

On Beauty

An Interview with Piero Ferrucci

Piero Ferrucci is an Italian psychotherapist, thinker and philosopher. He was a direct student and close collaborator of Roberto Assagioli, the father of Psychosynthesis. He is the author of several articles and books, including *What We May Be*, *Inevitable Grace*, *What Our Children Teach Us*, *The Power of Kindness*, and, most recently, *Beauty and the Soul*. With Laura Huxley he co-authored *The Child of Your Dreams* and was the editor of *The Human Situation*, a book of Aldous Huxley's lectures.

We interviewed him on a cold Saturday morning in November. We talked for about one hour on beauty and what it means for us as evolving human beings seeking integration with the Soul. What follows is a condensed version of our conversation. In it, Piero speaks of beauty, fear and the role Psychosynthesis can play to heal our lives. It is difficult to convey in writing the powerful depth of his words. What most strikes the listener as one hears him talk is his remarkable ability to communicate a vastness of knowledge in simple terms that penetrate directly into one's heart. When he talks about putting down your defenses, you can actually feel your body relaxing and your mind opening to new horizons. When he discusses beauty, his words turn into beautiful healing music.

We are indeed humbled and proud to publish this interview with the person who has probably done the most to keep Assagioli's legacy alive while also moving Psychosynthesis research into new, exciting directions. Thank you Piero!



Esoteric Quarterly (EQ): I really want to thank you for the opportunity to interview you. Students at the School for Esoteric Studies and readers of the *Esoteric Quarterly*

are, we presume, quite familiar with at least part of the work by Assagioli. You were a direct student of this extraordinary man. You have kept his legacy alive and also expanded on his research in many different ways. I thought it would be nice to hear directly from you about the message of Psychosynthesis for us today, in particular, to know more about current lines of research and your ideas about psychological or inner development. I have recently been visiting your website,¹ and I was intrigued by a passage in which you say that when we appreciate beauty, we are opened to others; we open ourselves to the world around us, and then we become transparent. It was intriguing because many people might not immediately associate psychotherapy with the word beauty.

Piero Ferrucci (PF): I work as a psychotherapist, so I can see that any time we speak about beauty with clients, clients who are of course receptive to this topic, I can see them change, I can see it is beneficial and healing.... Experiencing beauty of any kind, being absorbed by a beautiful landscape, reading a book, seeing the inner beauty of a person, seeing a beautiful movie, all of that is profoundly healing, and I think we often forget about this in our society because we are too busy, and also because we are afraid of beauty. When we meet beauty, our defenses might fall down. We are certainly more vulnerable, more open and maybe we are unconsciously resistant to this kind of experience. On the other hand, beauty has many benefits, it is not only healing, but also creatively transforming; it makes us better people. There is quite a bit of research that shows that people who enjoy beauty more, or who are interested in some kind of art or creative activity, also have more goodwill; they are better people. And also I think

beauty makes us more intelligent in many ways. For instance, it has been shown that students who are given some space to experience art perform better academically than students who do not have access to art.

EQ: You said many interesting things. One that especially resonates with the work of Alice A. Bailey is that beauty, in some ways, can scare us. AAB thought that fears were major obstacles in our path toward self-realization. Quite interestingly you associate beauty with fear. How is it that any human being, beautiful inside as we are, could be afraid of beauty?

PF: Well, we have to understand that the full experience of beauty is not just about pretty things, but it's something much larger and deeper. It can actually disorganize us and the concept we have of ourselves. Beauty, paradoxically, can lead us to a beneficial disintegration, or death! Beauty is often associated with death... In Italian we have a saying, "*bello da morire*" ("beautiful to die for"), and this is indeed a possibility in the sense that if we meet beauty, we change deeply and there could be a profound transformation. There are parts of us that resist that; we are attached to our old roles, our old images of ourselves, our old ideas and habits, and therefore we prefer not to give in too much to beauty. We often prefer to have a more superficial relationship to beauty, one that is not as dangerous in a way. I think that beauty is, together with sex, love, money, death, etc. one of those big realities in our life, and our relationship with it may be complex, at times contradictory and difficult.

