

Developing Humans

Humanos en Desarrollo

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Abstract

This article presents a broad view of consciousness – and identity as its “visible face” – as the fundamental variable for defining humans, understanding human psychological development and foreseeing a hopeful future for Humankind.

Key words: Development, Consciousness, Identity, Mirrors, Values

Resumen

Este artículo presenta una amplia visión de la consciencia (e identidad como su cara visible) como la variable fundamental para definir a los humanos, entendiendo el desarrollo psicológico humano y previendo un futuro esperanzador para la condición humana.

Palabras clave: Desarrollo, Consciencia, Identidad, Espejos, Valores

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Human Development can be studied in several ways and it has been so for many decades. Demography, Geography, Anthropology, Biology, History, Sociology, Psychology – all of them have built broad perspectives on it. Each Scientific Discipline can contribute in a rather unique way both taking the view of phylogeny or ontology. Humanity is out there for some time now and we can study the development of individuals and of groups or societies. For the purposes of this article, however, we are more interested in Psychology.

Textbooks on Psychological development are widespread. Some will present specialized views on areas of Psychological development (Social, Cognitive, Psychomotor and so on) while others present a Life Span view, encompassing Biological, Social, Cognitive, Affective development, approached from several theoretical models with somehow different emphasis on the issue of Nature vs. Nurture as chief developmental influences and also different perspectives on the driving forces behind it (see for example Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2001; Berk, 2001 or Crain, 1992 for a good review of the major theories in the field). The usual idea is that we are intelligent organisms trying to adapt to, and survive in, our complex world. Biologically hardwired motivations will make us search for what we need, be it love, security, food, shelter, sex and so on. Becoming human will imply a strong contribution from Society and socialization processes. Our personal history is the full story to be told about us while of course we are part of the larger story of Humankind, seen as one very special animal group. The fact that we internalize Culture while developing our bodies makes us humans (Bruner 1983); the way we use Culture and contribute to its preservation and development makes us differentiated individuals.

Is something lacking in the picture? Apparently It would not seem so. Lots of different textbooks emphasise different areas of human development but the ones to be included seem quite straightforward. One can include psychomotor, emotional, social, cognitive, moral, self-development, identity development, motivational development (see Wilber, 2000, for a good review in the context of a “integral psychology”), even consciousness (Smith, Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson & Loftus, 2003), but the general ideas will remain the same with a Darwinian ghost somehow always lurking in the background: we are rather adaptive, intelligent animals, struggling for pleasure and survival in a complex society born out of the same picture. Our self, consciousness, identity, are to be explained (or explained away?) as adaptive functions. Now about alternatives.

What if we could not really define a Human being without putting Consciousness as the major variable in the equation? Skinner (probably the most known author for classic behaviourism) will haunt me because of this but let me borrow some reasoning from LeShan (1984). Almost everybody would prefer a rather imperfect conscious companion to a perfect unconscious android, even if it would mimic the majority of human verbal behaviours. We do so because for us being human is about being conscious of ourselves. The specific kind of human consciousness is the mirror-like consciousness, the possibility of recognizing ourselves in physical mirrors or in the social mirrors other people give us. That is why vampires don't see themselves in mirrors: they don't have a soul, meaning they don't have a human consciousness. Now what if we define consciousness as the most fundamental variable for defining humanity? What if we acknowledge that human Culture and History only make sense because we are conscious witnesses of them? What if Art was only possible because we are aware of the conscious experience it produces on us – we are a public – and what if Philosophy, even Science, would not make sense without consciousness of our existential reality and our interrogations?

