

Paradoxes of Race and Gender

The wisdom of dynamic balance

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Abstract

This paper is born from the reflections that emerged through the Dialectica course held by Ubiquity University in the summer of 2021. Dialectica is the second in the system of the seven liberal arts. This system has come down to us from Greek antiquity through the medieval academy grounded in Chartres between the years 1000 and 1200 AD.

Each liberal art focuses on one layer of existence, offering a progressive understanding of reality. The first art, Grammatica, lays the foundations of an understanding of the Universe and humanity's place in it. At the heart of Dialectica, the second liberal art, lies the theme of the One and the Many, of diversity and polarity, of opposition and paradox. I will explore the mystery of Dialectica particularly as it can apply to the issues of gender and race, two of the most charged polarities of our times.

Introduction

In our journey through life, we experience both unity and multiplicity. On the one hand, in trance and mystical states, when enjoying art or contemplating nature, we have glimpses of unity as the ultimate ground of reality. All differences become illusory: we are one with each other, the cosmos, and all of creation. And yet, as incarnated beings, we also experience the unending variety of the world, with its contradictions and seemingly irreducible diversities. The dilemma of the One and the Many, the starting point of our contemplation on paradox and polarity, can, in its essence, be boiled down to the question: how is it possible that unity transforms into multiplicity?

This problem haunted the human mind for millennia, but it took a specific form in classical antiquity around the VI and V centuries BC, when the Greek philosophers contemplated this dilemma from divergent and, at times, opposite angles. For example, Parmenides attempted to resolve the paradox by collapsing it onto the pole of unity, arguing that anything that changes is unreal—only oneness is real. Heraclitus did the contrary and collapsed the paradox on the pole of multiplicity, stating that everything is in flux, and reality is perpetual change—being equals becoming. Neither of those two extreme positions proved ultimately satisfactory—paradox refused to be simplified.

Within the system of the liberal arts, *Dialectica*, the second art, is the one that addresses this particular conundrum. *Dialectica* introduces the existence of the Other, which brings along the possibility of diversity, opposites, polarity, and paradox.¹ This shift from unity to duality is necessary for the development of consciousness. Unity consciousness is free from doubts but also incapable of self-reflection. Where there is no other, there is also no I. Only once consciousness laboriously climbs out of unity into duality does the dazzling realm of

multiplicity and individual identities come into focus. The world, with its manifold variety, starts to emerge as an independent entity.

Alas, the appearance of the Other also brings with it hitherto unknown pain. Looking in the mirror can be hard; the reflections that come back are both delightful and dreadful. With duality comes the possibility of love and recognition, but also of conflict, opposition, and polarization. In her book *The Dream of the Cosmos*, Anne Baring (2013) describes the dramatic shift in consciousness from a participatory, shamanic sense of unity with the world and nature to a rational, detached intelligence—the one form of consciousness we are most accustomed to today (p. 84). This change, which in the history of Western civilization happened around 2000 BC, opened what philosopher Owen Barfield has called the “Phase of Separation” (Baring, 2013, p. 110). Having grown out of innocent identification with nature, consciousness learned to divide, compare, analyze, and engineer. This shift has allowed us to develop portentous technologies and dramatically improve our living conditions, yet it also entailed a tremendous loss of innocence and attunement. The consequences of that transition have shaped the world we live in and contributed to creating the global problems we face, from overpopulation to mass environmental destruction.

Duality consciousness introduces the possibility of discovering opposite and complementary qualities. I will use the term “polarity axis” to refer to the spectrum between opposites: the Masculine / Feminine polarity axis and the Light / Dark polarity axis are two of the most important examples. Wherever there is a polarity axis, there is a risk of painful inequality. The imbalance between Masculine and Feminine, for instance, is a key theme of reflection in philosophical and spiritual circles. In his book *New Self, New World*, Shepherd (2010) illustrates how, during the last four millennia, the masculine principle has gone into overdrive and relegated the feminine principle into the shadow, creating an essentially

disembodied culture. At the same time, Western civilization has manifested another equally powerful imbalance: that along the Light / Dark axis. Most of humanity has come to identify light and dark with the warring moral categories of good and evil—an association so ubiquitous nowadays that we can't even notice it most of the time. But the idea of a battle between light and darkness as manifestations of good and evil is not inherent to human nature. Instead, it is a myth introduced in the second millennium BC as part of the shift in consciousness we have been considering (Baring, 2013, p. 113). Today, the double imbalance of Masculine over Feminine and Light over Dark is one of the defining aspects of modern Western culture.