EQ: In your book about beauty you also talk about the similarities between beauty and goodness.

PF: Beauty, goodness and truth are the greatest values. If we attend to them we will be in quite good shape! The relationship between goodness and beauty and beauty and truth is complex, and I think in the best of all worlds they're one and the same thing. In the Navajo language the word *hozho* means at the same time beautiful, good and healthy. In that language these are one and the same thing. But

we know it is not necessarily so. We know that someone who looks conventionally beautiful could be very nasty indeed. Plato said that beauty is the splendor of truth. So if a statement is true it will also be beautiful, but we all see statements that are beautiful, yet if we test them we'll find out that they are not true. So it is a very complex relationship. But if we go deep enough we will indeed find out that inner beauty is goodness and inner goodness is beauty and beauty is the splendor of truth.

EQ: The work with Psychosynthesis helps us realize our inner beauty and be less afraid of it. It seems to me that once this happens, we naturally express more goodwill, as you said. How do you work with goodwill in a Psychosynthesis process?

PF: Of course with my patients I first of all work with whatever they present to me, which is usually a form of suffering, or problem, and that is what we deal with. I usually do not talk with them about beauty or goodwill at first. However, the image that we have of human beings in Psychosynthesis is that there is in each of us a tendency to have goodwill, to collaborate, to help, to be kind and caring. This view of the human being was not part of the traditional 19th or the first part of the 20th century image of the human being. The traditional image of the human being was that we are fundamentally selfish and aggressive and competitive. This is simply not so. It's scientifically not so. If you watch children in kindergarten and if you study how they relate with each other, you will see that the majority of their interactions are of kindness, caring, friendship and collaboration, and not competitiveness... Of course it is also true that we are the cruelest species on the planet. We can be both, not just one or the other. It is not what psychoanalysis claims, that kindness is a defense, that goodwill is a social construct that comes from a difficult compromise between instinct and social survival. People have some innate degree of kindness, and you can see this very well in children. And the moment people put down their defenses and heal that which hurts, they become more visible. If we do not

hurt inside, if we are not suspicious, if we are not or need not be aggressive, then we are naturally kind and we like to relate to other people. That is how we evolved as a species.

EQ: Can Psychosynthesis be integrated into educational approaches? Or, in other words, how can we learn to heal and be more kind?

PF: I do not work in education in schools; I work in adult education. I know that some colleagues work in schools, and it means moving on from books on geography and history, which are of course essential, toward inner realization, learning to grow from within – what Plato called *psychagogy*.... That was the earliest name of Psychosynthesis, and it means the full realization of the human being, the capacity to learn, to relate, to be centered, to make decisions, to appreciate beauty..., and that should be part of any education, because it is the art of living. There is an urgent need to do that, and there are practical tools to do it, and Psychosynthesis offers them to us.

EQ: What's the message of Psychosynthesis to the 21st century individual?

PF: Especially at this time, Psychosynthesis is very much needed because there are important changes in the way we think and relate. There are awesome novelties in the world, one of which is the digital revolution. I see the Internet as offering us the possibility for the construction of what Teilhard De Chardin called the *noosphere*, that is, a planet that is building its own nervous system, its own brain and mind.... I look at it with great amazement, and I know that my teacher Assagioli would have been very excited about this whole development. And of course

the other great change we are witnessing is the increasing communication among all the people of Earth, a globalization of consciousness and cultures.... However, there are also downsides to all these momentous changes, and the main downside is that the world is becoming faster and more distracted because there are so many stimuli around us,

bombarding us, and our relationships with others are colder. We relate more and more through a digital medium instead of face to face. We are losing the sense of neighborhood and friendship. We spend a long time in so-called “non-places,” places that are impersonal and anonymous.... So we are in danger of losing human warmth, profundity of thought and the ability to concentrate and look in depth at the subject we want to reflect

on, because there are so many stimuli that are always distracting us and moving us to other subjects. So I think that Psychosynthesis offers important tools to preserve and cultivate the depth of thought, the profundity of life, and the warmth of relationship that we all need....

