



Being Fully Human

Core Content for the Network?

Chris Thomson

*Readers will note the consistency of Chris's approach with the Foss and Morgan articles above – causality in both directions. I met Chris in 1986, as he implies below, since which time there have been a lot of developments, but not at the pace we might have expected in some respects. Much of the new thinking he refers to is still marginal. Going beyond the holistic world-view he suggests ways of becoming fully human, as explained in his lucid book **Full Spectrum Intelligence** reviewed in the last issue.*

Aldous Huxley believed that there is a “perennial philosophy” that links all the great religions and spiritual traditions. They have a shared “core content”, if you like. Ken Wilber developed this idea, notably in an article published in 1993 (reference at end). He notes that the worldviews of practically all societies, with the exception of modern western society, agree on certain characteristics. A central feature of this is the belief that the world of material things is somehow embedded in a *living* universe, which is in turn embedded in a realm of consciousness or spirit. Things are not – cannot be – separate. Everything, no matter what, is part of this “great chain of being”. This perennial wisdom also holds that every human being is capable of being directly aware of all levels of this continuum, from matter to spirit. It further claims that ultimately, in this Oneness, everything is the cause of everything else. Thus, causality proceeds both upwards and downwards. I agree with all of this, and I have often wondered whether the Scientific and Medical Network also has a core content, **possibly along the lines of Wilber's description**, that links its members together, and that defines, in part, what it is and where it might go. I certainly felt this in 1986.

For me, 1986 was very content rich. It was the year I joined the Network. It was the year in which I became involved with the fascinating, and confusing, world of alternative medicine (the *new healthcare*). It was the year I began to participate in events – such as TOES (The Other Economic Summit) – that were developing the *new economics*. It was the year that I became serious about the possible relationships between science and esoteric knowledge (the *new science* and the *new spirituality*). Those of you who were active at that time will recall how fresh and exciting everything felt. The world seemed to be changing fundamentally, and we felt that we were part of the change. Perhaps most important, 1986 was the year when I first realised that there significant connections between all these new ideas and initiatives. As with the great religions and spiritual traditions, they, too, have much in common. This commonality was very evident in a particular genre of book, such as Marilyn Ferguson's *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, where she compares the old economics with the new, the old medicine with the new, and so on. For the sake of clarity, I should say a few words about what I believe to be the essentials of the new healthcare, the new economics etc.

The *new economics* is about enhancing people and planet, rather than exploiting them. It brings with it new kinds of relationships, new kinds of businesses, and new kinds of institutions. The new economics does not mean that we will not have things to do. There will always be plenty to do. But it does mean that we will be much less likely to *overdo!*

The *new healthcare* is about self-reliance, rather than about overdependence on experts and technology. Medical treatment will be the exception rather than the rule, because the main focus will be on staying healthy. There will be much less need for doctors, drugs and hospitals, partly because fewer people will be getting ill, but also because our knowledge and understanding of the human being will change profoundly.

The *new science* is about applying the whole of the human being to the search for knowledge, rather than just our physical and intellectual parts, as at present. Science of the physical (i.e. science as understood and practised today) will continue to give us much that is useful. However, in the new science, knowledge of the physical will be complemented by knowledge of the non-physical, and that will give us a fuller, richer understanding of the world. The new science will reflect wider, deeper forms of knowing and the additional knowledge that flows from this. It will literally be a “science of the whole” because it will integrate the physical with the non-physical and the material with the spiritual.

The *new politics* will be about the return of power to people and communities, rather than having power concentrated in the hands of politicians and the wealthy. At the heart of the new politics are two ideas - the idea that most power stays at the local level, where it belongs, and the idea that everyone has something useful to say and contribute.

At the time, 1986, I assumed that the common factor linking these new ideas and initiatives was the holistic worldview, a term heard frequently in those days. Indeed, I recall, with some discomfort, giving a rather incoherent May Lecture on the subject in 1987. For some years I used the holistic worldview as a kind of map and compass to position myself within all the changes that were taking place, and I also assumed this worldview to be at the heart of much that the Network said and did. Today I am less sure. I have begun to suspect that one of the main things that underpins the Network is the idea of what it would mean, in practice, to be fully human. I say this because I believe that, if we were all fully human, then the new ideas and initiatives that I have just mentioned would be happening naturally, of their own accord, without the need to discuss, persuade and educate. But you are probably wondering what I mean by “fully human”. This requires a little explanation.

We admire tigers and wolves and falcons and dolphins, and many other creatures. I believe that this is because all of them are fully who they are. This “fullness” is evident in many ways. For example, they are “natural”, and we know what

we mean by this, even if we cannot define it exactly. They have “personal power”, and this enables them to survive in difficult situations, without any of the comforts and supports that we take for granted. They are invariably ecological, living in balance with each other and the planet. Apart from the relatively few who are injured, or very old, or suffering from lack of food, they are all in good health. Within the limitations of who they are, they all behave intelligently. This is obvious when we observe them. And it is surely significant that, when we speak of “tiger nature” or “dolphin nature”, or about the nature of any other creature, we have something admirable in mind, possibly a kind of perfection, a fullness.

Human nature

In contrast, when we speak about “human nature”, we usually have imperfection in mind. We seem to believe that it is human nature to be flawed, to make mistakes, to behave less than perfectly. How different it is for all other creatures! If they were flawed, if they made mistakes on the scale that we do, if they behaved as imperfectly as we do, they would soon be in serious trouble. If large numbers of them were not in good health, and did not act intelligently and ecologically, they would soon cease to exist. Why, then, do we make ourselves the sole exceptions? Why are so many of us not in good health? How many of us can say that we are in good shape, fit, and free from any physical, mental or emotional health problems? Why is personal power so rare in modern societies? Why is truly wise, intelligent behaviour the exception for us, and not the rule? And why do so few of us live ecologically, in harmony with each other and planet? In other words, why are we not fully human?

