

Book Review

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Adi Da. *Not-Two Is Peace: The Ordinary People's Way of Global Cooperative Order*, 3rd ed., expanded and updated. Middletown, CA: Dawn Horse Press, 2009.

This book is valuable in so many ways that writing a review of it is a pleasure; its limitations are only the result of its considerable virtues and, its author might add, of the times we live in.

It elucidates in diverse ways the immense value of profound nondualist experience for humane and ecohumane well-being. And while in doing so it does not rely on scholarly references, anyone who has encountered traditional teachings of the inherent unity of being from the Vedas, Sutras, mystics or indigenous sources will recognize basic similarities in concept and import. For instance, where we read in Adi Da that “The restoration of sanity and Truth – or the restoration to Reality Itself – requires the overcoming of the ‘self’-deluded process. . . of ‘self-objectification,’” we hear echoes of ancient teachings about the *avidya* or ignorance that obscures and deludes our understanding (of ourselves as essentially not-twoed from “prior unity”). Our ignorance, he explains, is in thinking of ourselves as separate egos which, therefore, in turn objectify All (including one another) as something separate from ourselves. From this derive the “tribalisms,” competitiveness, fears and lack in peace and composure that afflict our unsustainable lives. Our self-alienating presumption of individual ego eclipses the basic Self-realization that we are, finally, non-individually selfless in (and as) the not-two of never-completely-objectifiable “Reality Itself.”

Adi Da is both clear and tonic in showing the extent to which the contemporary “world is deluded by its own artifacts” and that we continuously blind ourselves to the fact that “the egoless human being fully participates in Reality Itself” by our persistently assuming that we do not do so via our repeated “egoic” assertions. In other words, it is in assuming and instantiating the unity of the reality that is prior to all egoing (rather than assuming duality in our interpersonal and geopolitical interactions) that we embody Reality. “Egolessness is the self-organizing energy of prior unity.” We have put the cart of separateness before the horse of not-two, and in the process let ourselves be “reduced” to the status of “consumers” or, worse, of commodities – much like the bounty of the natural world we are using up at an unsustainable rate.

One miscue in the development of Da’s thinking may be in using the term “individuation” to accentuate the confrontational hyper-individualism of contemporary social psychology. Compare his criticism of it with Jung’s richly developed use of the term individuation to characterize a process of psychospiritual “integration” of opposites

tending towards what Adi Da himself seems to propose. Consider also that characters and images in dream, myth and ritual drama often provide useful bridges for understanding how competing opposites reveal as well as conceal a manifold *coincidentia oppositorum*, or marriage of opposites. Examples are in the reciprocities of *yinyang* or in the unconditioned unity behind the battling armies of *Bhagavadgita* where Krishna, in the form of a charioteer, reminds us to “be free of the pairs of opposites. Poise [our] mind in tranquility . . . Be established in the consciousness of the *Atman*, always.” Da and his followers might reach readers more readily if they occasionally used the imagery of myth, parable and poetry to refresh the aridity of his exposition. By the same token, what Da writes is entirely germane to (nonreductive and nondual, in particular) philosophical, religious, political and scientific understandings worldwide and merits critical and appreciative interpretation in those contexts.

Attempting to clarify the self-presencing of undivided Reality-experience, what Adi Da calls “prior unity,” i. e., the unity that is “senior” to everything that we usually experience as divided into us and them, this and that, pro and con, and all the exaggerated *brouhaha* of the “daily news,” Da devises innovative tactics of language, (including punctuation and capitalization). These are briefly distracting, but in no case is his use of language ambiguous or unclear. Such a statement as that: “Love Is The Inherent (and, thus, moment to moment) Transcending of the separate ‘subject’ (or the egoic and divisive ‘self’) and the separate ‘object’ (or the illusory ‘not-self’)” would by itself be a show-stopper. But the book explains its use of novel forms of expression, provides a glossary and an astute introduction by Ervin Laszlo, and the reader is made familiar with terms as they arise; (the 3rd edition, 1/09, is some 100 pages longer than that of 6/07). So the overall experience is one of thinking together with and, gradually, as genuinely seminal being-consciousness – sometimes in tradition signified by *sat-chit-ananda*.