EQ: Humanity is then constructing this noosphere, a new kind of mental space, a thought-form dimension that had never been done before, and we're doing it through technology. The main challenge is to do this without depersonalizing relationships. This transitory stage in our long evolution, as we build this new world of thought, can be quite challenging. What should we be expecting?

PF: There certainly is the possibility that this is a transitory stage as you said – a bridge toward a new civilization. But we have to keep all this in mind because, if not, technology may just go on its own way, and instead of us mastering technology, technology may take over and shape our minds. For instance,

[Beauty] can actually disorganize us and the concept we have of ourselves. Beauty, paradoxically, can lead us to a beneficial disintegration, or death! Beauty is often associated with death.... and this is indeed a possibility in the sense that if we meet beauty, we change deeply and there could be a profound transformation.

children who spend a long time in front of the computer screen may partially lose their capacity to read faces and understand human expressions, an ability that we naturally acquire in face-to-face communication through interpersonal exchange.... So it is all right to spend some time at the computer, but we also have to reserve time for old-fashioned human communication. For example, an increasing number of young people terminate relationships through text messages. That is a very cold, a very fearful way of ending a relationship because it avoids confrontation. Maybe in the future text messaging will not exist anymore and we'll have 3D communication and meet again face to face through holograms, or maybe there will be tele-transportation and we'll be able to go from here to Australia and come back in few minutes. But this is not yet so.

EQ: The question of human evolution brings to mind the issue of spirituality in the sense of progressive integration and alignment with the Soul. How can we reconcile the Ageless Wisdom with the problems that technology and science bring to the modern individual?

PF: Well, there is in the Ageless Wisdom a basic perennial philosophy that is common to all people and all paths, and that core remains stable in time. For instance, we should not steal, non-violence is a positive value, beauty is better than ugliness, and so on. Meanwhile science has been making enormous strides, but science changes its hypotheses. So at some point scientists may state the opposite of what the Ageless Wisdom claims, at other times science may confirm the Ageless Wisdom.... I think we must not be dogmatic. I do not think science is necessarily and universally a true set of statements; it is a human endeavor and undergoes many changes. Even

in brain science there have been a lot of changes in the last 20 years. Until 20 years ago, for instance, most neuroscientists believed that the brain doesn't change after childhood.... Now we know that it changes all the time, throughout adult life. So in looking for connections between spirituality and science we have to remember that. While the Ageless Wisdom has a perennial core, science changes rapidly, makes discoveries, and sometimes contradicts earlier findings and theories.

EQ: What is your next line of research after your work on beauty?

PF: That is a hard question because I am still very much connected to that topic and I am just detaching from it little by little. I spent so many years doing research for my book on beauty that when it was actually finished I developed what I would jokingly call post partum depression! I have been immersed in this topic so much and so deeply, and now it is hard to decide what comes next. I'm dealing with many subjects at the same time because Psychosynthesis is a very vast field of studies indeed, and I learn a lot from my students as well as from clients; they help me to find new challenges and topics.

EQ: What is the message Assagioli tried to give to the world?

PF: Well, I would say that what we've been discussing in this interview is his message: the importance of remembering that we are a Self, a Soul, and therefore that we are free to be able to love, to be enlightened and enjoy beauty. This, in a few words, would be his message.

EQ: Piero, thanks so much.

PF: Thanks to you.

¹ <http://www.pieroferrucci.it/inglese/index.asp>

The Relationship between the Soul-Infused Personality, Discipleship and the Project of Building the Antahkarana

Ivan Kovacs

The relationship between the Soul-infused personality, discipleship and the project of building the Antahkarana, suggests a critical spiritual junction where each factor needs to be examined in light of its potential complementarity and interdependence. Past achievements need to be put in their proper perspective and simply seen as stepping stones which define the present and anticipate the future. The concept of selfhood needs to be re-examined and redefined, discipleship re-evaluated, and the relationship between “higher” and “lower”, or “being” and “becoming” more deeply probed.

