

THE BODY OF THE FIVE-MINDED ANIMAL

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I take the expression "five-minded animal" from Kieran Egan's *The Educated Mind*

We have, you might say, a fivefold mind, or, more dramatically, we are a five-minded animal, in whom different kinds of understanding jostle together and fold on one another, to some degree remaining "somewhat distinct".¹

Egan has his particular take on this idea, but the idea is not peculiarly his or particularly new. Gebser was writing about five distinct "structures of consciousness" in the forties. In the sixties MacLean argued a physiological foundation for this sort of thinking while McLuhan proposed that the evolution of consciousness should be viewed in terms of five successive quantum leaps in our capacity to communicate. In the eighties Wilber expanded the argument that we have a number of apparently discrete modes of experiencing and interpreting the world. More recently, Kegan and Egan as developmental psychologists and Donald as an historian of consciousness have argued along similar lines and provided evidence from their own fields. Our consciousness, and our understanding, appear to be shaped by "somewhat different" structures of mind. The schemas and the language don't match perfectly, but the images of mind which emerge are strikingly similar.

Development psychology and evolutionary psychology both start with a notion of sequential progress from the simple form of conscious which characterises infants and the earliest humans, to the more complex consciousness which characterises mature adults in a post-industrial age. However, none the writers I list above propose the notion of an inevitable progress or advancement in human understanding. MacLean wants to point out to us that for all our illusion of cognitive sophistication, there are parts of our brains which still think like lizards and horses. Egan and Kegan want us to understand that as we develop new ways of thinking and understanding through the course of childhood and adolescence we do not outgrow and leave behind our earlier ways of understanding. As children we show some evidence of the cognitive skills we usually associate with adults. As adults we continue to think in mythic and romantic (Egan) or second and third order (Kegan) ways, as well as developing both philosophic and ironic understandings of the world (Egan) and engaging in both fourth and fifth order thinking (Kegan).

Gebser is interested in the different modes of consciousness as indicative of cultural evolution rather than of individual psychological development. However, though he spends a lot of space examining the evidence for the evolution of consciousness in the human species and uses this evidence to develop his model of five-fold consciousness, he apologises for doing so. He argues that sequential, quantitative time is the construction of a particular structure of consciousness, the mental-rational, and does not represent the nature of time and space in any absolute way. When he writes about the emergence of the different structures of consciousness as an historical development he is very aware that he is writing within the limitations both of language and of the specific structure of consciousness which he and his readers comfortably inhabit. However, Gebser argues, the ever present origin, which some of us loosely refer to as "reality", is not located in time and is manifested in no less valid a way through simpler structures of consciousness which modernist arrogance perceives to be not only chronologically prior but essentially inferior. Gebser proposes that reality becomes transparent to us here and now through all five structures of consciousness which he has identified: archaic, magic, mythic, mental-rational and integral.

Egan does the proper neo-Piagetian thing of taking us through the sequence of developmental phases (mythic, romantic, philosophic and ironic) that mark our passage from infancy to mature

¹ Egan, K. (1997) *The Educated Mind*. University of Chicago Press. p.80.

adulthood, and concludes with a discussion of somatic understanding. In fact he puts it in the same chapter as the ironic understanding that characterizes sophisticated and aware postmoderns like us. Of course, every one with a passing acquaintance with Piaget knows that Egan should have discussed somatic understanding first, where it belongs, in view of its obvious equivalence with Piaget's sensorimotor intelligence. Instead, Egan seems keen to explore the connection between somatic and ironic understanding.

Somatic understanding provides to ironic understanding something beyond language, something foundational to all later understanding. It is not the kind of metanarrative foundation sought in philosophic understanding. The tension between the somatic foundation of consciousness and the ironic, flexible, linguistic superstructure allows to the ironic language-user an understanding of ultra-linguistic experience; this somatic experience provides us with something below language that our language can strive to be true to, and that truth can be something more Rortyesque than agreements with fellow language-users.²

Gebser did his thinking and writing long before it became necessary to respond, as Egan is compelled to do, to the now conventional proposition that human experience is essentially linguistic and that there is no pre-linguistic consciousness which language serves to represent. He had no problem imagining the origins of consciousness (and language) in a somatic, pre-linguistic consciousness. In fact it is central to his model. Besides, Gebser's model of structures of consciousness is not a psychological one, based on the experience of the egoic individual. Egoic individuality is itself relativised, as a feature of the mental-rational structure. Archaic consciousness is not something that the individual hominid "had". It is a way of being which belongs to the species, and our earliest ancestors lived their lives embedded in it. And so do we.

