

Colloquium: 20 min presentation:

Psychology of Awakening: Deepening the Transpersonal Perspective

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1. Normality as delusion

Our sensations are a continuum free from duality and multiplicity,

for the field of each sense is made of a single sense-stuff and there is neither some layer of something different from this stuff,

nor a layer of absence of stuff, which separates subject from objects or figures from ground.

According to current physics, the same is the case with the Universe, which is an energy continuum

where there are neither layers of nothingness nor layers of something different from energy that may produce inherent separations.

So it follows that the *perception of substantial duality and multiplicity* is a delusion:

it is an effect and an aspect of the unawareness *and* delusion that Buddha Śākyamuni and other Indian mystics called *avidyā*.

2. Root of delusion

The Dzogchen teachings have two threefold classifications of the unawareness *and* delusion called *avidyā*

which, when combined, give us four types or aspects of *avidyā*:

(i) **First aspect of *avidyā***: *innate unawareness* of the true condition of ourselves and whole universe (Tib. *gyu dagnyi chikpai marigpa [rgyu bdag nyid gcig pa'i ma rig pa]*)

produced by an element of stupefaction (Tib. *mongcha [rmongs cha]*),

that has always been flowing with the mental continuum (Skt. *saṃtāna*; Tib. *semgyü [sems rgyud]* or *gyün [rgyun]*) of those sentient beings that have never realized the true condition in question,

and that beclouds the nondual self-awareness of this condition that in Tibetan is called rigpa (*rig pa*, corresponding to the Sanskrit *vidyā*),

precluding the self-patency of the latter's "own face" (Tib. rangngo shepa [*rang ngo shes pa*]).

To understand the following ones, one must keep in mind that sensa are analog and continuous, whereas thoughts are digital and discontinuous,

and that charging thoughts with an illusion of absoluteness, truth and importance that they lack

— which is what I call *hypostatization / reification / absolutization / valorization of thought*, but which here I will abridge as *potentiation of thought*—

produces digital and thus discontinuous illusions that distort the analog and thus continuous basis of our perceptions. Thus:

(ii) **The second aspect of *avidyā*** is the subject-object duality dichotomy

which results from *potentiating* the supersubtle thought I render as threefold directional thought structure (Skt. *trimaṇḍala*; Tib. khorsum [*'khor gsum*]).

(iii) **The third aspect of *avidyā*** involves the fully-fledged illusion of selfhood in the individual and of self-existent plurality in the world,

for the subtle concept of I is superimposed on the illusory subject that is one of the poles of dualistic knowledge

whereas in the continuum of sensation segments are taken as figure and perceived in terms of subtle concepts (Skt. *arthasāmānya*; Tib. dōnchi [*don spyi*])

so that *the figure is taken to be in itself separate and to be in itself the concept in terms of which it is perceived*

and hence *to be a self-existing entity*

— which means that this aspect of *avidyā* involves apparitional-imputational delusion (Skt. *vyabhīcāra / vyakūla*; Tib. tülpa [*'phrul pa*])—

and hence *the subject is compelled to react to the objects' presence with different emotional attitudes*.

At any rate, these two aspects of *avidyā*—(ii) and (iii)—gradually develop during human spiritual and social evolution, becoming ever more powerful

and *yielding hostility toward what is perceived as threatening, dangerous or disturbing*

and *desire or covetousness toward what is perceived as desirable or useful*,

as well as *a fragmentary perception issuing from the exacerbation of the figure-mind mind that makes us unaware of interconnectedness*

until, toward the end of the dark (or black) age (Skt. *kaliyuga*; Tib. *tsöden [rtsod ldan]*) in which we find ourselves,

it gives rise to the project of scientific-technological dominion over the ecosystem that will be briefly discussed below.

