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ERRATUM

The name of author Diana Raab, whose article appeared in the previous issue of the Journal, was misspelled as Rabb on the cover and Table of Contents. Raab, D. (2014). Creative transcendence: Memoir writing for transformation and empowerment. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 46*(2), 187–207.
We open this issue remembering John L. Levy, long time Editorial Board member of the Journal, who passed away since the publication of our last issue. In addition to our sympathies, thanks are due Adele Schwarz, his partner and wife, who offered to us for publication the obituary that she wrote, along with friends and family. We express our appreciation and pay tribute, as well, to John—not only for his long tenure on the Board, but also for his early support and contributions to the transpersonal movement in both thinking and action. May his memory serve as an inspiration. As he takes up his place among our In Memoriam Board members, we will welcome in our next issue well known transpersonal researcher, Rosemarie Anderson, to the Editorial Board.

Our first two articles present different approaches to a deeper understanding of Holotropic Breathwork (HB), pioneered by Stanislav and the late Christina Grof. First, from Australia, co-authors Adam J. Rock, Nigel C. Denning, Kylie P. Harris, Gavin I. Clark, and Dave Misso tackle what they describe as an untested assumption in the literature (i.e., that HB induces a non-ordinary state of consciousness). Concerned that such a claim has yet to be empirically verified, especially in a controlled evaluation manner, they forged forward in testing the hypothesis that HB induces a non-ordinary (in their research, “altered”) state of consciousness. Next, Shaina Levee, first time author with the Journal, invites us on a journey into the world of the Q’eros, an indigenous population in the Andes of Peru. From her autoethnographic inquiry, she illuminates similarities in process and results between Andean Q’eros traditions (particularly in the form of ceremonies), and Holotropic Breathwork. Her research thus offers an additional perspective to the HB discourse and, in the process, sheds a spotlight on a South American wisdom tradition.

Two additional first time authors with the Journal follow:

Nicole Gruel chronicles the significant shift in thinking, Being, and accompanying values, experienced by Maslow between his first and second (fatal) heart attack, catalyzing what he termed the plateau experience. He described the phenomenon as less intense but more enduring than his well-known peak experience. Lamenting the observation that Maslow’s concentrated and passionate inquiry into and anticipated research trajectory on this matter was cut short, and that insufficient uptake has been made on this topic of great potential, Gruel issues an appeal for more extensive and concentrated inquiry on the plateau experience.

Starting with St. John of the Cross’s seminal 16th century text entitled, Dark Night (DN) as a foundation, David M. Odorisio further reviews and explores the DN from a Jungian alchemical lens, using the proverbial “stone” of the alchemical orientation (purportedly transmuting lead, for example, into gold) in a metaphorical sense. Revisioning the DN in terms of Western alchemy, he
simultaneously draws parallels with Western Christian mysticism, all of which leads to a deeper understanding of the DN.

Concluding the articles is a lengthy think piece by Paul Cunningham, who invites the reader into a discourse that addresses the state of the field in all its promise and potential as well as obstacles. He focuses particularly on what he terms two epistemic cultures of empirical rationalism and transpersonal empiricism, and calls for a bridging process buoyed by the transpersonal vision.

We are pleased to open our Book Review Section with a double review of Ed Dale’s book entitled Completing Piaget’s Project: Transpersonal philosophy and the future of psychology, which both reviewers consider an original far reaching work that, among other things, clearly illuminates Piaget’s understanding of and interaction with the transpersonal, reflected both in his very early as well as later writings.

Harry T. Hunt brings his well-honed developmental lens to the process and Jorge N. Ferrer follows with a more detailed essay review that he entitles Neo-Piagetian Transpersonal Psychology: Dancing In-Between Pluralism and Perennialism. Given that Dale extensively discussed Ferrer’s work in the book along with professional interchanges that Ferrer and Dale have had, we are pleased to offer both treatments.

With professional expertise and work with the creative process, Ruth Richards reviews The Creative Artist: Mental disturbance and mental health by Elliot Benjamin, which she terms an autoethnographic approach by Benjamin into the internal and external nuances in the creative process from an experiential knowledge base.

Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, with publications and interest in comparative religion, reviews Universal Aspects of the Kabbalah and Judaism, authored by Leo Schaya and edited by Roger Gaetani. He emphasizes that, while focusing on Judaism, the book illuminates outer and inner dimensions and a common spiritual heritage of all religions.

Concluding the Book Review section, co-president of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology, Stuart Sovatsky, with both theoretical and practical expertise in yoga, offers a review of The “Yoga Sutra of Patanjali”: A Biography, by Gordon D. White. Entitling his review Sleuthing Hagiography, The Poignant Self, and A Charismatic Future for Modern Postural Yoga, he demonstrates with clarity the process and product of the deep and painstaking research involved in White’s creation of the book.

The volume concludes, as always, with JTP’s unique and long standing feature of Books Our Editors are Reading. We continually welcome reader feedback, comments, and suggestions.

MB
Falls Church, VA
REMEMBERING JOHN L. LEVY

November 1, 1921 - January 11, 2015

John Levy, long time editorial Board Member of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology and beloved husband of Adele Schwarz, died peacefully at home in Berkeley, CA, surrounded by his family on January 11, 2015 at the age of ninety-three. He had Lewy body dementia for several years.

John was born in San Francisco. He received an undergraduate degree in engineering from Stanford University, where he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and a member of the boxing team. He served as an officer in the Navy in World War II, and was stationed at Guantanamo, Cuba. He later returned to Stanford and earned an MBA. He worked for Bechtel Corporation for many years as an estimator on large construction projects.

John’s life changed as his focus shifted from business to spiritual exploration and psychology. He led groups on the search for meaning and inner life with Harry and Emilia Rathbun at Sequoia Seminar in the 1950s and used LSD as a method for expanding consciousness. He went on to play a key role in numerous organizations. He co-founded San Francisco Venture with his lifelong friend Louis Sloss and others. In addition to his service to The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, he aided in the development of The Esalen Institute and the Humanistic Psychology Institute (Saybrook), served as executive director of the Association for Humanistic Psychology and the C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco, and was a founding board member of the Transpersonal Institute, as well as an on-going consultant to California Institute of Integral Studies.