To give significance and meaning to this threefold relationship, and how it affects the aspiring disciple, both individually as well as an integral unit of a group, it is necessary firstly to look at each factor separately, and after establishing its individual significance, relate it in a meaningful and purposeful way to the whole.

The Soul-infused Personality

It is assumed that before a disciple is said to have a Soul-infused personality, he will have demonstrated a fair degree of mental aptitude whereby he is able to use his concrete mind in a rational and goal-oriented way, and that he has trained himself to view his environment with a certain amount of detachment, mental discrimination and dispassion that will allow him to function in a useful and constructive way. He will also have made occasional but sporadic contacts with his Soul, by means of which he simply gained proof that the personality has its limitations, and that by means of conscious effort and meditation a wider and more effective level of consciousness can be contacted, which is

characteristic of the consciousness of the group or the Soul. Gradually, as his Soul-consciousness begins to unfold, he comes to the realization that the self-centered objectives of the personality are limiting, restrictive and ultimately pointless and self-defeating, and that the only way forward is by means of spiritual growth and recognition and cooperation with the Divine Plan. Step by step he begins to identify himself with those ideals that characterize the Soul. Consequently he begins to view the world in terms of unity, sharing, brotherhood and tolerance, and thus to rise above those differences which are defined in terms of race, nationality, religion or ideology.

Discipleship

In brief, discipleship can be defined as the conscious effort that is employed to serve and implement the divine Plan. In this sense everyone, from the humblest aspirant to the highest Chohan, can be considered as a disciple, the differences between them existing only in degree and effectiveness, as they are defined by attained levels of consciousness, ranging all the way from mental comprehension to monadic consciousness and beyond. Discipleship training, on the other hand, is an ongoing process, whereby the disciple broadens his view and effectiveness, initially by a conscious effort to make Soul contact, and then by self-induced discipline and effort that are preparatory to major expansions in consciousness as they are characterized by the sequentially graded initiations.

As the disciple broadens his vision, and consequently his potential effectiveness in world service, he will inevitably find a response from the specific Ashram in which

he might find his place. He will be allowed to enter the periphery of such an Ashram on a tentative basis, and as he begins to prove his effectiveness, permitted to share as much of the collective consciousness of that Ashram as he can safely handle and absorb. His Master will become known to him, and he will receive as much attention as it is expedient and necessary to aid him in his chosen field of service, with the proviso that any work he might be undertaking is necessarily a task for which he is fully responsible and which he will have chosen freely and voluntarily.

The gradual absorption from the periphery to the center of the Ashram depends entirely on the disciple's aptitude and effectiveness, and might be said to take place by steps that are consistent with his expansions in consciousness, which he successfully demonstrates by his ability to pass the requirements of initiation, and when he successfully attains the consciousness of a Master, fits him for the task of forming his own group and Ashram.

Building the Antahkarana

The first step of this project aims at the type of consciousness that is characterized by a Soul-infused personality, or a personality consciousness in which the three aspects of the personality are integrated and working as a unit, and as a logical result ready to receive and demonstrate the influence and guidance of the Soul. This is brought about when "that which desires to lift and that which cries aloud for lifting" are in the process of becoming at-one, and needless to say, is achieved by regular and conscientious meditation.

The next step of this project aims at assimilating the consciousness of the abstract or higher mind, which can simultaneously be considered the highest aspect of the threefold mind, and the lowest aspect of the Spiritual Triad. Apart from its abstract nature, this level or plane of consciousness also possesses the potential of being the repository of such ideas that are necessary and relevant to the realization of the divine Plan. In this respect, it fulfils a function which is absolutely

essential to a disciple who desires to serve the Plan in a more effective and meaningful way. It is the conscious link, or pathway, often referred to as the "rainbow bridge", which is the Antahkarana proper. Its building is dependent on the conscious effort and evocative power of the Soul-infused personality, aided by visualization and the ability to keep the channel between soul-mind-brain open and aligned that makes the building process possible.