Occasional generalizations demand some support, for example, the declaration that: humans created language-based systems of knowledge in a collective effort to “protect. . .the. . . ego-position on which human cultures are traditionally based.” This is congruent with Da’s overall argument (throughout which, as I recall, he provides only one reference). But there are thoughtful linguists, psychological and biocultural anthropologists and others who might demur here. I’d mention Benjamin Lee Whorf or Laughlin et al., in their *Brain, Symbol & Experience*

It is not initially easy, if ever easy, to bespeak indivisible prior unity in a world of mind and speech that is everywhere premised on ego-born duality and the dramas of often antagonistic multiplicities. As Zhuangzi suggests, there is the One, then there is somebody, and then that somebody is saying something about that One—which makes three; already the calculations are adding up fast. Again, however, we are asked to read Adi Da not foremost as an “author” or as a “writer,” and far less as an academic, but as an expression of a presumably integral consciousness that is often eclipsed by the divisiveness of “Narcissistic holocaust” in our “dark time.”

Adi Da gets right to work, in a “no nonsense. . .only business handled” way forgoing the humor, irony, fun and sweet affection we find in the writings of such

illuminated ones as Zhuangzi or Hafiz. In fact, as incontrovertibly valuable as Adi Da's teaching is in this book, its exposition is sometimes nigh unto hieratic, even pontifical. And this is especially so when his apostrophe is to "you" (meaning you, me, the readers) as if he were not also one among us: "You -- the people of the world. Every one of 'Everyman' must be changed, and restored to the non-dissociative circumstance. . . ." There is nothing offensive about this kind of address, and in its didactic or even hortatory context it is understandable. But neither, even though written in the name of compassion, does it savor of the inclusive love of, say, the self-deprecating Hafiz who writes to a similar end: "To your deepest sensibilities my Beloved has asked Hafiz to sing with all of my millstone's talents." The univocality of Avatar Adi Da *Samraj* sometimes verges on that of the Abrahamic traditions he not unreasonably critiques.

Yet "World-Friend" Adi Da offers real gifts of trenchancy and camaraderie in his work to help us grow "to relinquish the ego-principle and to embrace the Prior-Unity-Principle" and become politically free. "To be thus grown is, itself, to be (inherently) politically free." And a major way to this is through our "intimate cooperation" in effecting locally, and also -- notably via internet resources -- a "Global Cooperative Forum" for the future conduct of life on earth. This "does not require disassociation from one's nation, one's birthplace, or one's particular citizenship. Rather, it requires the discipline of always exercising a disposition that, fundamentally, transcends any kind of particularity of orientation." It is thinking and living in terms of all of us, not just of the ego, clan, state or other corporate body we have divided ourselves into. "The disposition of always (and inherently) being part of humankind first implies a kind of egolessness." "Cooperation and tolerance" accompany this, "the necessary 'new paradigm' for the human design of future effort," and the necessary, ensuing peace. The author also alludes to the practical value of contemplative practices, generically meditative or, as appropriate, "esoteric," for the widespread development of "self-organizing" peace and world justice. The technique of the esoteric teaching is not made explicit, but there is extensive reflection on the value of a disciplined pedagogy he calls "zero-point education" in the "restoration of the principles of egolessness and prior unity to the course of human life." He tellingly affirms that, The Global Cooperative Forum is, itself, the "activism," the "institutional manifestation of 'zero-point' education."

Da refers to the Forum as a new kind of human "institution" throughout his work, one that is vitally apt to the crises of our times. Yet with this word he also evokes unfortunate connotations of the kinds of self-limiting tribal institutions -- Church, State and Party -- that he hopes for us to outgrow. This choice of words may be another miscue to the average reader in a couple of ways. In the first, the word "institution" in colloquial American English still connotes a reified thing more than a transformative process and event varying with time and participants. Second, despite referring to the Forum as a "movement" characterized by "spontaneous" global "egolessness," (and expressly saying of "the pattern of cosmos" that "there is no single 'anything' in charge") he speaks of the Forum's institutional need to have "a unique group of responsible and capable individuals who know how to connect with everybody-all-at-once" in this, "the 'end-time' of ego-culture." These duly "converted" and "esoterically" trained "servant-heroes," (in roles that seemingly combine the better features of Plato's guardians, "mature contemplatives"

as mentioned in Laughlin, et al., and the Jesuits), would ably abet the “global systematization of humankind.”