John was committed to the concept and practice of philanthropy. In his later career, he served as a consultant to families and individuals who had inherited wealth, helping them to live with integrity and meaning. A collection of his essays, Inherited Wealth: Opportunities and Dilemmas, was published in 2008.

John was a serious meditator in the Buddhist tradition and organized a meditation group. He had a deep love of nature and spent much time throughout his life backpacking in the high Sierra, hiking on Mt. Tamalpais, or simply watching birds in the backyard.

John was a wonderfully warm, witty man. He was generous and wise and loved helping others. He had a special capacity for bringing people together in rewarding relationships. He lived a joyful, spiritual life, and leaves a wide circle of loving and admiring friends.

John is survived by his wife Adele and five step-children: two from his first marriage to Barbara, who predeceased him, Leigh and Gus; and three from his
marriage to Adele, Melissa, Alison and Jonathan. He is also survived by two grandchildren, Otis and Sophia.

The world is a better place because of John.

NOTE: Based on an obituary written by Adele Schwarz, with family and friends, for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 25, 2015. Offered by Adele Schwarz, with permission
EXPLORING HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK: AN EMPIRICAL EVALUATION OF ALTERED STATES OF AWARENESS AND PATTERNS OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL SUBSYSTEMS WITH REFERENCE TO TRANSLIMINALITY

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ABSTRACT: It is a long-standing assumption that holotropic breathwork (HB) induces an altered state of consciousness. However, this assumption has not been empirically tested. Consequently, 32 participants were recruited for the present study, which aimed to use the *Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory* (PCI) to quantify the pattern of phenomenological subsystems and Altered State of Awareness (ASA) scores associated with a HB condition relative to a comparison condition and a baseline assessment. The hypothesis that the HB group would report a different pattern of relationships among phenomenological subsystems relative to the comparison condition and baseline was partially supported. In addition, the hypothesis that, while controlling for baseline, the HB group would report higher ASA scores than the comparison group was supported. Finally, for the HB group, transliminality did not significantly improve the prediction of ASA, while controlling for baseline. Various suggestions for future research are discussed.

KEYWORDS: altered state of awareness, holotropic breathwork, phenomenology, Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory, transliminality.

The term ‘holotropic’ (from the Greek ‘holos’ meaning whole and ‘trepein’ meaning to move toward) was coined by Stanislav Grof (1988, 1998) to denote a state of being that is ‘oriented toward wholeness.’ Grof (1998) explained that holotropic states involve transformations in consciousness as we “experience an invasion of other dimensions of existence” (p. 344). Such states can be profound and overwhelming and can be characterized by dramatic sensory and

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perceptual changes, intense and unusual emotions and behavior, alterations in thought patterns, and psychosomatic manifestations. However, Grof asserted that such states are qualitatively different to pathological non-ordinary states of consciousness, such as those relating to cerebral trauma, infections, or degenerative and circulatory brain processes.

Holotropic Breathwork (HB) is a technique that was developed by Grof and his wife Christina in the 1970s (Grof & Grof, 2010). It is designed to facilitate non-ordinary, or holotropic, states of consciousness without the use of pharmacologic means. Instead, it combines rapid, deep breathing, evocative music, focused bodywork, and artistic expression within a safe, supportive group environment. According to Grof and Grof, non-ordinary states of consciousness facilitate an ‘inner radar’ that is able to detect emotionally charged material and bring it into consciousness for processing and subsequent healing.

HB has been studied in the context of addiction recovery (Brewerton, Eyerman, Cappetta, & Mithoefer, 2012; Jefferys, 1996; Metcalf, 1995; Taylor & Macy, 2008), death anxiety and self-esteem (Holmes, Morris, Clance, & Putney, 1996), personality (Binarova, 2003), mood states and psychiatric symptomatology (Hanratty, 2002; Pressman, 1993), and respiratory (Terekhin, 1996) and neurophysiological (Spivak, Kropotov, Spivak, & Sevostyanov, 1994) activity. For example, Pressman (1993) conducted an experiment designed to comparatively analyze the effects of HB and music therapy on mood states. While groups did not differ at baseline, the author reported statistically significant post-test differences between the HB and the music therapy group on all sub-scales of the Profile of Mood States (McNair, Lorr, & Droppleman, 1971). Rhinewine and Williams (2007) suggested that this result signifies “that a greater degree of altered consciousness was induced in the HB group” (p. 773).

In another study, Holmes et al. (1996) comparatively analyzed HB and experientially oriented therapy (EOT) regarding numerous outcome variables. The authors reported statistically significantly greater post-test reductions in death anxiety (measured by Templer’s Death Anxiety Scale; Templer, 1970) and statistically significantly greater increases in self-esteem (measured by the Personality Research Form E: Jackson, 1984) for the HB group compared to the EOT group.

In a subsequent unpublished HB study, Hanratty (2002) implemented a single-group, within-subjects, pre/post-test design. The author reported statistically significant post-test reductions in negative affect and psychiatric symptoms as quantified by the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) and the Brief Symptoms Inventory (Derogatis & Spencer, 1987), respectively.

Underpinning the HB literature is the long-standing assumption that HB induces a non-ordinary or altered state of consciousness (ASC) (e.g., Grof & Grof, 2010). For example, Rhinewine and Williams (2007) suggested, “HB would appear to capitalize upon the effects of hyperventilation on the central nervous system to facilitate development of a temporary, benign, and
potentially therapeutic state of altered consciousness” (p. 772). Similarly, Brewerton et al. (2012) stated, “HB offers the addict many opportunities that may enhance addiction treatment, including entering non-ordinary states of consciousness…” (p. 453).