As I sit at my word-processor reflecting on Gebser's structures of consciousness, I am aware of other minds working besides my rational one. I find myself connecting to my task through magic. I find myself in a world where things happen and I use magic to control them. I touch letters on my keyboard and magical things happen on the screen. I click on particular icons and other magical things happen. I do not have the slightest idea why the movements of my hands lead to these consequences, nor do I try to comprehend it or need to do so. Everybody in my usual world accepts this magic. It's a taken-for-granted reality that I don't need to think about it at all. If for some reason I touch my keyboard and something unexpected and undesirable happens, my ignorance of the complexities of the hardware and software and their interaction is such that I have no recourse but to experiment with an increasingly frustrated clicking on icons before calling a more experienced member of the word-processing tribe to assist me. It seems to me that the expert assistance also derives from a magical view of the computer. *If I do X, Y should happen. There you are. It's working.* Such expertise is based on training or experience rather than on a complete understanding of all the cause-effect relationships involved in the mathematics and mechanics and electronics of it all. I imagine that my long-forgotten ancestors went through a similar process when they found that their rain dance wasn't working. They called in the expert, who had more training and experience to call on, even if he did not really understand the complexities of meteorology. *Try doing it this way. There you are. It's raining.*

I also find my mythical mind engaged in this task. For one thing I have a tendency to imagine my computer as a quasi-person who is remarkably clever, generally benevolent, occasionally malicious. In moments of stress I find myself being grateful to it, talking to it in pleading tones, getting angry with it, calling it names. For another, I find that in writing this paper I am embedded imaginatively in a story. It's a story which I share with the community of discourse which I inhabit, a story about a particular kind of question and a particular way of addressing it. This story has its heroes and its villains and its basic values and assumptions. It is actually a story that works pretty well for me. It gives me a place to belong as a professional academic and it gives my work something I like to call "meaning".

However, my mental-rational mind is also engaged. I want to pursue some sort of truth, and to do so I have to break out of the container of this communal story. I have to look at it critically and consider whether its assumptions and conclusions are true, rather than simply inherited. I

² Kegan, *ibid.* p. 170.

apply dualistic thinking to the question, distinguish between the objective world and my subjective experience, distinguish between conclusions which are grounded in evidence and those which are merely aesthetically pleasing, pursue the notion that there is a truth out there which I can find if I think hard enough.

Yet, while my rational mind comes to conclusions which appear to me to be true, at least for the time being, my integral mind is busy relativising them. What my mental-rational mind sees as truth (or at least an approximation to truth) my integral mind recognises as a perspective. My mental-rational mind sees the world from a particular position, constructed largely by a European academic tradition. My integral mind – if I am up to it - sees it from no position in particular and from all positions at once. It enables me to look critically not only at evidence and conclusions, but also at the modes of thought through which I see this evidence and draw these conclusions. It enables me to apply to my own meaning-making the same reservations that I have applied to the meaning-making of those with whom I disagree. It enables me to apply the critical perspective not only to my thoughts but to my manner of thinking (Kegan). It enables me to have an understanding of the world that is, in Egan's word, *ironic*.

Egan argues that ironic understanding is made up largely of mythic, romantic and philosophic characteristics. The ironic manner of understanding provides strategies for transcending the limitations of straightforward discourse and for getting at what straightforward discourse cannot readily express. In a world understood ironically, statements can be both true and false, events can be both significant and trivial, life can be both meaningful and meaningless. In particular, irony provides strategies for giving the ineffable, including our somatic understanding, some sort of representation. Our somatically experienced understanding of the world does not readily translate into straightforward discourse.