If we do place Consciousness where it belongs in what concerns Humans, meaning at the core of what being human is all about, lots of consequences will ensue. When we start studying Consciousness, one notion comes forth immediately: Identity. Because we are conscious, we identify ourselves with something and we keep doing this. Changes in identity are the tangible correspondent of the development of consciousness. The Transpersonal perspective brings with it a full array of ideas around this. At first, both as Human species or as individual humans in our ontogenesis, we tend to identify with our bodies; then emotions become more and more important, then thought gets more salient; then we go for other

modes of knowledge (namely intuition in the deep sense of direct knowledge of Reality) while coordinating the rest in unique ways. Perhaps in the future of Humankind identification with Divine realms will become normal; for now we see it in some very salient individuals. World Religions and Spirituality will have a lot to say about this since from the point of view of a Psychology of Consciousness they are mostly consecrated to a redefinition of identity.

Now for the purposes of this article I will skip any attempt at discussing the more or less Scientific character of current assumptions in the Transpersonal field. I will instead examine what they imply for our hypothetical view of human development.

(1) If we are more than just biological-material entities, then perhaps we don't just bring to our individual development a biological-genetic nature; we will also bring along with us a spiritual nature, a sort of "soul genetics". This is, of course, the same we find in traditions that speak about Karma.

(2) Then, if we are spiritual beings and if we are out there before a new physical body is built, we will have to admit that the life span extends indefinitely both to pre-birth and post-mortem areas. Along with this, helping the development of individual humans implies that while nurturing their biological-social-psychological natures we will have to nurture their "transpersonal" natures, both at psychic and spiritual levels. This in turn will imply taking care of the "energy" surroundings of a developing child both during pregnancy and afterwards. Grof (2000), while theorizing from abundant clinical data that important roots of violence in our modern society can be found in perinatal traumatic experiences, goes on to suggest that deep improvement in this area can bring a strong decrease in general violence and an increase in consciousness expansion. So perhaps a perinatal education and a death education will become a necessary part of the picture. And so will an Education of consciousness dealing with so important and so incredibly neglected areas as learning how to identify and de-identify, to focus and to distract, to associate and dissociate from mind and sense experiences, how to deal with pain and pleasure (as both are very well-known intensifiers of awareness) and finally, how to construct and deconstruct areas and layers of identity. Also, if we consider the hypothesis that reincarnation exists, each rebirth will amount to a harmonious rebuilding of an identity and sensible parents will be alert to signs of previous knowledge, skills and areas of difficulty. Perhaps we can even give new value to the ideas of Alice Bailey (1980) about Education as the process of building the Antakharana or the "string of consciousness" between our deeper nature and our outside, mundane, being. Even then, the dimension of the prenatal building of the antakharana (See Chamberlain, 2003, for some groundbreaking research belonging in this theme) or the breaking of the antakharana from our physical bodies known as death (see some interesting research about this and other relevant themes in Schmicker, 2002 or other works concerning Thanatology, like the ones from the Palliative Care movement) must receive deep consideration.

(3) If we do have a process of preparation for each new life and a process of reaping the fruits of each previous one, this will need some consideration. Also the trajectory for a new life implies, according to esoteric traditions and some strange experiences from this author, the crossing of several psychic layers until we reach a new womb. This crossing through several layers will entail, according to the moment we go through each one, a special imprint from the momentary energies that are stronger. This imprint, in turn, will make us more sensitive to, or more ready to tune into, special qualities of energy and special states of mind. So perhaps a Psychology of the Development of Consciousness will take Astrology seriously...

(4) When we start studying the possible nature of humans as mostly conscious beings aware of themselves and dealing with their identities, we also stumble easily across the fact that the Psychic realms of human Archetypes, magical forces, astral entities, chakras and the like are not the same as the Spiritual realms of Platonic Archetypes, pure impersonal Love or Cosmic experience. The first are still under the spell of personal identifications while the later ones correspond to the experience of a impersonal (transpersonal) identity, that is immortal and has no boundaries.

(5) Because of such and other distinctions, we need cartographies of consciousness while of course keeping in mind that maps are not the territory. Assisting the development of human individuals through their life spans becomes the same as assisting them in their journey through both physical and

non-physical worlds, through both psychical and spiritual realms, through both the process of retrieving some of their inheritance from previous lives and the process of going for new developments, perhaps retrieving a deeper divine inheritance. During our lives we may be not just re-building bodies and human personalities but also structures and functions of consciousness (Wilber, 2000).

