



Levels and Flattery

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It is no good. I have to say something. The whole literary establishment, the whole of academia, is at fault. It is systematically engaged, it seems to me, in a great work of flattery. It tells us, again and again, that we all share the same level of consciousness, that we are all the same. But it seems obvious to me that this is not so, not so at all. There are some different levels of consciousness, not just one.

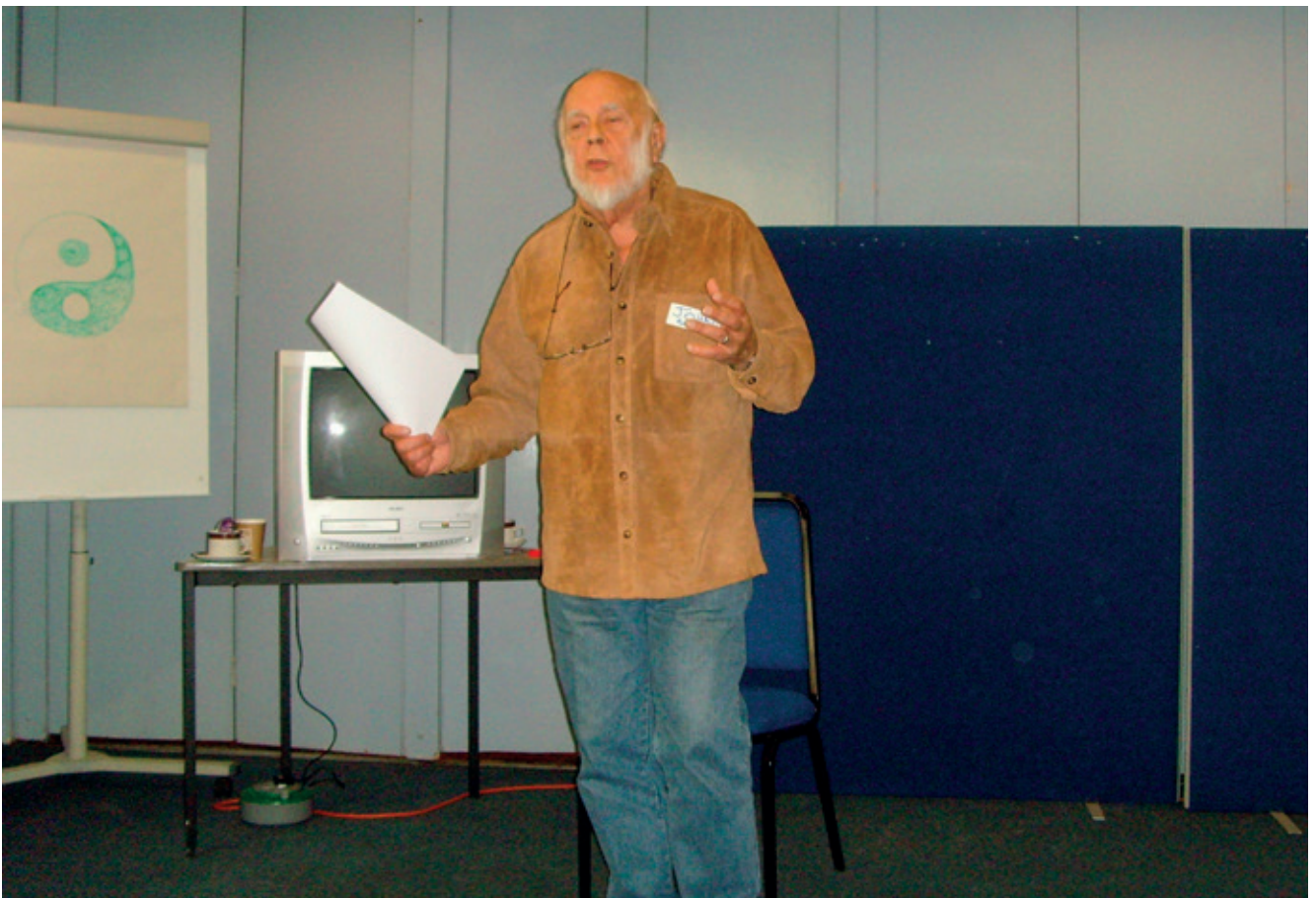
The great pioneer of the idea of levels of consciousness was of course Piaget, and those of who have been to courses on psychology have almost always been introduced to him. I did some of his experiments with my own children, and found that he was right most of the time about this. Later I came across Maslow, with his very popular idea of the hierarchy of needs. It used to be said that we did not have to believe Maslow, because he never did proper research, but in recent years at least eight different bodies of research have confirmed his ideas to the hilt. I have explained all that elsewhere (Rowan 2012). I would now like to outline the three main levels which we come across in everyday life, just to make it clear what I am talking about. I call these First Tier, Second Tier and Third Tier thinking or forms of thought.

FIRST TIER is informed by formal logic, which begins with the proposition "A is A" and carries on from there. If you go on an educational course on Logic, this is what you will learn. It was initiated by Aristotle, and later taken up by Newton, Descartes, Boole and the mathematical logicians. It is also the basis for positivist philosophy, with its doctrine that you

must have evidence which is true not false to back up any scientific statement. Our computers are built upon this logic, and it is popular in academia, and in courts of law. It is our everyday thinking in most walks of life, and seldom questioned, because it has come to seem obvious. Science is built upon testability and falsifiability, and so it must be right. This idea works perfectly with things, but not with people. That is why, unlike every other science (physics, chemistry, biology and so forth), there are no psychological laws.