The final stages of the building process extend to include the consciousness of the intuition and the spiritual will, and ultimately the Monad itself, by which time the role of the Soul as mediator between that which is "lower" and that which is "higher" becomes redundant, and a direct link between the three aspects of the Monad and the three aspects of the personality becomes possible and effective, and by means of which the Monad, or Spirit, can express itself fully in the world of manifestation or the world of form.

The relationship between the three

In each of the above topics, it was necessary for the disciple to take stock of himself in relation to his spiritual status and development, and relate it to his potential effectiveness in world service and the implementation of the divine Plan. Taking stock is part of the growth process, and has been practiced ever since the disciple has made the conscious effort to tread the Path.

Soul consciousness and group consciousness have ever been the objective, both as a necessary characteristic of discipleship, as well as the inevitable evolutionary step that leads out of the personality life into that of the Soul and the group. If, however, we consider that the Soul itself is but an intermediary or mediator between that which is "higher" and that which is "lower", we realize that the process of building the Antahkarana is the next logical step in the unfoldment of discipleship training.

In its role as mediator, the Soul is characterized by intelligence, love and will; but to

allow these characteristics to reach their full potential, the Soul needs to be related to the Spiritual Triad in a way that will allow intelligence, love and will to manifest in its purest form, and thus draw its inspiration, and make its impact, from the levels of atma, buddhi and manas. Thus a line of ascent can be

drawn all the way from the integrated personality, the Soul-infused personality, to triadic, and finally to monadic consciousness, of which “the relationship between the Soul-infused personality, discipleship and the project of building the Antahkarana” is a necessary and integral part.

Book Reviews

***Partakers of the Divine Nature*. Michael J. Christensen & Jeffery A Wittung (eds.)**
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.
US\$30.00.

Partakers of the Divine Nature consists of nineteen essays selected from the proceedings of an international theological conference held at Drew University, Madison, NJ, in 2006. The conference was dedicated to the single topic of *theosis*, or deification, usually considered to be of interest only to a small cadre of patristic scholars and the more mystical theologians of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. However, the conclusion drawn from the conference was that notions of *theosis* could be detected in a broad sample of scripture, patristic writings (the work of the Church Fathers), and the literature of eastern and western Christianity. *Theosis*, in Michael Christensen's words, is "an engaging, inspiring, and powerful religious idea" [p. 23]. This reviewer's conclusion is that may be of considerable interest to esoteric students.

Theosis' primary scriptural anchor—and the one that inspired the book's title—is a short passage in the *Second Epistle of Peter*: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" [2 Peter 1:4, KJV]. As the concept developed it took on the meaning that human beings had the potential to become, in some sense, divine. Athanasius, fourth-century patriarch of Alexandria, famously juxtaposed *theosis* against the doctrine of the incarnation: "The Word became human that we might become divine."

The names in the Eastern Orthodox tradition most commonly linked to *theosis* are Gregory Palamas, Vladimir Lossky, and Sergius Bulgakov. Palamas, a fourteenth-century Russian saint, is remembered for defending the concept of *theosis* against attacks from western scholastics. His understanding of deification became the standard for Eastern Orthodoxy.

Lossky, is regarded as a modern "Palamite" because of his elaboration of Palamas' teachings. Bulgakov, another 20th-century Russian, has done the most work in the field, though his orthodoxy has been questioned, and he was forced to retract controversial teachings on the trinity and Sophia. Jeffery Finch's essay on Palamas' legacy, Boris Jakim's on Bulgakov's work, and Gösta Hallonstein's on recent research, provide a good survey of their work.

Partakers of the Divine Nature makes an important contribution by drawing attention to the many other writers whose work can be read as supportive of *theosis*. *Theosis* is not a popular concept in Western Christianity. Authoritative writings focus instead on *grace*: a gift "freely bestowed upon us" and facilitating salvation. But the notion of *grace* underscores our unworthiness and still leaves us separate from God. Deification potentially enables us to overcome that separateness. Three individuals whose willingness to explore that potential and raise eyebrows were Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley, none of whom has customarily been regarded as a mystical theologian.