It would take a long time to answer these questions, because there are so many factors. However, two things spring to mind. First, we have become very dependent on technology. This has had the consequence of making us “soft”, and not as healthy and self-reliant and “natural” as we should be. If you doubt this, then just imagine doing without your car for a month or spending a week or more camping alone in wild country. Once you adjusted to the change, you would almost certainly become healthier, more self-reliant, more ecological and, in some senses, more intelligent. In short, you would become more fully human. While I accept that it may not be easy to do without your car or to get away on

your own for any length of time, I do think that this would bring benefits that far outweigh any sense of sacrifice, yet it remains a minority activity. A second reason that we are not fully human is that we are obsessed with economic growth. Although it is rarely stated explicitly, this has effectively become the central purpose of most countries and most governments, no doubt because economic growth is widely assumed to be intrinsically desirable and the universal panacea, the eventual solution to all our problems. While it is true that some growth is needed for those people who do not even have the basics of food, water, shelter and warmth, the fact is that too many of us have too much and consume too much. The last thing we and this planet need is even more growth. The damaging effects of endless growth on society and the environment hardly need stating. It is putting unsustainable stresses on people and the planet. In all kinds of ways it prevents us from being fully human.

One thing is clear. Any species where large numbers are not in good health, where unintelligent behaviour is widespread, and which, as a collective, does not live ecologically, is not going to survive forever, even with the cushion of technology. Our current ways of living and organising our affairs are simply unsustainable. The question is: what are we going to do about it? When faced with this question, my own response has been to ask how we can become more fully human, just as tigers are fully tigers and dolphins are fully dolphins. This is a central question for us today because, if we fail in this, then any human future can be, at best, only a perpetual repair job.

Being fully human

As you can see, I have suggested that being fully human consists in the following: being in good health, having personal power (which includes being able to fend for yourself), being intelligent (I will explain this shortly), and being ecological. I would add one thing to this list – that we are actively developing ourselves, in consciousness and in other ways, so as to reach our highest potential within this lifetime. Now, here’s the point! When I look at this list – health, **personal** power, intelligence, consciousness, ecology, and human potential – I see what I believe to be the core content of the Network. In other words, I see the new health/medicine, the new economics/ecology, personal development and human potential, as well as the exploration of consciousness and new knowledge (the new science and the new spirituality).

I am convinced that, if being fully human were the norm, rather than the exception, then the kind of the things that interest the Network would already be well established in the world and at the heart of all societies. The fact that they are not yet well established – they are still seen as “fringe” or “weird” by mainstream academia and media, for example – tells me that we still have a long way to go before we can consider ourselves fully human. That said, I believe that many of us are consciously heading in

that direction, as we take care of our health, develop our personal power, behave intelligently and ecologically, and become as conscious **and evolved** as we can. Despite the alarming news that we see every day – climate change, destruction of the environment, grotesque inequalities, corruption and stupidity in business and government...the list just goes on – I am optimistic. Although the evidence sometimes suggests otherwise, I believe that there is a clear, probably unstoppable, trend towards being fully human. **And although I accept that there are as many possible ways of being fully human as there are human beings, because we are all unique, I believe that the foundations for being fully human are as I have just described. One more thing...when I use the word “fully”, this is not to imply that we stop evolving (I cannot imagine that ever stopping), but it is to imply that we are as healthy, powerful, intelligent, ecological and conscious as we can be. Since the word “intelligent” can mean so many things, I would like to end with a few words about it.**

Intelligence as behaviour

In my book *Full Spectrum Intelligence* I went out on a limb by stating that, for me, intelligence is all about actual behaviour. If you behave intelligently, then you are intelligent. If not, you are not. And I took the view that intelligent behaviour is anything that makes the world a better place. It could be something “small” such as a kind word or act, or a positive thought. Or it could be something “big”, such as your daily work or a project designed to help in some way. So long as the word or act or thought makes the world a better place in some way, it counts as intelligence. It was with all this in mind that I was able to choose some unlikely role models, such as Forrest Gump.

If you have seen the film, you will know that Forrest’s haircut and his slow way of speaking, and even his name, were designed to create the impression that he was not the full shilling, as we say in Scotland. Indeed, early on the film, Forrest mentions the

word “stupid”. He said that his mother had told him that “Stupid is as stupid does.” You will also remember that, although he was an unsophisticated man, Forrest was anything but stupid. On the contrary, his simplicity, honesty and directness led him to do noble, intelligent things that helped a lot of people. The thing that most struck me about Forrest was that he never did anything bad. Forrest Gump shows us that we do not need to be “clever” or “smart” to be intelligent. We just have to behave well. Being “intelligent”, in the conventional sense, is no guarantee that we will behave well. We can all think of examples of “intelligent” people who behave badly or stupidly. Forrest’s mother could equally have said that “Intelligent is as intelligent does.”

None of this is to suggest that being fully human is easy within the pressures and stresses of today’s world. People will not willingly give up the habits of a lifetime, and many in power will resist change tooth and nail. In fact, if we are honest with ourselves, engaging in the kinds of changes I am suggesting here may be the most difficult thing we ever do. Transformation may seem attractive in theory. In practice, it is often messy and painful. Yet if we want to preserve this planet and survive and develop as human beings, we have no choice but to change fundamentally. That may take a generation or two, but we have to start somewhere.

Reference

Ken Wilber: *The Great Chain of Being*. Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Vol 33, no. 3, 1993

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