### Conceptualizing (Altered) States of Consciousness

Ludwig (1969) defined ASCs as “any mental state(s), induced by various physiological, psychological, or pharmacological manoeuvres or agents, which can be recognized subjectively” (p. 9). Ludwig also identified a variety of general characteristics exhibited by ASCs, e.g., hypersuggestibility, a sense of ineffability, and a loss of volitional control. Unfortunately, as Rock and Krippner (2007a, 2007b) pointed out, Ludwig’s (1969) definition neglects to operationalize the notion of a “sufficient deviation in subjective experience” (italics added; pp. 9-10). Furthermore, Ludwig did not identify the “general norms” related to ordinary waking states (Rock & Krippner, 2007a, 2007b).

In contrast to Ludwig (1969), Krippner (1972) formulated a definition of ASCs that eliminates the problems associated with operationalizing the qualifying term “sufficient.” Krippner (1972) defined an ASC as “a mental state which [that] can be subjectively recognized by an individual (or by an objective observer of the individual) as representing a difference in psychological functioning from the individual’s ‘normal’ alert state” (p. 1).

Similarly, Tart (1969) defined an ASC for a given individual as one in which he or she experiences a

> qualitative shift in his pattern of mental functioning, that is, he feels not just a quantitative shift (more or less alert, more or less visual imagery, sharper or duller, etc.), but also that some quality or qualities of his mental processes are different. (p. 1)

(Examples of qualities may include alterations in space-time perception, visual hallucinations, and the dissolution of one’s ego.) One may contend that Tart’s decision to include both quantitative and qualitative differences in cognitive functioning within the definitional boundaries of the acronym ASC, renders his formulation of the concept superior to Krippner’s (1972) attempt at operationalization.

Subsequently, Fischer (1971, 1972, 1976) developed a perception-meditation continuum that allows one to distinguish between ergotropic and trophotropic arousal. These refer, respectively, to hyperaroused (ecstatic) states and the “hypoaroused states of Zazen and Yoga samadhi” (Fischer, 1971, p. 897).

It is noteworthy that Tart (1975) argued that the term “states of consciousness” (and its variant, “altered states of consciousness”) “have come to be used too loosely, to mean whatever is on one’s mind at the moment” (p. 5). Consequently, Tart developed the term “discrete states of consciousness”
(d-SoCs) in an attempt to rectify this terminological problem. A d-SoC refers to a “unique configuration or system of psychological structures or subsystems ... that maintains its integrity or identity as a recognizable system in spite of variations in input from the environment and in spite of various (small) changes in the subsystems” (Tart, 1975, p. 62). Pekala (1985) asserted that, from Tart’s perspective, it is the pattern or configuration of these different structures or subsystems (i.e., phenomenological elements) that constitutes a d-SoC. In contrast, Singer (1977) suggested that it is the intensity of these different elements, rather than the pattern, that defines a d-SoC. Pekala and Wenger (1983) synthesized the essential aspects of Tart’s and Singer’s conceptions to define a state of consciousness (SoC) as the “particular intensity and pattern of associated phenomenological parameters that characterize one’s subjective experience during a given time” (pp. 252-253).

We emphasize that to date, and to the best of our knowledge, the assumption that HB induces an ASC has not been verified empirically in the context of a controlled evaluation. In the next section we will describe a quantitative phenomenological instrument derived in part from Tart (1975) and Singer (1977) that allows one to test the hypothesis that HB induces an ASC.

**THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF CONSCIOUSNESS INVENTORY**

HB experiences may be quantified using a methodology that was developed by Pekala (1985) to “operationally define, map and diagram states and altered states of consciousness” (p. 207). This methodology consists, in part, of a novel retrospective phenomenological assessment instrument referred to as the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (PCI) (Pekala, 1991). The PCI is a 53-item questionnaire consisting of 12 major dimensions or phenomenological (i.e., subjective) elements (e.g., Positive Effect, Altered Experience, Visual Imagery, Altered State of Awareness, Rationality), and 14 minor dimensions (e.g., Fear, Joy, Altered Body Image, Absorption).

The PCI allows one to define operationally or ‘map’ phenomena typically referred to as d-SoCs or ASCs by producing “psygrams” (graphs) that provide two types of information associated with exposure to a stimulus condition: (a) the average intensity values (ranging from 0–6) for each PCI major dimension, and (b) the strength of the association between pairs of PCI major dimensions (Pekala, & Kumar, 1986). One creates a psygram by first producing a correlation matrix consisting of the 12 PCI major dimensions. The non-significant correlation coefficients (p > .05) are ignored, whereas significant r values are converted to r² values (i.e., coefficients of determination). Subsequently, the r² values are converted to percentages. Each line linking a pair of major dimensions constitutes 5% of the r² or variance in common (i.e., covariance) (Pekala, 1991). Thus, the higher the r², the stronger the coupling between a given pair of major dimensions.

The performative function of a psygram is aligned with Tart’s (1975) notion of a d-SoC. As previously stated, Pekala (1985) asserted that, in Tart’s view, it is the
pattern formed by these various psychological subsystems that comprises a d-SoC. Consequently, if the psygram associated with a baseline or comparison condition is statistically significantly different from a psygram associated with, for example, a HB condition, then one may conclude that the HB condition was associated with a “major reorganization in pattern structure that is hypothesized by Tart (1975) to be associated with an altered state of consciousness” (Woodside, Kumar, & Pekala, 1997, p. 84). That is, the pattern structure of the d-SoC associated with the HB condition would be considered statistically significantly altered relative to the pattern structure of the d-SoC associated with the comparison condition or baseline assessment. In contrast, from Singer’s (1977) perspective, if a HB group reports statistically significantly higher intensity values on the PCI major dimension of Altered State of Awareness compared to a comparison group or baseline, then the HB group has reported an ASC.

