

Psyche's Lantern: Illuminating the Co-emergence of Idealism and Realism

Willow Pearson

Integral Relational Therapeutic Arts

August, 2013

Abstract

This short essay explores the opening of the myth of Psyche, in three readings, and its myriad implications for recognizing the container/contained relationship, or co-emergence, of idealism (figured by Integral Theory) and realism (figured by Integral practice and expressed through the incarnation of Metaintegral Foundation). Reading the relationship between Psyche and Eros variously as a developmental journey of the feminine, a love story, and a tale of awakening, the reader is invited to consider how idealism and realism contain, and are contained by, one another.

Keywords: Psyche, Eros, container/contained

"Calming the mind is like closing the glass of a lantern around the flame so that it can shine brightly and steadily, protected from the wind." – Dilgo Kyentse Rinpoche

Like flame and lantern, Idealism and realism are co-emergent. The nature of their relationship is one of dependent origination. They exist in a dialectical *container/contained* relationship, to apply psychoanalytic genius Wilfred Bion's helpful psychological principle (Grotstein, 2007). That is to say that idealism is both contained *by* realism, contained *within* realism and, at the same time, idealism also serves as a container *for* realism. To view this occurrence from the *reverse perspective* (another one of Bion's clinical tools, which cannot be simply reduced to an abstract inverse but rather affords its own specific, important recognition), realism is both contained *by* idealism, contained *within* idealism and, at the same time, realism also serves as a container *for* idealism.

This apparent and deceptively simple truth seems worth pointing out at this juncture in the life of Integral Theory and practice, in the wake of the third Integral Theory conference where Integral Theory and Critical Realism were invited into a direct relationship, on many levels.

From a clinical psychological perspective, this development seems to be right on time, for the advancement of Integral Theory and practice. For, with the ongoing incarnation of Integral Theory and practice—most notably through the Metaintegral Foundation and also through many other kindred avenues—the immanent truth is that as ideals are born into apparent existence and thus *realized*, that which is lost (the status of an ideal form and a naïve idealization that accompanies any ideal form) is paradoxically its *gain*. The promise of involution is here, where infinite space dwells in this very place.

In this place, idealization matures. The persecutory anxiety that inevitably partners idealization, as its shadow, abates (Kristeva, 2004). (Through splitting, idealization covers over persecutory anxiety, which ironically serves to keep the genuinely good enough object at a distance, i.e. to keep the real from incarnating in intrapsychic and interpersonal reality.) As the light is contained and diffused in order to illuminate, the shadow diminishes. As involution progresses, a matured idealization blends with the relinquishment of pure, perfect forms. The superego relaxes its grip in service of embracing immanence.

The love affair that everyone has been having, and is still having, with Integral Theory and practice gives way to a deeper love—that which is within reach, that which is possible. There is the possibility of more tenderness, born of an appreciation for the depth of the wounding as well as the creativity and giftedness that Integral Theory and practice is a beacon to. There is the possibility of a real love beyond imagination—not just a fleeting affair, or a passing courtship, or a long distance thing—where Integral Theory and practice doesn't solve all of the world's problems one developmental stage at a time. Something much greater is sensed. If we can bear the true love with all of its disappointments, only then can Integral Theory and practice fulfill its promise—something inevitably greater than anyone could have imagined: the real thing.

Psyche—that feminine wisdom within each of us—knows this very well. She has lived the descent of becoming, many times. Yet each descent is its own particular, 'never before and never again' revelation. You know the story (see Carol Gilligan's beautiful rendering of the tale, 2003): Psyche reveals the true face of her lover, Eros, who has

come to be with her each night in the safety of darkness in order to hide his real, divine identity. For Venus, his mother, who is riddled with envy of their true love—a love that beautifully combines immanence and transcendence, could not stand for Eros and Psyche to be together. Psyche is then taunted by her less than supportive sisters, both fearing and half believing that her secret lover is in fact a monster. The sisters goad her into bringing a lamp and a dagger to bed, in order to prepare for the worst and be able to defend herself when Psyche cuts through the mask of darkness and looks upon this undoubted monster. The story goes on from there. Psyche's is an epic tale. She endures many hardships in pursuit of her true love. It is at once a developmental story of the feminine, a love story, and a tale of awakening. Importantly, as Carol Gilligan (2004) most helpfully points out, it does not end in tragedy; in truth, it does not end.