Gebser's understanding of the integral structure of consciousness (aperspectival, arational, time-free, ego-free) is that it is a new structure whose emergence he was able to document in the middle of the twentieth century. He expressed the view that rational consciousness had got us into a planetary emergency which rational consciousness is not able to get us out of. He understood that he was observing the emergence of a way of thinking which re-owns our neglected archaic, magical, and mythical minds and integrates them within a new structure of consciousness which might enable us to find a way out of the crisis. The re-owning of an archaic, pre-egoic consciousness structure, in which the individual experiences the world without distinguishing self from the world, is an essential element in this image.

Returning to my five-minded activity at the computer, what part does archaic consciousness play in this? There are a number of ways of thinking about this. I can place MacLean's theoretical template on this and say that my reptilian brain does not contribute much to my awareness (except for the occasional shot of adrenalin) but as the seat of my instinctive behaviour it drives the whole project whether I'm aware or not. I can follow Julian Jaynes and say that most of my behaviour is unconscious, that even when I am wide awake and reflective as I claim to be at this moment, my organism keeps on doing quite complicated things without my attending to them. I can talk about the unconscious, personal and collective, the way Jung does when he locates it in the physical as distinct from the mental world. I can follow Egan in his reflections on somatic learning, speculating on the human organism's pre-linguistic understandings which are not always available to awareness. We might talk about *tacit knowledge* in such terms, as Polanyi does. Or we might join Gendlin in finding techniques for articulating our inchoate *felt sense* in all its immediacy. What I want to do here is to take seriously Gebser's notion that we retain an archaic mind that is not only pre-linguistic but pre-egoic. And that the *ever present origin* presents itself to us directly through this structure as well as through the integral structure which encompasses the archaic along with the magical, mythic and mental.

From such a perspective my interaction with the key-board and screen are not to be thought of as a subjective agent acting on a lifeless object. Observing the five-minded animal I find an individual, critical mind trying to think rationally and construct an argument. I also find a tribal, communal mind telling part of the story which gives the tribe identity, and a species mind which is simply trying to exercise some control over a world in which "things happen". I also find a

mind which has very little awareness at all, which is not the mind of the individual, or the mind of the species or the tribe, but the mind of the greater whole. As the image of world-as-machine is found to fit less and less comfortably with the information about the universe revealed by science, other, previously discarded, images are returning and the notion of a "world soul" begins to appear less absurd.³

Our image of the universe and our relationship to it shapes the way we live our lives and the way we prepare our children to live theirs. Since Piaget we have been reminded of the need to acknowledge that children do not think just as adults do, and we have a pedagogical literature which suggests how we should approach the education of infants, children, adolescents and adults. Egan's *The Educated Mind* is an excellent recent example which focuses on the implications of such a theory for schooling. Kegan's *In Over Our Heads* looks most closely at the implications for adult learning. However, though such thinking may have its roots in a developmental model, it has outgrown it. Children are five-minded animals and can have all their minds awakened and engaged to some extent, at least. So can adults.

Education, conventionally, is something that individuals engage in (or have imposed on them) for their own sakes or the sake of their community. However, if we were to drop our egocentric or sociocentric assumptions, or even our anthropocentric ones, and start from ecocentric assumptions we might theorise education very differently.

Egocentric and sociocentric theories of education depend on our assuming the existence of a boundary between self and the world, or between human society and the world. The deep ecologist, by contrast, does not perceive the world as "other". Notions of "self" and "self-realisation" are applied not only to the individual and the species but to the whole of nonhuman reality. If subjective, individualised experience is acknowledged and valued, it is acknowledged and valued as a manifestation of the "mind of the world". From such a perspective the focus of education shifts from the individual to the planet.