It is important to note that these powerful imbalances are not just abstract phenomena: they directly impact some of the most critical issues our globalized society finds itself in. For example, as I write these lines, the war in Ukraine is raging. While there is no shortage of historical and economic reasons for the conflict, this war can also be seen as a clear expression of an overdriven, distorted Masculine that has lost touch with the Feminine. Vladimir Putin, the visible face of the Russian invasion, embodies a specific masculine archetype: driven, firm, immune to emotions such as fear or sadness. In fact, even if such feelings were present, a leader like Putin would not be able to show them, lest he lose all credibility in his circles of power. The same is true of many world leaders, both men and women, who are expected to express the masculine qualities of determination, willpower, vision, and courage, with little to no regard for the feminine qualities of compassion, empathy, and emotional intelligence.

This example illustrates how dire the consequences can be when humanity goes too far along a polarity axis. What can we do to correct such a profound imbalance? I am convinced that developing a capacity to embrace paradox is key. We may find a way out of painful

oppositions by enlarging our consciousness on both a personal and collective level so that it can hold both poles. This, however, cannot be accomplished by the rational mind alone: we need access to other layers of our being. As I have elsewhere argued (Manacorda, 2019, p. 3), by contemplating paradox and staying with it rather than finding solutions, we learn to get past the rational mind and enter a level of consciousness (sometimes metaphorically called the heart) that can hold opposites together.

The rest of this discussion will be based on the hypothesis that paradox can help us restore balance in those places where an imbalance is becoming a source of too much distress. It is through this lens that I will explore the two most charged, painful imbalances of our times: that along the polarity axis of Masculine / Feminine as it relates to gender, and that concerning the polarity axis of Black / White as it relates to race.

Static and Dynamic Balance

What does it actually mean to correct an imbalance? Do we swing to the other extreme of a polarity axis? Or do we try to hold on to a position right in the center of the two extremes? Is there any other alternative—could we, for example, attempt to keep both poles in equal consideration?

Matthew Fox, a Christian minister who has coined the term “deep ecumenism” to define an approach based on inclusion and acceptance of many spiritual traditions, sees the dualism between body and mind as a scourge of Western thought (2008, p. 138). Fighting dualism, the essential duty of every bona fide spirituality (p. 151), means providing a container that can hold both poles of mind and body, spirit and matter, or any other polarity axis. In short, it means welcoming paradox. Fox is not afraid to invite paradox at the highest religious level when he states that a full Christianity is one that includes the “opposites” of Protestantism

and Catholicism (2008, p. 260), or when he frames the polarity between Western and Eastern religions as the contrast between serenity and passion, embodied by the Buddha's patience and Jesus's impatience (p. 262). Fox shows us beyond any doubt that, as far as religion is concerned, we don't need to choose between two poles: we can hold them both, provided we're willing to make an effort to enlarge our consciousness.

Yet holding opposite poles in paradox may seem easier said than done. Opening our minds and hearts to contradictory views and energies can feel excruciating. Why is embracing paradox so difficult? The trouble may lie with our concept of balance. It is true that paradoxes, by their very nature, do not lend themselves easily to solutions. The absence of solutions, however, is only a problem in a static view of the world. Finding balance, in other words, does not necessarily mean identifying a solution. Balance can be understood as static or dynamic, and this distinction may offer a way out of the difficulty of paradox.

In sports, static balance is our capacity to hold the body steady in a specific posture. Dynamic balance, on the other hand, refers to our ability to maintain equilibrium as we move, such as when walking or running. These are good metaphors for thinking about the balance along a polarity axis. Static balance would represent a definite proportion between the two poles, from the extremes of choosing one pole over the other to anything in between. While there is a value to static balance, if we observe our daily experience, we will find out that we change all the time, as do the surrounding circumstances. We don't have the same attitude when socializing as when we are deeply focused. Our intention shifts, and our way of interpreting the world changes, so much so that we are almost different people in different contexts. For example, we may wake up more in our Masculine in the morning and be more in our Feminine in the evening—whatever those words mean to us. Is there no use at all in speaking about balance, then? Here is where dynamic balance comes into play.