A problem here is that Da’s welcome intentions for “something new [that] can only emerge from everybody-all-at-once” in an “ecstasy” of egolessness as we “relinquish the old civilization” seem repeatedly to be subverted by his use of the old essentialized brick-mortar-and-manifesto-laden vocabulary of a (now seemingly hierarchized) “core institution” led or overseen by an elect cognoscenti for the “systematization of the totality of the human world on Earth.” Something as truly refreshing, if not indeed as authentically soteriological, as Da’s project needs to be poetically redeemed from its prosaic echoing of Total System language familiar since, say, Nebuchadnezzar. We do indeed benefit by teachers and wise guides, but more “institutionalization” seems not the remedy these days. Yet as say the Sufis, let us take the wheat and not the measure in which it is contained.

Teilhard’s notion of the “noosphere” might help here, or Gebser’s idea of “integral consciousness.” Indeed, one very good choice of a conceptual and rhetorical complement to Da’s discourse is in *rDzogs-chen* Buddhism, an “esoteric system” of nondoing-twoing wonderfully interpreted in light of contemporary systems theory by Herbert Guenther’s *From Reductionism to Creativity*. I’d even suggest that the silicon advent of the Global Cooperative Forum heralded by Adi Da deserves for support and context not only a library of interactions with texts and traditions but a planetarily-tuned, transdisciplinary and intercultural (not just dutifully multi-cultural) practical/contemplative/learning community. Whether with a university, in a journal, among websites and webcasts, in ongoing seminars, symposia, conferences, dialogues or gentle late-night FM radio, the Forum is more likely to escape any parochialism (of originating vocabulary) if it is enhancingly hybridized, seasoned and invigorated (i. e., rendered tasty, musical and easy to dance to) by the resources of the entire global noetic repertoire, contemporary and ancient – and spices and tunes these resources up at the same time. (See Bohm, *On Dialogue*; Herman, *I and Tao*; Hall, *Eros and Irony*; “weak ontology” in Stephen K. White; see also the prescient discussions of *ars contextualis*, acosmological understanding and single-ordered metaphysics in Hall and Ames and again in Kuang-Ming Wu who also shares with us the “musical hermeneutics” of the nondualism of Zhuangzi who “was always smiling in his sentences”; and Girardot offers up a deliciously appropriate hermeneutics of existential soups, stews and wontons.)

If I understand today’s need aright, the characterizations of the timely, fluid and fluent practice of the Global Cooperative Forum that Da proposes might better emphasize it as the vibrant event or “ritual process” of shared “liminality” and “communitas” described by Victor Turner, for instance, than as the inert thing “institution” suggests. And the descriptive notion of the Forum as a “self-organizing system” would much benefit from a greater emphasis on its far-from-equilibrium “openness” to the environment and on its ateleological performance (as described by, for instance, Jantsch) or its axiological expansion of systemic goal seeking (as in Kauffman). Da does well to essay a language of whole systems, but he does so as if the connotations of “systematization” were the same as those of the “self-organizing systems” to which he so

beneficially but cursorily alludes; (there's no development of the idea of feedback loops in autopoiesis, for instance). The institution GM is systematized; the irreducibly mysterious universe self-organizes. Altogether, some of the heavy totalism implicit in Da's prose and concept (including a large sprinkling of "must," "insist," and "require") would be relieved and humanized by a complementary dose of dynamic and processual themes not to mention some Hermes-Trickster-*Dada* playfulness.