We might start theorising education with the notion that we are cells of a greater evolving organism and that the process which we acknowledge as our individual "growth" is an element of a greater process - in other words, that "growing" is not something we do but a process in which we participate. We can deal with such an idea through third, fourth or fifth order thinking; we can have a romantic, philosophic or ironic understanding of it; we can approach it in mythical, mental or integral consciousness. But what is most significant in Gebser's model is the notion that, before ever we "think" about it at all, we prehend it through our physical, organic sense of the world, that the constantly transforming ecology of nature is felt in our natural rhythms and "known in our bones". We may not be able to articulate such a sense, and may well have been taught not to try, but our felt sense of the world may be the foundation, not only of our wisdom but also of our relationships. Gebser suggests that it is our archaic, pre-linguistic identification with the earth which is the basis of our ability to empathise with others, the source, as Roczak argues, of

³ Whitehead, in refuting the "doctrine" of a lifeless, machine-like universe, deplored the fact that "The state of [recent] modern thought is that though every single item in this general doctrine is denied, that the general conclusions from the doctrine as a whole are tenaciously retained" Whitehead, A.N. (1938) *Modes of thought*. Cambridge University Press.p.132. More recently, Von Weisacker argued that quantum theory now makes mechanistic images of the world obsolete. Furthermore, if quantum theory is understood as a theory of information, it applies to information about mental events as well as physical events. Such a notion is incompatible with Cartesian dualism and leads inevitably to a serious consideration of the existence of world soul. See Von Weisacker (1980) *The unity of nature*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux.

Plato's notion of world soul, which carries the image of the world as a purposeful organism, was kept alive by Kant, Goethe and the "nature philosophers" of the 19th century, in spite of being discarded as obsolete by mainstream science. In the 20th century, the notion has been explored and developed in such domains as process philosophy, Jungian psychology, deep ecology, biology and physics.

the empathic rapport with the natural world which is reborn in every child and which survives in the work of nature poets and landscape painters. Where this sense of shared identity is experienced as we most often experience it, person to person, we call it "love".⁴

Unfortunately, conventional Western education is dominated by particular narratives which ignore this rapport and separate humans from nature, as exploiters at worst or custodians at best. Our thought and talk about our relationship with nature can be framed by such narratives and limited to a mythical understanding; or we can assume the philosophic and scientific stance to look rationally and objectively at that relationship and see how deeply we are implicated in nature. We can even come from an ironic/fifth order/integral understanding to transcend the limitations of the subject-object distinction which conventional Western thought takes for granted. From this stance we may even acknowledge that our subjectivity is not our own private possession but is the subjectivity of the cosmos, and that notions of "self" and "self-realisation" need to be expanded to include not only to the species but the whole of nonhuman reality.

My purpose in this paper is not to make suggestions as to how we should educate the separate minds of the multiple-minded animal. Piaget and his successors have made plenty of recommendations on the basis of the developmental model, and there is an increasingly sophisticated pedagogical literature about multiple intelligence, learning styles, left-brain, right-brain and whole-brain learning, which deals with the education of our multiple minds without necessarily adopting such a metaphor or using such language. My purpose, rather, is to wonder out loud what sort of education is appropriate for a five-minded animal whose body is the planet.

We might start with the notion that adequate human functioning demands a congruence between self and Nature. Infants are born in a state of congruence with Nature. Our challenge is to guide their development through increasingly complex ways of thinking without their losing this simple grounding in nature. This is made most difficult by the fact that they live in a culture that is not congruent with Nature and is too slowly coming to realise where this incongruence is leading. Moreover we belong to a species whose powerful elites have spent centuries wiping out cultures that are congruent with Nature.

We might cherish a deep realisation that we and all other entities are aspects of a single unfolding reality. We might get to see our relationships with our students not as instrumental to their learning about an objective universe, but as an expression of the universe's evolving process. We might cease to suppress our organismic sense of unity with all being and model its expression for our students.

We might respect our own and our students' organic identification with the planet and assist them to find ways of expressing it. We might be sensitive to our students' pain as the pain of the world, and acknowledge that perhaps the anxiety of many young people and the destructive means they use to medicate it are a collective manifestation of a massive collective anxiety about the incomprehensible danger we are in.

We might balance the dominant myth of human progress through science and technology with the alternative narrative that Gaia is our mother and we are her children.

