for human beings, we tend to relate them to

developmental psychology—some kind of arrested or incomplete development. But I want to point toward a different direction that could prove quite fruitful. What happens if the imaginal dimension becomes available to open in a certain direction—say, in relation to other but not in relation to self, or in relation to self but not in relation to other? There's a kind of lopsidedness to the soul-making opening and movement. What causes this lopsidedness initially, and what does it result in developmentally? What kinds of pathologies emerge when this becomes a long-term, habitual mode of being and seeing?

What if there's this repeated pattern of not seeing image as image, not understanding "this is image"? Of course, this is actually quite common, though we don't tend to realize it. In our culture and education, there's a real push to make sure the child knows what reality is, coupled with an almost palpable fear of imagination—that it might linger too much, except in very contained directions like art class or school theater. This fear of imagination leads us to suppress it while emphasizing something called "reality."

But perhaps healthy psychology actually requires that the imaginal dimension be allowed more, amplified more, explored and opened to more fully. This suggests a very different way of thinking about psychology, developmental psychology, and pathology.

I wonder: do children, does an infant, does a child really believe their images and confuse them with reality? When children are playing, this doesn't seem to be the case. There's this fear about over-imagination, as if pathology lies in allowing the imaginal to grow too freely. I wonder if we can actually trust the human psyche to naturally see image as image, to understand that image is image as part of its natural development—if it's allowed to, if it's supported, unless it's subjected to some kind of fundamentalist dogma.

And that fundamentalism can take obvious forms—religious fundamentalism that doesn't see image as image—or much subtler forms that are harder for us to recognize because they're so embedded in our cultural assumptions.

totally woven into our culture and we don't even see it.

Not seeing an image as an image is regarded as relatively acceptable if most people around me agree to see it that way—to agree that this is reality, not an image. If my whole community shares some image and doesn't see this image as an image, it's somehow deemed psychologically normal. From outside of that community, it looks pathological, bonkers, dangerous. But I wonder if there's this natural, organic movement of the psyche to understand the imaginal and to see it as image, if it's allowed to, if it's supported to, if it's not subject to the pressures of fundamentalism or some kind of logos that doesn't permit that recognition.

Again, when we think of pathology on this broader scale—as I said, expanding what we've explored in moment-to-moment meditative navigation—we might consider the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, this expansion and mutual fertilization. Where can this get blocked or fall out of balance? Is it in the logos? Is

it the image getting stuck somewhere, rigidly identified, not seeing images as images—whether images of self, other, world, the eros itself, the love, or something like the body?

The body might be related to in a way that doesn't allow it to be imaginally filled out. There might be all kinds of belief in an image of the body, or an idea of the body, or the eros has gotten stuck in relation to the body. Something becomes imbalanced, something gets blocked in that whole circular mandala where everything wants to move in all directions. Something gets obstructed in the eros, in the psyche, in the logos, in the image of self, other, world, eros, body, whatever it is. It's not seeing image as image, and pathologies emerge from that—incomplete or arrested development arises from that, perhaps.

These are just some ideas to offer for reflection that might prove interesting and fruitful.

Lastly, I want to touch on something I've mentioned before. In the conceptual framework we're unfolding here with soul-making—the explanation of the soul-making dynamic and what's involved—we need, and perhaps we have, a conceptual framework that implies, already implicit within it, that eros and soul-making will always elude our final understanding. They are always more than we can ever comprehend.

Why? Because the eros, because of the pothos within the eros, always wants more of whatever it comes into relationship with as an erotic object. This stimulates the eros-psyche-logos dynamic to create and discover more—always more. It expands, opens, stretches, breaks the boundaries of anything it encounters in creating and discovering more of that thing, including not just psyche and soul, but eros itself. And whatever logos, whatever idea is involved with the notion of psyche or the notion of eros.

Whatever idea of these—those boundaries and ideas, as I've said before, are delineations. They create boundaries, but they will also be broken open, expanded, stretched. Simply because of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, they will eventually move in the direction of eros and in the direction of soul itself. The dynamic will include them in its whole expanding vortex of movement, involvement, digestion, transformation, transubstantiation, creation, discovery.

In a way, this whole understanding of the eros-psyche-logos movement, process, and involvement means that any logos, any idea, will expand or break in time. In time it will crack. To paraphrase Leonard Cohen: there's a crack in everything, and that's where the light comes in.

We might think of this in terms of our broken heart and our imperfections, but we can just as readily apply it to ideas, to logoi, to conceptual frameworks. Implicit in how we're discussing the soul-making dynamic—eros, psyche, logos, and all that—is the Kabbalistic idea of the breaking of the vessels. The Shevirat HaKelim—it will break. And the crack is a blessing. The light comes in. There's illumination, further expanse. Something of the divine, if we want to amplify that metaphor—the light of the divine enters through the crack.

We will reach a point with any idea, any concept or framework, where it won't be able to contain or

account for our experience, new ideas, new observations. The very idea of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic may face this too. It's interesting as an idea, though, because it includes within itself this notion of the breaking of vessels, of cracks, because of what it implies about expansion.

There are already cracks in this idea—structural weaknesses, circularities, as there must be with any conceptual framework. Is that a problem? Perhaps theory, conceptual framework theory, is more theater. Theory is theater more than reality or truth. Theory is theater.

I don't think those words are etymologically related, but let's connect them imaginally: theory is theater. What does that mean? Theater actually has etymology connected to the gods, theos, I believe.

The question is not about its reality and truth, but what is it serving? What is it serving? A theory, a conceptual framework. And we've already said: soul-making. Serving soul-making is... And the theory itself is part of soul. The logos is part of what we're calling soul and soul-making.

So in a way, we discover a conceptual framework based on our observations and deductions from that. But we create it. We could say we forge it—with the double implication of what that word means. We forge a conceptual framework. We are forging a conceptual framework.

And theory is theatre.

This is, to me, a whole notion of concept that's soul-making, that's fertile. To me, beautiful as well.

Thank you for listening.

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