(6) Now thinking about us as Human Race, a change in perspective about the core definition of what we are will entail a different perspective about the driving forces of History and the possibility of going for new worldwide developments. If our History is also a History of Consciousness and identity, then perhaps the way human groups (village groups, tribes, regional, national groups and the like) have identified themselves in the past with ideas, emotions, attitudes or activities will explain part of their ways. Past terminology like “conquerors”, “warriors”, “empire”, “kingdom expansion”, “crusaders”, “holy warriors”, “national pride” and others can say a lot about it. During the last thousands of years, human groups identified with power, aggression, armies, fortresses, weapons. They identified with territories and felt like expanding them was a way of expanding their sense of worth. Growing as a nation was all about growing in territory or possessions. Different ideas or creeds would invite war as if religious or philosophical groups were protecting their right to live. The equivalent of the identification with fallible, limited, mundane aspects of human personality can be found through history in societies. And like with human individuals that can feel angry, fearful, aggressive, frustrated, or anxious when something threatens such aspects or just invites change, groups can behave in the same way, sometimes to a greater extent because emotional climates can grow very fast in a mutual reinforcement inside groups. Nowadays we see the beginning of a new rise for female values closer to the Arts, the power to generate or create, “weak” emotions like caring, showing vulnerability, friendship as intimacy and sharing; however this will only bring the change and development Humankind needs if it also implies a real transpersonal development. Meaning big national or smaller groups will de-identify with their group personalities to re-identify with abstract values, impersonal love, Nature, abstract feelings and representations of the divine, the Cosmos... So contributing to the development of Nations or Humankind in general will need some emphasis on new group identities. Human groups must learn ways of identification with constructive, abstract values (like knowing the Good, therefore practicing it – see Lourenço, 2002) and to develop a sense of self esteem through devising their unique ways of contributing to a symphonic whole. Nations must find ways of feeling that their expansion is now to be found in inner realms and the uniqueness of their cultural contribution to the whole through the Arts, Philosophy, and their specific qualities of energy. Such qualities will be apparent in the ways each human group lives fundamental impersonal values (the landmark of the Transpersonal, according to Descamps, 2008) Or, as some of us like to think in Portugal, the “fifth Empire” is not one to be established on Earth but to be found in the Realms of the Soul. As Humankind is finding the limits to the very ugly and no longer defensible capitalistic philosophy of limitless economic expansion and limitless exploration of material and human resources everywhere, it can now progress to the true area of limitless expansion: consciousness and “energy literacy” – meaning the cultivation of the knowledge of the kingdoms of the Psyche. One recent sign of such kind of expansion is obviously the development of Deep Ecology – a direct consequence of Love and the direct experiential sensitivity to Nature and its representatives like animals, plants and even minerals. Sometimes I even feel that nowadays Humankind is facing the challenge of “transcending or dying” as keeping its old ways and the corresponding aggressive identities will bring destruction both through techno wars and climate catastrophes. But the possibilities lying ahead are infinite and beautiful... Murphy (1992) made an excellent work inventorying and presenting evidence for extraordinary human capabilities and “transformative capacity”. In such inventory we can find stigmata, powerful placebo effects, hypnotically-induced bodily, psychic or even spiritual effects, extreme feats in sports, extraordinary capacities of religious adepts, mystic phenomena, psychological phenomena. We also know that deep healing processes can be produced through consciousness and identity change, new focusing of the human psyche, creative visualization and the like (see Schlitz, Amoroc and Micozzi, 2005, or Pert, 1997, for good examples). So perhaps we do have a growing number of pioneers evidencing new human capabilities in the paranormal field, deep transpersonal

experiences and/or deep identity and values transformations. If this is so, in the future we can optimistically picture a very different Humankind.

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