The PCI has been used to map and diagram phenomenology facilitated by progressive relaxation (e.g., Pekala, Forbes, & Conrisciani, 1989), hypnosis (e.g., Kumar & Pekala, 1989; Pekala & Kumar, 1984, 1986, 1989), sitting quietly with eyes closed (e.g., Pekala & Kumar, 1989), and shamanic-like journeying experiences (e.g., Rock, Casey, & Baynes, 2006; Rock, Abbott, Childargushi, & Kiehne, 2008; Rock & Storm, 2010; Rock, Storm, Harris, & Friedman, 2013). However, to date, there exist no studies that have applied Pekala’s (1985) methodology to map the phenomenological effects of a HB stimulus condition.

**Transliminality**

Little is known about individual susceptibility to the effects of HB. The intended effects of HB (i.e., altered or non-ordinary states of consciousness) may purportedly facilitate such experiences as the recall of repressed traumatic memories and past life memories, meaningful interpretation of dream content, the reliving of biological birth and experiences of psychospiritual death and rebirth, encounters with archetypal figures, and feelings of cosmic unity (Grof & Grof, 2010). Individual susceptibility to such states may be associated with various personality traits. One potentially relevant personality trait is transliminality.

Transliminality is defined as the “hypothesized tendency for psychological material to cross (trans) thresholds (limines) into or out of consciousness” (Thalbourne & Houran, 2000, p. 853), both from unconscious sources and the external environment (Thalbourne & Delin, 1994). Transliminality has been found to underlie paranormal belief, mystical experience, manic experience, magical ideation, absorption (i.e., a tendency to become deeply engaged in mental imagery) (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974), fantasy proneness (Myers, 1983), hyperaesthesia (i.e., hypersensitivity to sensory stimulation), and positive attitude towards dream interpretation (Thalbourne, 1998; Thalbourne & Delin, 1994).

In a study investigating the links between HB and various trait-like tendencies, Binarova (2003) reported that HB facilitated reductions in rigidity and dogmatism. Binarova also reported that ‘Breathers’ tended to display a greater tendency toward magical thinking and unconventionality than ‘Non-Breathers.’
Additionally, Hanratty (2002) found that HB participants scored higher on trait absorption than the general population. With these findings in mind, it seems reasonable to suggest that individuals who display high levels of transliminality may be more susceptible to the intended effects of HB.

**Aims and Hypotheses**

The aim of the present study was to investigate the pattern of phenomenological sub-systems and Altered State of Awareness (ASA) intensity scores associated with a HB stimulus condition relative to a comparison condition and a baseline assessment. An additional aim was to evaluate whether, for the HB group, transliminality improved the prediction of post-test ASA scores, after controlling for baseline ASA scores. Given the long-standing primary assumption that HB induces an ASC (e.g., Grof & Grof, 2010) we hypothesized on the basis of Tart’s (1975) and Singer’s (1977) conceptions of an ASC, respectively, that:

1. The HB group will report a different pattern of relationships among phenomenological subsystems than the comparison group and baseline.
2. The HB group will report higher ASA scores than participants in the comparison group, while controlling for baseline ASA scores.

In addition, we hypothesized that:

3. For the HB group, transliminality improves the prediction of post-test ASA scores after controlling for baseline ASA scores.

**Method**

**Participants**

The present study consisted of a sample of 32 participants [nine male (28.1%), 23 female (71.9%)]. The minimum age requirement for the study was 18 years (consenting age). Ages ranged from 31 to 60 years (M = 43.19, SD = 9.05, median = 44.5). The 25th percentile was aged 35 and the 75th percentile was aged 49. Sixty percent of participants had prior experience of HB. Three participants (9.4%) conceptualized themselves as “religious,” whereas 27 participants (84.4%) conceptualized themselves as “spiritual.” A Confidential Medical Information Form for Holotropic BreathworkTM Workshops was used to screen participants for contraindicators of HB (i.e., pregnancy, cardiovascular problems, severe hypertension, severe mental illness, recent surgery or fractures, acute infectious diseases, epilepsy).

The principal investigator and co-investigators were affiliated with the Phoenix Institute of Australia at the time this study was conducted. This institution did not have an IRB or require IRB approval. Participants were recruited through word-of-mouth, general electronic advertising mail out, and web posts on various sites such as Missio Psychology, east Melbourne Psychology and Melbourne Breathwork.
This study was introduced to prospective participants as research concerning the subjective effects of HB. No hypotheses were provided to prospective participants, because we did not wish to prime responses. Thus, prospective participants were not informed that the researchers were expecting participation in HB to be associated with an ASC. Prospective participants were advised that participation in the present study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Prospective participants read a Plain Language Statement and, if they agreed to participate in the present study, signed a Consent Form.

**Design**

The present study consisted of a repeated-measures design whereby participants’ phenomenology was assessed at baseline using the PCI at an initial time, \( t_1 \). Subsequently, participants were exposed to counterbalanced sequences of a treatment condition (i.e., a HB procedure) and a comparison condition and phenomenology was assessed after each condition. These conditions are described below in the **Procedure** subsection.

**Materials and Apparatus**

**Instrument: Transliminality Scale Revised (Form B).** This scale consists of 29 true/false items, of which 17 are scored for the psychometrically improved Rasch-scaled version, after top-down purification using Rasch-scaling techniques to eliminate age and gender bias from the scale. Rasch-scaling alters the scoring range and mean. Raw range is 0 to 29; Raw mean = 14.5. The KR-20 reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.85 (Lange, Thalbourne, Houran, & Storm, 2000). In the present study, a reliability test of the Rasch-scaled Transliminality Scale (RTS) yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .62.

**Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (PCI).** The PCI (Pekala, 1991) is a 53-item scale used to assess the phenomenological effects of different stimulus conditions (e.g., hypnosis, meditation). The PCI contains 26 (sub) dimensions including 12 major dimensions (e.g., Positive Affect, Negative Affect, Altered Experience), and 14 minor dimensions (e.g., Joy, Anger, Altered Body Image) (Pekala, 1985). Participants are asked to respond to each item on a 7-point Likert scale (Pekala & Wenger, 1983). The PCI has respectable psychometric properties (e.g., Pekala, 1991). For example, the PCI has been shown to reliably discriminate between qualitatively different states of consciousness (thus supporting the scale’s criterion validity), and has demonstrated good internal consistency, yielding coefficient alphas between .70 and .90 (Pekala, Steinberg, & Kumar, 1986). In the present study, the Cronbach’s alpha for the PCI was .77 for baseline, .86 for the HB group, and .92 for the comparison group.