To understand dynamic balance, think of tightrope walkers. As they walk, one foot in front of the other, they are working with the polarity between their left and right side. Funambulists must constantly shift their center of mass to the left or to the right and try to keep it right above the centerline while moving towards the front. They need to adapt to continuously changing circumstances, not according to a preconceived plan, but rather with responsiveness to each moment. Usually, to maintain balance, tightrope walkers focus on a point in front, some distance away, in the direction they are walking. This is akin to an ideal point of balance, a metaphorical goal towards which to advance. All the above is what dynamic balance looks like: rather than finding a once-and-for-all balance between two poles, developing a mastery of movement that allows us to swing as needed while maintaining a goal in sight as our ideal destination.

I find the metaphor of dynamic balance to be illustrative of our condition. Like a tightrope walker, we are constantly out of alignment on any polarity axis, continuously readjusting according to our inner state and the feedback we get from the world. We may benefit from holding a center point in our vision, both as an ideal state to look to and as a reference to compare our current state of affairs with, to help us keep balance. But we may never be in a point of static balance for more than a fleeting moment.

One prerequisite of working with dynamic balance is accepting that both poles are, in principle, equally valid. It would not make sense for a tightrope walker to believe that left is better than right, or vice versa. From this point of view, we need to strengthen our capacity to hold two contradictory truths as valid, though perhaps not equally needed at any given time. Only then can we develop the ability to bring in as much of each pole as is demanded by the present instant. Dynamic balance, then, becomes a practice that enables us to embrace paradox, drawing from the two opposite qualities according to the needs of the moment.

While the demands of paradox cannot be met at any point in time, just as we cannot lean simultaneously to the left and to the right, they can be attained as a dynamic dance through time. Let us then see how the reflections on dynamic balance and the nature of paradox apply to the painful imbalances between Masculine and Feminine, and between Light and Dark.

The Hero and the Tyrant

Shepherd (2010) analyses the condition of our world through the lens of the rift between the body and the mind. The split between body and mind is rightfully regarded as one of the direst consequences of the Masculine / Feminine imbalance. According to Shepherd, this split is the result of a long process that started in the V millennium BC, with the invasion of Europe by the Kurgan, a horde of nomadic tribes coming from the steppes north of the Black Sea (2010, p. 342). The invaders brought with them a radical change of civilization. To them, we owe the introduction of the horse, the beginning of the domestication of animals, and the substitution of the female goddesses by new male deities (p. 348). But the Kurgan culture is also responsible for the conflation of white with life and black with death, reversing an age-long opposite association (2010, p. 343). Shepherd argues that the shifts connected to this violent incursion sowed the seeds of the current era. Most of our individual and collective problems derive precisely from that original split, which resulted in the dangerous isolation of a consciousness disembodied and disconnected from the body and the world (2010, pp. 56-57). The Masculine has gone into overdrive and taken its abode in the abstract realm of reason (p. 74). On the basis of his comprehensive analysis of the current situation, Shepherd goes on to provide some possible answers to the imbalance along the Masculine / Feminine polarity axis.

The male element, according to Shepherd (2010), can take one of two main forms: hero and tyrant. The tyrant is characterized by placing the focus of his identity and attention on

himself (p. 166). Full of glorious dreams, he has an insatiable desire for autonomy from the world and, therefore, from the Feminine. To achieve independence, the tyrant needs to dampen his sensitivity and become numb to the world's suffering (p. 425). Then, he can proceed to pillage and exploit people and natural resources without remorse.

The hero, on the other hand, places his center of gravity not in himself, but in the world—that is, in the Feminine. By doing so, he is able to connect to the world's suffering, hear its call, and act from a place of connection to the totality of existence (p. 259). Shepherd (2010) argues that, if we want to revert some of the self-destructive tendencies humanity is engaged in, we need to take responsibility for the tyrant in us and shift it into hero.