To carry on and work with just this opening of the story, when Eros is revealed by the lantern's illumination Psyche is so overcome by his majesty that, enveloped by desire, she spills hot oil from her lamp, burning and blinding poor Eros, who runs for the hills just as fast as he can. From the perspective of a developmental story of the feminine, Psyche recognizes her *own* true face by the light of her lamp, the light on Eros. She sees he is at once a dragon to be feared, who will surely consume her and her children, *and* a god. In perceiving her lover in both his dragonhood and his godhood – the equal capacity for the violent, murderous masculine within her as well as the masterful, enlightening masculine within her – without sacrificing her feminine essence, Psyche approaches the real.

From the perspective of a love story, Psyche frees Eros to claim his own fear of discovery of the real, instead of endowing his parent with all of that power. While both

Psyche and Eros will, indeed, be tortured by Venus in the trials ahead, they are now nevertheless free to pursue the real thing, trials, tortured experience and all. If it were not for the illumination of Psyche's lamp, if it were not for her searching and for her bravery and her faith, Eros would still be hiding out in the dark. In this way of course, Psyche's pursuit of her own freedom and fullness, regardless of the outcome, inevitably offers that same gift to her lover—if he can take it.

From the perspective of awakening, however, we need to rewrite the story. From the perspective of awakening, Psyche doesn't burn and blind Eros. She holds her lantern steadily, skillfully, in both hands. The light waxes with her steadiness, her fearlessness, her willingness to see him nakedly, just as he is. Not just their faces, but the whole room lights up. The glass of calm abiding steadies the flame of passion, allowing that passion to burn every more brilliantly, indeed not to spill but to dance. Faced with such a partner, Eros, displaying his wisdom, doesn't run. So Venus doesn't torture the lovers, for they are unafraid and so divest Venus of her persecutory power.

Eros looks at Psyche directly, just as she beholds him. They see one another fairly clearly: divinely human. Venus is thwarted because she can't jerk them around. The divine dimension of their love is beyond harm. The human dimension of their love accepts the inevitable limitations of what is (not) to be theirs. In other words, Psyche joins her calm abiding with insight into the true nature of love. Eros meets her there. There is no wedding in this version of the story, only a mere perfect union—from the perspective of awakening. True love, the joining of wisdom and compassion, the very heart of Psyche's quest, is born. This is the genuine birth of pleasure, Voluptas: the sheer delight of participating in waking up together. Just This is the beautiful daughter of

Psyche and Eros.

For everyone who reads this essay, Integral Theory and practice is a meaningful aspect of our Eros. We are Psyche. We are the feminine in development. We are lovers in union. We are awakening together. Metaintegral Foundation is a most beautiful daughter. She is already learning to speak multiple languages, Critical Realism being one among many. May she be supremely successful in her quest—surprising even her parents with her original wisdom and depth of love. May the ideal forms that Integral Theory and practice enshrines be contained for a few moments in time by Critical Realism. May Critical Realism learn to see the original face of Integral Theory. May we all continue to steady the lantern, in our very own hands, and shine, appreciating that this fated union of Psyche and Eros, of realism and idealism, is beyond us.

References

Gilligan, C. (2003). *The birth of pleasure* (Reprint.). New York, NY: Vintage.

Gilligan, C. (2004). Recovering psyche: reflections on life-history and history. *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, 32, 131–147.

Grotstein, J. S. (2007). *A beam of intense darkness: Wilfred Bion's legacy to psychoanalysis* (1st ed.). London, UK: Karnac Books.

Kristeva, J. (2004). *Melanie Klein*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.