**Materials.** Each participant formed part of a dyad and was provided with a mattress, fitted sheet, blanket, towel, eyeshades, pillow, tissues and rubbish bag. Each HB session included a set of musical pieces lasting two hours and 40 minutes. The musical pieces were divided into three sections of approximately

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equal length: (a) rhythmic drumming, (b) expansive, symphonic style pieces, and (c) relaxing and peaceful music. A musical system was used consisting of two large commercial speakers, a base speaker, amplifier, mixer and CD player.

Procedure

The sessions were conducted in a group context across two weekend residential retreats and conformed to Grof Holotropic Breathwork\textsuperscript{TM} protocols. There are five distinct stages to a HB workshop session: (a) screening (see Participants subsection), (b) preparation, (c) the session, (d) focused bodywork, and (e) integration (Grof & Grof, 2010).

1. Preparation for the HB session involved the development of comfort and trust within the group. Participants were randomly matched in dyads and each member of the dyad was randomly assigned to the treatment (HB) group or a comparison (‘sitter’) group and administered the PCI for the baseline assessment.

2. The sessions were overseen by four facilitators, of which three were registered HB facilitators trained in the USA by Stanislav Grof and also registered psychologists. Operating in dyads, the HB participants were instructed to lie down on the mattress and make themselves comfortable. Comparison participants were instructed to sit quietly next to the HB participant and do so with eyes open. The lights in the room were dimmed, and one of the facilitators led the group through a 20-minute progressive muscle relaxation. Subsequently, HB participants were instructed to allow their attention to shift from their thought processes to their breath. HB participants were instructed to breath deeper and faster in a cyclical manner and, if possible, to continue this process for approximately 40 minutes. Next, the music commenced at a volume high enough to nullify any other sounds (e.g., breathing, talking). The duration of the music was approximately two hours and 40 minutes and divided into three sections of approximately equal length: (a) rhythmic drumming, (b) expansive, symphonic style pieces, and (c) relaxing and peaceful music. During the music, the facilitators supported the dyads and provided body work where required.

3. Towards the end of the music, the facilitators offered focused bodywork, involving gentle pressure or body manipulation, in order to process any latent tension that resided within the HB participant. After the music ended, the facilitators checked-in with each dyad in order to ensure that the HB participant felt that the session was completed. Subsequently, each member of the dyad was instructed to complete the PCI.

4. HB participants were instructed to complete integration activities (i.e., speaking with their comparison participant at length about their HB experience, engaging in free-form art work and, finally, having lunch).

5. After lunch, the HB procedure was repeated for the whole group with the dyads inverting the HB-comparison roles. Subsequently, each member of the dyad was instructed to complete the PCI.
We acknowledge that our comparison group was exposed to components of the holotropic activity (i.e., loud evocative music). However, a breather-sitter dyad is an integral part of the standard Grof HB protocol, and, thus, to remove the sitters and dissolve the dyad would significantly compromise the gestalt of the therapeutic process involved in HB, and, therefore, the ecological validity of the present study. Indeed, when considering the numerous variables involved, the sitters’ presence may contribute to the HB participants’ response. In order to determine which components of HB contribute to the observed effects it would be necessary to carry out a treatment-component dismantling study. However, we note that established research practice dictates that an overall treatment effect (i.e., response to the overall intervention) should be measured prior to undertaking a dismantling study (Ahn & Wampold, 2001).

**Statistical Analysis**

We note that the Jenrich (1970) Test is the appropriate statistical procedure to assess pattern differences associated with the 12 major dimensions of the PCI (Pekala, 1991). However, Pekala (1991, p. 235) asserted that the Jenrich Test is a “large-sample multivariate procedure” requiring a minimum of 60 participants per condition (provided that all 12 major dimensions of the PCI are being examined). Given that the present study did not meet this sample size requirement, the Jenrich Test was not appropriate. Consequently, a Box Test comparison was performed (Pekala, 1991) to assess Hypothesis 1 (H1), whereby the independent variable (IV) consisted of three groups or levels (i.e., baseline; HB; comparison) and the dependent variable (DV) was the pattern of phenomenological subsystems (i.e., the covariance matrix consisting of the 12 PCI variables) for each of the three groups. The Box Test yields a Box M statistic that “tests the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices” (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p. 252). The inflation of the Type 1 error rate due to performing multiple tests was corrected using a Bonferroni adjustment whereby the alpha was divided by the number of tests.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) was addressed using a one-way repeated-measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). In this analysis, the repeated-measures factor consisted of two levels (i.e., HB versus comparison), and the DV was post-test ASA scores. The covariate was baseline ASA scores.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) was tested using a hierarchical multiple regression. Baseline ASA scores were entered in block 1. Subsequently, transliminality was entered in block 2 while controlling for baseline ASA scores. The DV was post-test ASA scores.

**Results**

**Descriptive Data**

*Transliminality.* The mean score for the RTS was 27.93 ($SD = 3.17$). The skew of the distribution of scores was normal ($skew = 0.27, SE = .41$). The

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theoretical range is 13.70 to 37.30, and the observed range was 21.10 to 35.00. Sex was correlated with RTS, $r(32) = .40$, $p = .023$; however, age was not, $r(32) = -.01$, $p = .98$.

**H1:** The HB group will report a different pattern of relationships among phenomenological subsystems than the comparison group and baseline.