This transformation hinges on the Masculine's relationship to the Feminine (p. 75), and particularly on their power balance. Shepherd argues that the masculine and feminine principles aren't equally suited to leading: when the Masculine leads, it excludes, while when the Feminine leads, it can carry the Masculine along, thanks to her natural inclination to inclusion (2010, p. 87). According to Shepherd, the Masculine represents the element of doing, the Feminine the element of being (2010, p. 16). Based on this assumption, Shepherd advocates the primacy of being over doing, because "only when being comes first can we dwell in the self and in the world at the same time" (p. 87). In order to achieve a more integrated self, one that is in better harmony with the world, the Masculine in us needs to develop a capacity for healthy submission to the Feminine.

Shepherd's vision is bold in that it aims to revert at least forty centuries of dominance of the Masculine and effectively enact a change of the guard. This may sound like a fair and needed countermeasure. However, what Shepherd proposes is a new form of static balance. Deciding once and for all that our Feminine should lead and our Masculine follow is an example of finding a solution to a paradox, and Shepherd himself warns us against solutions.

The world, he argues, is too complex to be solved: solutions are appealing only because they disconnect us from the world's complexity, and offer us the reassurance of a fixed formula. Reality, on the contrary, lives in a state of harmonious perplexity—a term that Shepherd uses, in essence, to refer to paradox (p. 118). Mythologically represented by the insoluble Gordian knot, perplexity is a feature of life, rather than an inconvenience (Shepherd, 2010, p. 116). The frustration of Alexander the great who, unable to untie the knot, drew his sword and cut it in two, is an illustration of the overdriven Masculine. Learning to live with perplexity, on the other hand, means learning to tap into the mystery of existence. Mystery never provides an answer to our questions, rather inviting us into a contemplation of the paradoxical aliveness of our existence.

I wholeheartedly agree that reality is paradoxical, and so are we. If we just look at how we conduct our daily lives, we find that we are in a constant dynamic balance. And while there are times when a simple solution may be exactly what we need, it is seldom what works in the case of imbalance on a polarity axis. Jumping from solution to solution, we risk behaving like a pendulum, oscillating from one imbalance to the opposite. The wisdom of dynamic balance, instead of looking for solutions, invites us to hold a vision, like a tightrope walker, and continue putting one foot in front of the other, walking forward.

Shepherd's position on the Masculine / Feminine polarity axis is an example of aiming to correct an imbalance by proposing its reversal. Shepherd correctly identifies some of the worrying aspects of our culture as the results of an overdriven Masculine, yet he seems to suggest that the Feminine pole holds the answers to our plight. In so doing, he runs into what Fox (2008) calls the risk of sentimentalizing the Feminine (p. 237). Fox (2008) reminds us that the Feminine as an archetype is both nourishing and terrifying. She is both Tara and Kali, the Virgin Mary and the Black Madonna. She expresses the creative and chaotic forces of

nature, and she must be respected for what she is: powerful, fearsome, and independent. Fox warns us against putting the Feminine on a pedestal: that would be just another way of keeping her separate from itself and denying her the possibility of growth and evolution (p. 246). Both absurd debasement and unchecked adoration are, essentially, distortions of a Masculine cut out from a healthy, interactive, and cooperative relationship with the Feminine. Summing up, it is my conviction that the imbalance along the Masculine / Feminine axis, manifested in the split between mind and body, is both an urgent call and a great opportunity for us to contemplate paradox, and apply the lessons of dynamic balance. Let us now see whether the wisdom of polarity and paradox can offer a new lens through which to look at the painful imbalance that relates to race.

Ego and Higher Self

Can we speak of race as a polarity axis? This is a complex question and I don't expect to give a definite answer here. Yet although the concept of race is a construct, and its expressions are multiform and non-binary, the same can be said of gender. And while there is value in exploring gender outside of the Masculine / Feminine binarism, it is also true that, as far as the general state of collective consciousness is concerned, gender still mainly inhabits the spectrum between Masculine and Feminine. We can trace a tentative correspondence with race. Even though there are myriads of shades in physical and cultural expression, one specific polarity is entrenched in the collective psyche, at least in Western culture: the polarity between Black and White. These two archetypal extremes have the symbolic power to act as poles of an axis, despite the fact that they are not the most accurate terms to describe human skin color. What makes the issue even more complicated is the tendency to conflate the polarity axis of Black and White with that of Dark and Light—which, in turn, has been

unwarrantedly superimposed on moral ideas of good and evil.² With these preliminary considerations, I believe looking at race as polarity can be illuminating.