We might teach our students to value the planet for its own sake, and not for the benefits it gives us. We might at the very least cease to teach our students to destroy it through excessive consumption and the pollution which accompanies it.

We might acknowledge, as Sheldrake does⁵, that people's stance toward Nature is profoundly influenced by childhood experiences, and ensure that the schooling our students receive includes a rich experience of the natural world.

We might provide a schooling environment which allows students to *be*, acknowledging, like Carl Rogers, that in allowing children to become truly themselves, " we are not involved in a chance

⁴ Roczak, T. (1995) Where Psyche Meets Gaia. In T. Roczak, M.E.Gomes & A.D.Kanner (Eds) *Ecopsychology*. Sierra Club Books. p.16.

⁵ Sheldrake, R. (1990) *The rebirth of nature: new science and the revival of animism*. London: Rider.p.182f.

event. We are tapping into a tendency which permeates all organic life – a tendency to become all the complexity of which the organism is capable."⁶

Gebser pursued his research and speculation on the emergence of an integral structure of consciousness in the mid-twentieth century in the hope that the existence of such a structure would give us the means to avoid the seemingly inevitable planetary catastrophe. His focus was on the evidence he found in the European arts and sciences of new modes of thought and language that were able to transcend ego, dualistic rationality, perspective and quantified time and space. In examining this emerging structure he looks more towards what is new and complex in it than to what is old and simple. While it is clear from his argument that the pre-egoic, pre-linguistic sensing of the interconnectedness of all being which he calls *archaic* is the ground all succeeding structures, he gives it little attention in his discussion of integral consciousness. It is time we gave it attention. Individually I sense my physical body, identify it as *me*, and care for it. Collectively we sense the planet as our body, suppress this sense, and abuse it.

It is no longer particularly controversial to suggest that our physical selves are continuous with the material universe, that there is no clear boundary between my body and its environment. It is much more difficult to be taken seriously if we argue, as Jung did, that our minds are continuous not only with the collective mind of the species but with the soul of the universe, the *anima mundi*, and that matter and mind are themselves continuous, being complementary aspects of the same reality, the *unus mundus*.⁷

Rupert Sheldrake, who prefers to speak of a "primal unified field" rather than the "soul of the universe", and the "unified field of Gaia" rather than the "anima mundi", nevertheless argues vigorously that we must recognise nature as *alive*, a recognition which has profound social and political consequences:

*As soon as we allow ourselves to think of the world as alive, we recognize that a part of us knew this all along. It is like emerging from winter into a new spring. We can begin to reconnect our mental life with our own direct, intuitive experiences of nature. We can participate in the spirits of sacred places and times. We can see that we have much to learn from traditional societies that have never lost their sense of connection with the living world around them. We can acknowledge the animistic traditions of our ancestors. And we can begin to develop a richer understanding of human nature, shaped by tradition and collective memory, linked to the earth and the heavens, related to all forms of life; and consciously open to the creative power expressed in all evolution. We are reborn into a living world.*⁸

We are indebted to Egan for the insight that it is the somatic, organismic, sensing of a world for which straightforward language is not adequate that enables the individual to think and communicate in the complex mode he calls *ironic*. I suggest that it is our pre-egoic, pre-linguistic, organismic, unformulated sensing of the interconnectedness of all being that needs to be articulated in our magic, our myth and (ironically if need be) in our educational theory and practice if we are to live in a way which is congruent with who we are.

⁶ Carl Rogers (1980) *A Way of Being*. Houghton Mifflin.p.134. It should be noted that Rogers understood this tendency to be a manifestation of a "formative directional tendency in the universe...This is an evolutionary tendency towards greater order, greater complexity, greater interrelatedness." Ibid. p.133. Such statements naturally drew the accusation that he had ceased to be a serious scientist and had slipped into "nature mysticism".

⁷ Jung developed the notion of "unus mundus" in collaboration with the physicist Wolfgang Pauli. See Jung, C.J.& Pauli, W. (1955) *The interpretation of nature and the psyche*. New York: Pantheon.

⁸ Sheldrake, R. *ibid* .p.188.

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