After performing a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons (adjusted alpha = $2/0.05 = 0.25$), a Box Test of the equality of covariance matrices revealed that the difference between the covariation matrices of the HB group versus baseline was statistically significant, $F(78, 10521.79) = 1.49, p = .003$; Box $M = 149.27$. However, the difference between the HB group and the comparison group was not statistically significant, $F(78, 9527.02) = 1.14, p = .191$; Box $M = 115.93$. The hypothesis was partially supported. The psygrams for baseline, the HB group, and the comparison group are depicted in Figure 1 to 3.

**H2:** The HB group will report higher ASA scores than participants in the comparison group, while controlling for baseline ASA scores.

A one-way repeated-measures ANCOVA was performed with group (HB; comparison) as the IV, post-test scores on ASA as the DV, and baseline scores on ASA as the covariate. After controlling for baseline, there was a statistically significant main effect for group, $F(1, 30) = 11.64, p = .002$; partial $\eta^2 = .28$. Thus, group accounts for 28% of the variability in post-test ASA scores. The mean score for the HB group ($M = 3.11, SD = .87$) was statistically significantly higher than the mean score for the comparison group ($M = 2.08, SD = .98$). The hypothesis was supported.

**H3:** For the HB group, transliminality improves the prediction of post-test ASA scores after controlling for baseline ASA scores.

A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to examine whether baseline ASA and transliminality were significant predictors of post-test ASA scores. A specific focus of this analysis was to determine whether transliminality statistically significantly improved the prediction of post-test ASA scores after controlling for baseline ASA scores.

At step 1, baseline ASA was a statistically significant predictor of post-test ASA, $R^2 = 0.19$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.17$), $F(1, 30) = 7.17, p = .012$. At step 2, the inclusion of transliminality did not statistically significantly improve prediction of post-test ASA, $\Delta R^2 = 0.10$, $F(1, 29) = 3.92, p = .057$ (see Table 1). However, at both steps, $R$ was statistically significantly different from zero; Step 1 $R = .44$, $F(1, 30) = 7.17, p = .012$; Step 2, $R = .54$, $F(2, 29) = 5.90, p = .007$. 

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For the sake of completeness, we elected to evaluate group differences in intensity ratings across the remaining phenomenological subsystems that the PCI is capable of measuring (Positive Affect, Negative Affect, Altered Experience, Imagery, Attention, Self-Awareness, Internal Dialogue, Rationality, Volitional Control, Memory, and Arousal).

A one-way repeated-measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with group (baseline; HB; comparison) as the IV and the aforementioned phenomenological subsystems as the DVs. We point out that it is more parsimonious to perform multivariate, rather than univariate, analyses.

**Figure 1.** Psygram of baseline.

**POST HOC ANALYSIS**

For the sake of completeness, we elected to evaluate group differences in intensity ratings across the remaining phenomenological subsystems that the PCI is capable of measuring (Positive Affect, Negative Affect, Altered Experience, Imagery, Attention, Self-Awareness, Internal Dialogue, Rationality, Volitional Control, Memory, and Arousal).

A one-way repeated-measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with group (baseline; HB; comparison) as the IV and the aforementioned phenomenological subsystems as the DVs. We point out that it is more parsimonious to perform multivariate, rather than univariate, analyses.
when one wishes to examine group differences on multiple, related DVs. MANOVA yields a multivariate effect (i.e., an effect on combined DVs). If a statistically significant multivariate effect is found, then an examination of the univariate effects (i.e., results concerning each individual DV) is warranted (on MANOVA, see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

A statistically significant multivariate effect was found for group, $F(22, 80) = 4.90, p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .318$. The univariate effects are presented in Table 2.

Figure 2. Psygram of HB group.
DISCUSSION

In partial support of H1, there was a statistically significant difference between the psygrams (i.e., covariation matrices) of the HB group versus baseline. This result suggests that, compared to baseline, the HB group was associated with a “major reorganization in pattern structure that is hypothesized by Tart (1975) to be associated with an altered state of consciousness” (Woodside et al., 1997, p. 84). This finding indicates that participants’ cognition in the HB

Figure 3. Psygram of comparison group.

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group was fundamentally different to participants’ cognition at baseline. However, there was not a statistically significant difference between the psygrams of the HB group versus the comparison group. This result may be, at least in part, due to the fact that the comparison group, in accordance with attempts to preserve the external validity of the present study, was exposed to variables such as loud, evocative music.

In support of H2, the HB group reported statistically significantly higher ASA scores relative to the comparison group, while controlling for baseline ASA scores. The ASA dimension quantifies one’s experience of “an extraordinarily unusual and nonordinary state of awareness versus one’s state of consciousness being no different than usual” (Pekala, 1991, p. 132). As previously stated, in Singer’s (1977) view, it is the quantitative shift in the intensity, rather than the pattern, of phenomenology that constitutes an ASC. Thus, from Singer’s perspective, this result supports the long-standing assumption that HB induces non-ordinary or altered SoCs (e.g., Rhinewine & Williams, 2007).

Regarding H3, baseline ASA scores was a statistically significant predictor of post-test ASA scores for the HB group. However, the inclusion of transliminality did not statistically significantly improve the prediction of post-test ASA scores, after controlling for baseline ASA scores. Indeed, baseline ASA scores accounted for 16% of the unique variability in post-test ASA scores, whereas transliminality accounted for 10% of the unique variability in post-test ASA scores. We note that the regression model containing these two predictors was statistically significantly different from zero. In general terms, in the context of HB it seems that one’s phenomenology at baseline appears to influence one’s post-test phenomenology.