Before continuing, though, I have a personal observation to make. Growing up in Italy, I had remarkably few opportunities to be exposed to people of other ethnicities. Up and including my university years, my entire circle of friends and schoolmates was composed of white people, except for a short-lived friendship with a Black boy who ended up moving away in just a few months. As fate would have it, ethnic diversity is also not very present in my genetic code. A couple of years ago, after doing a genetic test, I discovered that my ancestry composition is 99,8% European. Summing up, while I have a certain degree of knowledge of the issues of gender and sexuality, I am keenly aware of the lack of references around race and ethnicity in my most formative years.

Faced with the prospect of bringing race into my exposition, I soon realized I had to turn to other sources of wisdom. Thankfully, I was offered a chance to tap into the perspective of someone that understands the issue of race from a personal as well as spiritual standpoint. Just a few months before writing this paper, I participated in a virtual event called “Race to Healing.” The event consisted of a panel where several Black teachers of embodied spirituality were invited to speak on race, gender, and inclusion in the fields of spirituality and healing. The organizers asked me to take part by leading a ritual at the end of the seminar. They aimed to create a space where, after having listened to the interventions of the panelists, participants would enter an experience of heart activation.

As I prepared for this part of the event, I had the inspiration to have the audience work with the polarity of White and Black. I invited the attendees to embody one of those two poles and speak, sound, and express emotions to the other. After a while, everyone was encouraged to switch and embody the other pole. There was no definite aim except the

opportunity to feel the tension between those two poles and allow some of that energy to be expressed—as rage, love, Eros, sadness, or any other emotion, without opinions and judgments.

After the event, Jerome Braggs, one panelist whose presentation I had especially liked, reached out. He expressed appreciation for the ritual and invited a collaboration. Jerome had impacted me with his wisdom, wit, humor, and depth. During the panel, he had made some comments linking the Black / White polarity to the Masculine / Feminine polarity in a way that I had not heard before. Here was a Black spiritual teacher who approached the field of sacred sexuality and embodied spirituality from an altogether original angle. I immediately realized that he was the one to turn to for a discussion on gender and race. The following is a simplified presentation of Braggs' views on gender and race, based on conversations and interviews between us. The primary source for this exposition can be found in Braggs (2021).

Braggs is a Black same-gender-loving man in his forties. He channeled many of his spiritual insights while facing severe health issues and near-death experiences over several years. Today, his life and work are dedicated to teaching self-love and supporting others in their awakening process.³ At the core of Braggs' teachings is an understanding of the soul as the central principle of human life. For Braggs, the soul is both energy and consciousness—paradox at its purest. While the wholeness of the soul can be described as boundless, unconditional love, when the soul incarnates, it enters the world of duality. In so doing, the soul gets, for lack of a better word, “bifurcated” into two aspects that Braggs describes as “being loving” and “being loved.” These two dimensions correspond to two different aspects of individual and collectives that Braggs (2022) calls “higher self” and “ego,” respectively. The ego is what allows us to have an individual experience and set and enforce boundaries. Without an ego, we would slip back continuously into an undifferentiated experience of

oneness. The higher self is the part in us that is focused on beaming love and compassion onto others, and it makes us group-conscious. Without access to the higher self, we become narrow-minded and selfish.

Braggs' framing of the dual nature of the soul intersects with the Tantric understanding of the polarity between Masculine and Feminine.⁴ Being loving, or the higher self aspect, corresponds to the feminine pole, while being loved, or the ego, corresponds to the masculine pole. Braggs understands the individual and collective journey as a progression towards wholeness. The soul has an innate drive to experience (or return to) unity, to the totality of being unconditional love itself. And yet, at the moment of incarnation, the soul is expressed through a body that has certain definite attributes and inclinations. Totality is momentarily lost or forgotten to make space for the partiality and uniqueness that is the hallmark of individual human experience. Each of the characteristics the soul takes on at incarnation, particularly race and gender, offers an opportunity to amplify or dampen one of the two aspects of unconditional love.