Jonathan Linman's essays on Luther, Todd Billings and Calvin report attempts, motivated in large measure by ecumenical contacts, to reexamine the Reformers' writings to discover suggestions of deification through union with Christ. In order to do so they had to dilute the notion of deification from what Palamas would have allowed; they also had to distinguish the Reformers' own comments from what became Lutheran and Calvinist doctrine. Notwithstanding, the suggestion that Protestant tradition could be reconciled at all with *theosis* is highly significant. Christensen, a self-described "Wesleyan scholar," faced fewer difficulties in discussing Wesley who was less "Protestant" than either Luther or Calvin. Wesley, along with his hymn-writer brother Charles, were inspired by the work of late second-century Clement of Alexandria to promote the ideal of

“Christian perfection.” The Wesley brothers’ perfect Christian was *like* God rather than divine. Nevertheless, Christensen concludes that their doctrine of sanctification, affirmed by later generations of Methodists, was “a domesticated (or democratized) version of the more ancient doctrine” of theosis [p. 223; parenthesis in original].

Luther’s, Calvin’s, and Wesley’s interest in theosis, or something resembling it, demonstrates that the concept enjoys a measure of universal acceptance. However, nobody would dispute that the concept was developed to a greater degree in Eastern Orthodoxy. Eastern mystical theologians do not all agree on the precise definition of theosis; some assert the possibility of humanity’s union with God, while others envision the transformation of human nature itself. But they are in broad agreement that theosis was made possible by Christ’s redemptive act.

Palamas, Lossky, Bulgakov, and others give theosis significance beyond what most western theologians would deem permissible. In their view Christ’s redemptive act healed humanity’s weaknesses and initiated a transformation of human nature that can bridge the gap between creature and Creator. They stress that it does not mean participation in the divine “essence”—considered impossible for created beings. Rather, it means sharing in God’s “energies,” which became accessible through the exercise of divine will and were manifested most conspicuously in Christ’s incarnation. Bulgakov goes so far as to say that the path to divinity was anticipated in the very purpose of creation. Thus interpreted, theosis reminds us of Platonic and modern esoteric teachings that the human monad is a fragment of the divine essence, destined, after the long period of transformative experience in physical existence, to return to that realm.

The achievement of theosis in this life is rare and requires enormous effort. In eastern Christianity it is often equated with sainthood,

and eastern saints typically chose lives of harsh asceticism and engaged in contemplative practices like *hesychasm*, often compared with the yogic practices of South Asia. In his essay on Bulgakov, Boris Jakim comments that “the process of deification is unceasing: the individual can unceasingly approach divinity by receiving more and more grace; but humanity never reaches full divinity, except in the case of Christ” [p. 252]. Like other Eastern theologians, Bulgakov built the notion of sanctification through grace into his vision of theosis.

Although we may never achieve full divinity, as Christ did, grace has launched us on a path toward “ascension” and “glorification,” comparable with Christ’s. In Jakim’s words: “One’s entire life is actualized on the pathway to deification . . . the glorification of the creature” [p. 253]. Christ’s mother Mary, Jakim notes, has already achieved that state. How long it will take us is not specified. Fortunately, Orthodox theologians—and, interestingly, John Wesley—do not regard physical death as the end of our approach to sanctity.

Partakers of the Divine Nature reassures us that Christianity is not restricted to the Calvinistic view of humanity’s utter depravity and the associated belief that Christ’s death on the cross achieved nothing more than to save a few souls from eternal damnation. Eastern Orthodox teachings and Bulgakov’s work in particular, take the much more optimistic view that humanity has a divine destiny. Without that optimism the prospects for building esoteric Christianity on a satisfactory philosophical and ethical foundation would be limited.

The implications of theosis for esotericism merit a more comprehensive study. Meanwhile, *Partakers of the Divine Nature* is highly recommended as a resource for all students and scholars seeking to resolve Christian theology and modern esoteric philosophy into a larger synthesis.

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