(iv) **The fourth aspect of *avidyā*** may be called *meta-delusion*, for it consists in taking the delusions which are *avidyā* (ii) and (iii)

for a sound perception of an objective, self-existing reality: it results from ignoring (Tib. *mishepa [mi shes pa]*) that the false appearances

yielded by *avidyā* (ii) and (iii) are false and baseless and is the condition for the latter to find their continuity

for without it the latter would be realized for what they are, yielding a de-realization of the false appearances of normality

and making the contradiction inherent in *avidyā* (ii) and (iii) turn into conflict.

3. Fragmentary perception as key element of delusion

Thus as already noted, the exacerbation of the illusion of separateness

and the fragmentary perception that results from the exacerbation of the figure-ground mind

are at the root of the project of modernity:

the sense of inherent separation and opposition to the rest of the ecosystem, including other individuals,

and the fragmentary perception that makes it possible to overlook interdependencies

gives rise to the attempt to dominate and exploit other human beings and the so-called “natural environment.”

K. Venkata Ramanan paraphrases the explanation of this key aspect of delusion in the *Prajñāpāramitāsāstra*, which the Chinese attribute to Nāgārjuna (Venkata Ramanan, 1966, pp. 107-108):

We select from out of the presented only the aspects of our interest and neglect the rest; to the rest that is neglected we become first indifferent and then blind; in our blindness, we claim completeness for the aspects we have selected. We seize them as absolute, we cling to them as complete truth... While the intellectual analysis of the presented content

into its different aspects is conducive to and necessary for a comprehensive understanding, analysis is miscarried if the fragmentary is mistaken for the complete, the relative is mistaken for the absolute.

In the *Udāna* of the Pāli Canon and then in the *Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* of the Sanskrit Canon,

Śākyamuni Buddha taught the parable of the blind men with the elephant, which if adapted to our time could be told as follows:

trunk > firefighters' hosepipe

tusks > iron hooks

ears > fans or winnowing baskets

leg > pillar

eye > bowl

back > throne

tail > venomous snake

Frog in the well: following Kyabjé Dungse Thinle Norbu Rinpoché we can synthesize a Daoist and a Buddhist story

and speak of a frog that, confined all its life to the water at the bottom of a well,

believed the sky to be a small blue circle and could not accept the existence of the ocean.

Bateson, for his part, illustrated this with the example of arc and circuit.

4. Effects that reveal delusion as such

Delusion reveals itself by the effects of our acts:

if these produce effects contrary to the ones we intend to achieve,

it is likely that we based ourselves on a deluded perception.

This coincides with Korzybski's criteria of sanity and insanity, according to which

sanity is determined by the structural fit between our reactions to the world and what is actually going on in the world,

and insanity by the lack of such fit.

Delusion / insanity may be defined as confusing a distorted perception of sense or of the universe, for sense or the universe themselves,

or as taking that distorted perception for a correct perception of a given reality.

The unawareness and delusion that the Buddha Śākyamuni called *avidyā*,

present in normality as well as in all psychological disorders, is the core of insanity

for it causes our attempts to achieve satisfaction to yield dissatisfaction and our efforts to suppress pain to yield pain,

and in our time it has exacerbated itself to such a degree that it has begotten the project

of destroying death and the aspects of life we perceive as undesirable and building a technological Eden

that begot the ecological crisis that is producing terrible disasters and that threatens to cause the disintegration of human society

and even to put an end to human life on the planet in the course of the current century

— thus proving, in terms of Korzybski's criterion, that our psyches are in the extreme opposite to that of sanity,

and hence that normality is not only the most common form of insanity, but the most extreme and dangerous one as well.

5. Deluded normality as a psychological disorder or form of insanity

In fact, Blaise Pascal noted that normality is like a psychological disorder or form of insanity

And Erich Fromm (1955, pp. 14-15) noted that:

Just as there is a *folie à deux* there is a *folie à millions*. The fact that millions of people share the same vices does not make these vices virtues, the fact that they share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same form of mental pathology does not make these people sane.

Twelve centuries before Fromm in *Bodhisattvayogacaryācatuḥśatakaṭīkā*, Buddhist **Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika Master** and philosopher Candrakīrti told the fable of the King and the maddening water:

explain

As already noted, in our time delusion has reached such a degree that it has become the most dangerous form of insanity that our species has ever manifested.