I don't care to infer that Da intends literal enforcement of anything by elite initiates so much as that he seems with visionary clarity to believe that the strength of his arguments and tutored, meditative realization among followers will carry the day. But I have orbited the sun often enough to know how charisma gets routinized into duress. And such Da assertions as that, "Everybody other than everybody-all-at-once is merely a faction. . . .merely an egoically 'self'-interested consumer" can only fuel the fires of missionary polemics among those whose education for the "new global order" of "sanity and wisdom" is only rote, piecemeal or secondhand, however sincere.

The alchemy of "authentic human existence" Da bids us to, and the always-already "harmonious event of prior unity and cooperative peace" proceed inclusively amid, not platonically outside, the vagaries of the passions, differences, worries and doubts of all of us – "humankind-as-a-whole activates itself in the context of time and space." *Klesa* is *Bodhi*, to invoke another nondualizing metric. To "participate in indivisible prior unity with all-and-every-one and each-and-all-of-every-'thing'" is to draw on the languages of sister traditions in taking upon ourselves what someone has called the sins of this world. We can understandingly work with these by using language whose lucidities, locutions and perseverations help deliver us to any further shore by first meaning something to us where we are.

The egolessness we learn of in this book is devoid of the high drama of our usual knee-jerk assertions, national and individual, of I, me and mine as if these were not "always already" one with, and as, you and yours in the ecology of mind and nature. Absent the *agon* of adversarial concupiscence and violence, the no-drama *politique* of a Global Cooperative Forum convokes a mode of global community organization. It is refreshingly reminiscent of the cadences of "No Drama Obama" and the emerging global *mystique* of new age *aloha*. Adi Da writes from Fiji; you don't need a weatherman to know which way the Pacific wind blows.

I haven't in a long time read a book that hits so many nondual nails on the head so neatly, to make a bad analogy. There were parts of this work that, in the words of a classical Chinese scholar-sage, made me so happy I felt like I was "dancing with my hands and feet." There were a few where I sensed a suppressed rancor. Reminded along the way of Plotinus and Eriugena as much as of *Advaita*, I heard also a refrain of transformative urgency not sounded quite so singularly or penetratingly since the millennial aspirations of Joachim of Fiore. It is well worth reading twice—I've read the 2nd and the much-enlarged 3rd editions. It deserves a place on both public and university library shelves.

I recommend it highly with the qualification that it requires concentration, patient attentiveness, and a certain allowance for the note of outraged idealism that I am sure lived in the heart of its recently deceased author. Da read literature and philosophy, and the book reproduces some of his artwork. However rare his gifts, I intuit that they also include some remorse and the longing for the lost (w)holiness that long antedates Milton, Genesis, the *Rig Veda*, the caves at Lascaux – or many of the other things he learned about as a budding humanities student. His work offers a diagnosis and remedy for a world culture of peaceless “mummery” and violence. But seriously to put it into practice, we “must surrender” and “lose face” of the egoic kind we are used to saving (the *mikroprosopos*), that we may “All-and-all-at-once” reveal the glad countenance of Reality.

Google offers multiple references to Adi Da (some problematic or gossipy, some giving different names he has used, e. g., Da Free John); and the book itself directs interested readers to <<ispeace723.org>>, site of the Global Cooperative Forum.

Interested readers might also appreciate: Jean Gebser’s *Ever-Present Origin*, Sri Aurobindo’s *The Future Evolution of Man*, David Loy’s *Nonduality*, N. K. Girardot’s *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, Thomas Berry’s *Dream of the Earth*, Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds. *Buddhism and Ecology*, Beatrice Bruteau’s *Evolution toward Divinity*, Peter D. Hershock’s *Liberating Intimacy*, Ervin Laszlo’s *The Connectivity Hypothesis*, Charles Le Blanc’s *Huai-Nan Tzu*, Gray Kocchar-Lindgren’s *Narcissus Transformed*, John Weir Perry’s *The Heart of History*, Erich Neumann’s *The Origin and History of Consciousness*, Wilhelm Fränger’s *The Millenium of Hieronymous Bosch*, Robert A. Paul’s *Moses and Civilization*, William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and the projects of The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education, of The Forum on Religion and Ecology, and of Harvard’s Religions of the World and Ecology Series of books.

Namaste