Our post hoc analyses yielded numerous statistically significant group differences regarding PCI dimensions. The HB group reported statistically significantly higher Negative Affect, Altered Experience, and Visual Imagery scores relative to baseline and the comparison group. Negative Affect consists of the minor dimensions Anger, Sadness and Fear. The Anger dimension evaluates feelings of being “angry and upset,” whereas Sadness assesses “feeling very, very sad or unhappy.” The Fear minor dimension monitors feeling “very frightened” or being “scared or afraid” (Pekala, 1991, p. 131).
Altered Experience consists of four minor dimensions: Altered Body Image, Altered Time Sense, Altered Perception, and Altered or Unusual Meaning. Altered Body Image quantifies the degree to which participants “feel their bodily feelings expand into the world around them” (p. 132). Altered Time Sense assesses the extent to which “the flow of time changed drastically” or whether it appeared to “speed up or slow down” (p. 132). Altered Perception evaluates “changes in the perception of the world in terms of color, form, size, shape, or perspective” (p. 132). Altered Meaning assesses the degree to which a participant reports “an experience that might be labeled religious, spiritual, or transcendental, or has feelings of awe, sacredness, or reverence” (p. 132). Visual Imagery consists of the following two minor dimensions: Amount of Imagery (e.g., “My experience was made up almost completely of images”, p. 131) and Vividness of Imagery, which evaluates the degree to which one’s visual imagery is “vivid and three-dimensional” or “as clear and vivid as objects in the real world” (p. 132).

The HB group reported statistically significantly lower Rationality scores relative to baseline and the comparison group. Rationality “addresses whether thinking is clear and distinct, or rational and easy to comprehend, versus thinking being “confused and muddled” or “non-rational and very hard to comprehend” (Pekala, 1991, p. 132).

In addition, the HB group reported statistically significantly higher Attention and Arousal scores relative to the comparison group. Attention is comprised of two minor dimensions: Direction and Absorption. Direction monitors whether attention is focused on “internal subjective experience” or “toward the environment around me” (Pekala, 1991, p. 132). Absorption evaluates whether one is ensconced in what one is experiencing or “continually distracted by extraneous impressions” (p. 132). Arousal measures “the extent of muscular tension, that is, the extent to which the muscles of the body are “very tense and tight” versus not feeling “tension or tightness at all” (p. 132).
Finally, the HB group reported statistically significantly lower Volitional Control compared to baseline and the comparison group. Volitional control evaluates the degree to which participants have “complete control over what one is paying attention to” versus having “images and thoughts pop into my mind without my control” (Pekala, 1991, p. 132).

The PCI was selected for the present study because, “for research purposes it still is probably the most flexible and best documented instrument to evaluate different states of consciousness” (Johanson, Valli, & Revonsuo, 2011, p. 15). Thus, the PCI is perhaps the ideal instrument to assess the primary claim that HB induces an ASC relative to, for example, baseline. However, despite the promising results of the present study, we caution the reader that the PCI is a general measure of phenomenological responses to stimulus conditions and was, therefore, not specifically designed to measure the phenomenology of HB. Thus, there may be phenomenological variables that are integral to HB-induced states that are not measured by the PCI. More specifically, the PCI does not allow one to investigate whether HB induces an ASC that is holotropic. Future research might use the PCI in conjunction with other quantitative measures such as the APZ-OAV Questionnaire (Abnormer Psychischer Zustand = altered states of consciousness; Dittrich, von Arx, & Staub, 1985) and qualitative methodologies such as interpretive phenomenological analysis to test: (a) the primary claim that HB induces an ASC, and (b) the secondary claim that HB induces an ASC that may be characterized as holotropic. In addition, for the purpose of item construction one might use a complementary mixed-methods approach whereby semi-structured interviews are administered to HB participants. The resultant qualitative data may be phenomenologically analyzed with the aim of generating comprehensive constituent themes that capture the essential aspects of HB experiences. Such themes may be used to create items comprising a quantitative measure designed specifically to investigate the phenomenological effects of HB.

A difficulty inherent in the investigation of the majority of psychotherapeutic techniques and procedures, including HB, is that they are typically composed of a number of elements that may contribute to a greater or lesser extent to the observed effects of the intervention (Ahn & Wampold, 2001). Therefore, given the scarcity of studies investigating HB, an avenue for future research would be to carry out a dismantling study in which the PCI is used to assess the constituent elements of HB (i.e., rapid, deep breathing; evocative music; focused bodywork) in isolation and in combination. This process would allow one to examine the phenomenological effects of each component of HB and whether each element contributes to the observed phenomenological effects of HB.

It has been suggested that HB may facilitate significant clinical benefits, whereby the HB method allows individuals to access, re-experience and integrate previous trauma and may lead to reductions in death anxiety and increases in self-esteem when included as an adjunct to psychotherapy (Holmes et al., 1996). Given such purported effects it would be of interest to
conduct a controlled investigation of the impact of HB on variables such as general subjective distress, including anxiety and depression, using measures such as the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) momentary well-being (e.g., Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule-Expanded Form) (Watson & Clark, 1994), and self-esteem. It would also be of significant interest to measure variables associated with the presence, organization and intrusiveness of traumatic/aversive memories (e.g., using the Trauma Memory Questionnaire, Halligan, Clark, & Ehlers, 2002; or the Intrusive Memory Questionnaire, Michael & Ehlers, 2007) and the extent to which these variables promote subjective distress. Furthermore, it is recommended that future researchers use the PCI to test whether phenomenological variables mediate the relationship between personality traits and clinical outcome variables such as subjective distress and the presence and intrusiveness of traumatic memories. For example, future research might investigate the relationship between transliminality and distress associated with aversive memories in the context of a HB condition and whether the PCI-variable Altered State of Awareness mediates (i.e., contributes to) this relationship. Thus, within the context of HB, one may postulate a hypothetical causal chain whereby an IV (X), transliminality, promotes fluctuations in a mediator (M), Altered State of Awareness, which promotes fluctuations in a DV (Y), distress associated with aversive memories, thus, X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y.

Moreover, the PCI enables researchers to explore whether phenomenology moderates the effect of an HB condition on a given clinical outcome variable. That is, whether there is an interaction between a HB condition and phenomenological variables with respect to their effect on a given clinical outcome variable. For example, in the context of a HB experiment, it might be hypothesized that the PCI-variable Attention moderates the effect of HB on a clinical outcome variable. A finding in support of this hypothesis would suggest that the effect of HB on the clinical outcome variable is not the same for high and low Attention participants.