6. Grades of delusion and correctness

Now we can distinguish degrees and kinds, both of (I) sanity and of (II) insanity:

(I) *sanity*:

(I.1) *true sanity* includes those conditions that do not involve any degree of *avidyā*, whether these are:

(I.1.a) *temporary true sanity*, such as the Contemplation state (Skt. *samāhita*; Tib. *nyamzhak [mnyam bzhag]*) of higher bodhisattvas, yogis, siddhas and so on, or

(I.1.b) *definitive true sanity*, lying in Buddhahood and thus in a definitive, irreversible healing from *avidyā*

and involving a host of positive qualities—including perfect spontaneous, selfless activities

(I.2) *partial sanity*, which lies in the alternation of states of *temporary true sanity*—such as the Contemplation state indicated as (I.1.a)—

and states of (II.3) *mitigated delusion* or *mitigated insanity*, in which delusion / insanity has been mitigated as a result of the recurrence of *temporary true sanity*

such as the post-Contemplation (Skt. *prṣṭhalabdha*; Tib. *jetob [rjes thob]*) of higher bodhisattvas, yogis, siddhas and so on

(II) *delusion / insanity*:

(II.1) *covert delusion or covert insanity*: this is what we call *normality* and that I asserted it to be the condition involving the greatest degree of delusion,

and the most dangerous one because it threatens the integrity of human society and even our survival, and therefore the sickest one

—and yet in this condition the third aspect / type of *avidyā* causes us to feel perfectly sane and believe we are perfectly sane.

(II.2) *open delusion or open insanity*: to a greater or lower degree the third aspect or type of *avidyā* loses effectiveness

—often as a result of what Bateson called pathogenic double-binding, what Laing called “being placed in an untenable position,” etc.—

and individuals become unable to effectively deceive themselves and adapt to society

yet since *true sanity* has never manifested itself as yet those individuals are confused by the socially prevailing criteria or sanity and insanity

and in general by the wrong beliefs of significant others (Harry Stack Sullivan)

as the false reality of *covert delusion* or *covert insanity* is de-realized, their inability to understand what is happening

and their clinging to the false reality that is dissolving

causes them to experience most intense dread, confusion and conflict

as a result of which they are likely to face the psychiatric interview that Laing called a “ceremonial of degradation”

and have their de-realization turned into a long term, possibly irreversible, illness.

(II.3) *mitigated delusion* or *mitigated insanity*: conditions in which delusion has been mitigated by the recurrent manifestation of (I.1.a) *temporary true sanity*

and hence experiences no longer seem absolutely real and ultimately important.

Example: the post-Contemplation state of higher bodhisattvas, yogis, siddhas, etc.

7. Limitations of transpersonal psychology and why is there a need to deepen its perspective

As will be shown tomorrow in my presentation,

rather than viewing sanity as the eradication of the various forms of delusion discussed above,

most transpersonal psychologies, as well as the integral psychology of Ken Wilber,

(a) conceive definitive, absolute mental health as a condition involving the illusions of duality and multiplicity produced by the aspects of *avidyā* indicated as (2) and (3)

which roughly corresponds to what I have called (II.3) *mitigated delusion* or *mitigated insanity*;

(b) fail to distinguish between various types of transpersonal and holotropic conditions that will also be discussed tomorrow in my presentation;

and (c) have the manifold limitations that will also be discussed in that presentation.

Hence the need for what now I am calling a psychology of Awakening and that formerly I designated as a metatranspersonal psychology

which is the one that clearly distinguishes between the types of sanity and insanity that have been discussed

and the different types of transpersonal conditions that will be discussed tomorrow

and thus is able to orient individuals toward what I am calling *true sanity*,

in which they should establish themselves not only during the meditative composure, but throughout their lives

—thus attaining what higher forms of Buddhism call “full Awakening” or Buddhahood and that I called (I.1.b) *definitive true sanity*.