Consequently, Braggs (2022) argues that all other factors being equal, being born as female-bodied means that the higher self aspect is maximized, whereas, for a male-bodied, the ego aspect is maximized. Some people are born in a body that sits within the spectrum between male and female, and their expression is on the gamut between ego and higher self. It's important to remember that all polarities are a continuum, and we simplify them by taking the two poles as references. Sexual orientation also has an influence, albeit a more indirect one: a same-gender-loving man like Braggs, for example, may have his Feminine or higher self aspect more developed than a straight man. When he is healed, he can serve as a reference point for male bodies on how to attain more balance. The same is true for same-gender-loving women.

It is then apparent that Braggs sees the issues of race and gender through the filter of polarity, and that is why his teachings resonate so deeply with the field of embodied spirituality. Yet what makes Braggs' understanding original is adding race as the other dimension in the soul's quest for incarnation and wholeness. More precisely, Braggs (2022) speaks about the level of melanin in each person's skin as one of the key factors in evoking the energies of the ego and the higher self. The less melanated (lighter) the skin, the more the ego aspect is maximized; the more melanated (darker) the skin, the more the higher self aspect is maximized. The interaction between race and gender creates a two-dimensional set of coordinates where a White male corresponds to the most amplified ego (being loved) aspect and a Black female to the most amplified higher self (being loving) aspect. Between those extremes lies a whole field of infinite possibilities of expression.

Much of the challenge and beauty of life comes from the fact that individuals, collectives, and even whole societies are over-amplified in either the ego or the higher self aspect. Over-amplification in the higher self makes people more loving and compassionate, but it creates a tendency to be less apt at setting boundaries, standing up for oneself, and getting needs met. Being over-amplified in the ego means more capacity to get what we need, set boundaries, and make our voice heard, but also an inclination to be less compassionate and potentially more oppressive. Cultures that are amplified in the higher self aspect (and therefore the more melanated ethnicities) often end up being oppressed, while those more amplified in the ego aspect (those ethnicities with lighter skin) often end up being the colonizers and oppressors.

As we noted, both the ego and higher self aspects need to be experienced and activated in order to access the fullness of love that the soul remembers as its essential vibration. And yet, when the soul incarnates as a specific body characterized by a certain gender and race, one of those aspects is more amplified. As a result, incarnated life is a journey whose goal is

strengthening the weaker side in order to reach some form of balance. People and groups with strong ego are challenged to be more loving, more selfless, and more in tune with the higher self. People and groups who are already amplified in the higher self, instead, need to strengthen their ego by learning to set boundaries, speak their voice, and get their needs met.

Humanity as a whole, then, is trying to find balance. And because we are all part of humanity, we all have medicine for one another. For example, more melanated people, who symbolically represent the polarity of the Black, hold the medicine of oneness, of being loving, of expanding consciousness beyond the individual and into group and collectivity. Less melanated people, who represent the polarity of the White, carry the opposite medicine: that of individuality, separation, setting boundaries, uniqueness, and difference.

The exchange of medicine between polarities also applies at the level of intimate relationships. Braggs (2022) notes that we often seek those intimate partners who carry the opposite medicine to ours. The problem is that we don't always know how to exchange medicine properly. As a result, we may fall into the dysfunctional models exemplified by the relationship between an empath and a narcissist. The empath is extremely over-amplified in the higher self aspect, the narcissist in the ego aspect, but they cannot share their gifts consciously. Instead, they get caught up in conflict and projection. Energy and information are still exchanged, but in a way that can't be properly assimilated. Usually, these relationships end up creating hurt and trauma.

While acknowledging the existence of power imbalances and oppressive relationships, Braggs argues that ultimately we are all part of the same embodied consciousness, striving to recognize itself. This kind of spiritual framework allows us to see other human beings, who incarnate different aspects of the soul, as a source of medicine. Diversity along the spectrums

of race and gender becomes an extraordinary resource for our awakening. The polarity between Black and White becomes another axis to hold in a paradoxical embrace.