This is the most popular level of consciousness in our society. It is regarded by many as the defining consciousness of our age, and goes largely unchallenged in academia. However, in the field of psychotherapy and counselling, it is not highly regarded, and has occasionally been given dismissive labels such as 'the consensus trance', 'black-and-white thinking' and 'the They'. It is perfectly suitable for the study of things, but not for the study of people. It is hard to overestimate the powerful influence this level of consciousness has had, and still does have, in Western culture. This is nothing to do with the fight between head and heart, because it is only one version of head in any case. So let us go on and see what comes next.

SECOND TIER is dialectical logic, which begins with the proposition "A is not simply A" and carries on from there. It easily accommodates paradox and contradiction. It includes the doctrine of the interdependence of opposites, the interpenetration of opposites, and the ultimate identity



of opposites, all of which are handily illustrated in the Yin-Yang diagram of Taoist philosophy. It is the logic which is necessary to all decent and proper human interactions, and is to be found in all intimate relations and in the practice of authenticity. We cannot be intimate with another person unless we are allowed in to the contradictions of that person. Psychotherapy, and particularly all the more relational forms of it, relies upon this. It is to be found in humanistic psychology, and in some versions of psychoanalysis. It is the land of the I-Thou, not of the I-It, as Martin Buber put it. It is easy to see that to say of a client "John is John" is quite inadequate, while "John is not simply John" gives much more room for manoeuvre. It is only at this level of thought that we can discover such ideas as the unconscious, subpersonalities, I-positions, 'the analytic third' and so forth. This is where we may discover the Shadow, and work through its ramifications: it is also the realm of openness, taken as a prime value. It is the province of qualitative research, and more particularly of Qualitative research with a big Q (Kidder & Fine 1997).

This is less familiar, though quite well understood in the world of therapy – which is perhaps why the world of therapy is so little understood in the literary establishment and in academia. It is becoming better known through the challenging work of Slavoj Žižek (1993), who wields it with a will, inspired by both Hegel and Marx, through It is interesting that the current interest in Hegel is not in his great edifices of theory, but in his very modest and down-to-earth proposals about dialectical thinking – a form of thought which actually goes back to Heraclitus. In recent time dialectical thinking has been revived by people like Otto Laske (2009) and Michael Basseches (1984, 2009), in some very challenging ways. Unless we grasp this mode of thought, we cannot genuinely appreciate what it is to be fully human. But this is not the end of the road, though it is actually the end of the Maslow road, in spite of his later efforts to add on some stuff from the next level.

THIRD TIER thinking emerges when we admit that we are spiritual beings, familiar with the Subtle level of spiritual development. This is the level where we encounter gods, goddesses, angels, devils, archetypes – the whole range of symbolic beings explored so well by Jung and his followers, by Stanislav Grof and by Roberto Assagioli. It is the realm of the collective unconscious. Formally we call this the level of concrete representations of the divine. It is the level of soul, and also the level of dreams. We all have some acquaintance with this level of consciousness, because we all dream. In mysticism, this is the area where we get dramatic experiences, some of which make us wonder if we are going mad. At this level we cannot ask the question – "Is it true?" We instead have to ask the question – "What effect did that have on you?" This is anathema to most scientific investigators, and makes this class of phenomena tricky to study. This immediately rules out such practices as trying to establish the exact locations of previous lives. It is also the realm of the subtle body, which is where the memories of previous lives are held. Psychosynthesis has been very active in exploring this realm, using such concepts as the superconscious and the higher self (Parfitt 2003). Stanislav Grof and his wife (1990) have been important explorers of this realm.

This is the least well known, and the least fully explored, of our three tiers. It is the hardest to study because of its unique features, which render it quite unlike everyday life. But it is increasingly coming to the fore, because of the growth of transpersonal psychology, where it is very much at home. As I have said at length elsewhere (Rowan 2005), there is an important field of psychotherapy here, with a lot to contribute. I have argued that the whole concept of relational depth is enriched if we see it as opening up the possibility of seeing person-centred therapy as capable of third-tier work (Rowan 2014). And more and more books are coming along to help deal with this important area: not only in psychotherapy and counselling, but also in the field of coaching, which grows more and more sophisticated by the day (Cox et al 2014). It is an essential resource in dealing with spiritual emergencies – a recent field which has been seen more and more as a really significant field of study (Grof & Grof 1990).

To sum up, then, what I am saying is that if these different levels of consciousness exist, and the evidence is still accumulating that they do, it is a great – if flattering – mistake to think that one size fits all: that there is just one level of consciousness, in which we all share. There is nothing undemocratic about this – it is not saying that one level should rule – it is just a recognition of something which should really be obvious. Once it is pointed out, it is hard to deny.

The basic points I am making here – that second tier thinking is more suitable for understanding human beings, that we must not ask if angels are real or past lives are factual, that we do not have to fall into the consensus trance, and so forth – seem to me to be pretty concrete and quite checkable. And they make an enormous difference as to how we regard the taken-for-granted standards of our literary and academic establishments. No longer do we have to accept that the establishment mantra of 'my way or the highway' hold true: we can look at the whole literary world with new eyes. And this new sophistication can render us immune to the blandishments of those who would maintain a belief in the uniformity of human experience.

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