Braggs' teaching is to be understood mainly at the spiritual level. Others have developed socio-economic frameworks to address the causes of racial and gender oppression. Yet as we continue seeking answers to the plights of humanity, I believe we need teachers like Braggs to look at the cleavages of gender and race through an original framework that includes the spiritual dimension. Braggs' teachings frame race and gender as two of the primary expressions of the polarity between the One and the Many. This polarity exposes the primordial tension between our underlying awareness of ultimate oneness and the beauty and pain of our endless diversity. We obviously need to find political and social countermeasures to the oppressive relationships of power that plague our society. In parallel, we must continue exploring the psychological, archetypal, and spiritual planes for new symbols that can lead us to more capacity to embrace diversity and oneness in an alive, pulsating paradox.

Conclusion

Considering the issues of race and gender brings us closer to some of the most charged paradoxes of our times. While the pain inherent in those oppositions is evident, by facing those paradoxes we have a chance to enlarge our consciousness. By releasing us from the need to find solutions, meditating on paradox frees up energy that can be used to find creative ways forward. Ultimately, we are talking about an enlargement of the soul, an expansion of identity that happens by contemplating Self and Other within a sacred container. Jungian analyst Marie-Louise Von Franz wrote that "The only way the Self can manifest is through conflict; to meet one's insoluble and eternal conflict is to meet God" (1980, p. 137). In other words, if we consider our psychic totality, we find therein all the contradictions and

opposites. In the depths of our psyche, we can get in touch with the same undifferentiated totality that we may call God, the Universe, or the All.

Holding the tension between opposites activates and opens our hearts; by contemplating paradoxes, we become better individuals. Can the same be said about societies? Can we posit that a collectivity is at its best when it holds contraries and can embrace their tension? In an era that is dangerously veering towards despotism and dictatorship, this may be an important question to ponder. One of the revelations coming from the study of Dialectica is that the major issues of humanity need to be dealt with not only practically but also spiritually, from the existential and psychological standpoint. This necessity stems from the observation that if our inner world does not change, our behavior will not change either.

Before concluding, I will offer a reflection on contemporary times. It may be hard to observe collective phenomena while we're still in their midst. But there seem to be some signals that the swing towards the Masculine might have exhausted its trajectory. One of those signs is the renewed interest in disciplines like Tantra, Shamanism, and other variations of what we might define as embodied spirituality. This shift is characterized by a few common points: bringing attention to the body, the inclusion of sexuality, an inclination towards a non-dualistic understanding of reality, and the honoring of the sacred Feminine in her various forms. On the other hand, the skewed favoring of Light over Dark hasn't yet approached a point of exhaustion in mainstream consciousness. It is perhaps only in the field of psychology, thanks to the work of Freud, Jung, and others, that we are beginning to recognize (or remember) the value of the Dark as a necessary part of the tapestry of life.

That human consciousness is making progress does not automatically mean a less painful human experience. Observing imbalances and reflecting on them does not necessarily feel like solving them. Often, when we have space to look at and talk about individual or

collective wounds, they seem to become even more visible. When brought to the light of consciousness, abuse, trauma, oppression, and injustice may seem to hurt more. And yet, this heightened sense of discomfort and pain is a necessary step toward any form of significant action-taking.

As our capacity to read ourselves and the world changes and matures, our understanding of humanity's journey also evolves. Thanks to the work of authors and teachers like Fox, Shepherd, and Braggs, we can bring our attention to painful imbalances. This act is in itself transformative. Then, instead of looking for simple solutions, we can learn to stay still, contemplate those paradoxes, and allow our consciousness to grow big enough to hold them.

¹ In the Yogic and Tantric teachings, the passage from the first to the second liberal art corresponds to the progress from Muladhara, the root center, up to Svadisthana, the sacral center. Svadisthana literally means "seat of the I-consciousness." The etymology shows how moving from oneness to duality is an essential foundation for the establishment of individual identity.

² This kind of confusion is rather common. Thought-forms that live partly submerged in the collective unconscious have much fuzzier outlines than conscious, logical concepts. The history of religions, for example, is full of these juxtapositions of archetypes.

³ Jerome's work and life experiences can be found at <https://jeromebraggs.com/>

⁴ Braggs (2022) finds these two terms misleading. Yet, he recognizes that the Masculine / Feminine polarity is anchored in collective consciousness, and he sees it as an entry point into his understanding of the soul.

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