Previous research concerning the PCI (e.g., Manmiller, Kumar, & Pekala, 2005; Pekala, Kumar, Maurer, Elliott-Carter, & Moon, 2006; Robin, Kumar, & Pekala, 2005) has been conducted in a Classical Test Theory sense. However, it would be advantageous to investigate whether the findings of the present study are replicated using Modern Test Theory (Rasch scaling), which controls for artifacts pertaining to response biases and generates interval scale data (Lange et al., 2000).

**CONCLUSION**

The present study was fruitful in terms of identifying phenomenological dimensions that appear to underlie the HB process. First, the HB group reported a statistically significant shift in the pattern structure of phenomenological subsystems relative to baseline. Second, the HB group reported statistically significantly higher Altered State of Awareness scores relative
to the comparison group, while controlling for baseline Altered State of Awareness scores. Finally, our post hoc analysis revealed numerous phenomenological differences (e.g., Negative Affect, Altered Experience, Visual Imagery) between the HB group, the comparison group and baseline. Taken together, the results of the present study highlight the usefulness of applying a process-oriented approach to the study of HB. We caution, however, that statistically significant results that are not replications should be regarded as tentative pending replication, and corrections for multiple analyses do not qualify as a substitute for replication. Thus, we see the next step in this line of enquiry as an attempt to replicate our statistically significant findings while also investigating the unverified assumption that HB induces a holotropic ASC, and testing HB mediation and moderation models focused on pertinent clinical outcome variables.

Notes

1 Rock and Krippner (2012) argued that altered states of consciousness are more appropriately referred to as altered states of phenomenology. Also see Beischel, Rock and Krippner (2011) and Rock and Krippner (2007ab, 2011ab).

2 Pekala (1991) asserted that

To assure that only statistically significant correlations are represented, I have generally chosen to represent only those variances that denote a significant correlation between dimensions, with an alpha level of no greater than .05 (although I have opted for an alpha value of .01 or .001 depending on the size of the sample and how conservative I want to be). (p. 173)

3 In defense of the use of coefficients of determination rather than correlation coefficients, Pekala (1991) explained that

Psygrams thus illustrate not the correlations between dimensions, but rather the variance in common between dimensions. It was decided to utilize coefficients of determination instead of correlations so that the reviewer could look at a psygram and tell from the drawing what percentage of variance two PCI dimensions have in common. It was felt that this was a better descriptor of the “pattern” relationships between dimensions than its associated correlation. (p. 173)

4 According to Houran and Lange (2012), “Top-down purification” refers to a set of Rasch scaling procedures that identify and remedy differential item functioning in questionnaires, i.e., response biases related to extraneous variables such as respondents’ ages, genders, or even cultures. These biases can elicit spurious factor structures of test items, as well as erroneous findings from statistical analyses. Rasch scaling also yields measures that have interval-level properties. Therefore, the techniques overcome the limitations of classical test theory. (p. 45)

References


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A HOLOTROPIC DISCOURSE: ANDEAN MYSTICISM AND THE TRANSPERSONAL PARADIGM

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ABSTRACT: This article offers a discussion of Andean ontology in terms of its symbiotic relationship with transpersonal psychology (TP). Prevailing concepts from the Andean wisdom tradition propagated by Q’eros, Quechua-speaking indigenous peoples descended from the Inka and the Andean highlands, are presented alongside Dr. Stanislav Grof’s research on holotropic states of consciousness. Grof’s theory offers a non-culturally specific context for interpreting the Andean wisdom tradition. This article presents results of an autoethnographic study that included a systematic inquiry into holotropic states of consciousness by means of Andean ceremony. The author discovered that identification with the holotropic principle (holotropic identity) enabled individual awakening and furthered an inclusive understanding of the nature/human relation. The article aims to bridge the gap between indigenous wisdom traditions and South American representation in transpersonal scholarship.

KEYWORDS: Grof, holotropic, Q’ero, Peru, indigenous, autoethnography.

Both Andean and TP paradigms have much to offer toward an evolving humanity. In the latter case Dr. Stanislav Grof has detailed a new cartography of the human psyche made accessible through holotropic states of consciousness (1985, 1986, 1988, 1998, 2012a, 2012b). In the case of the Andean paradigm, Andean paqos (Andean priests/initiates) exercise a tradition transferred through cultural practice from the time of their ancestors. Their tradition is complete with prophecy for manifesting a vision of humanity’s potential, reminiscent of the Buddhist “Shambhala.”

Andean methodology for psychological development is unconfined by biographical limitations and rather moves toward a paradigmatic view of transcending states of consciousness marked by levels, qualities, and ontological attainments (Jenkins, 2013; Nuñez del Prado, 2006). Psycho-spiritual development is therefore a preferred term for this article, which attempts to facilitate an inclusive and transpersonal world view.

In their comprehensive summary and analysis of 35 years of TP scholarship, Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin (2007) point out that the majority of TP scholarship and growth has occurred in Europe, the United States, and Japan. They point to the “scant” representation of the Southern Hemisphere, Third World countries, and indigenous populations. This article aims to address that gap through its portrayal of indigenous world views from South America.

Definitions of Grof’s theoretical concepts are followed by an introduction to Andean mysticism. In particular, the Q’eros indigenous peoples of Peru’s
highlands are discussed as purveyors of Andean ontology through their culture, traditions, and prophecy. The research method can best be described as an autoethnography: I recount my personal holotropic experiences while participating in Q’eros ceremony. My experiences validate holotropic states as ontologically real, a naturally occurring phenomenon that contributes to the developing dialectic. Grof’s understanding of the human psyche is supported by this auto-ethnomethodological study and accompanying literature review. Striking similarities between Andean ontology and holotropic research are noted that facilitate and encourage the inclusion of nature-based wisdom traditions in TP scholarship.

A Holotropic Paradigm

Grof coined the term “holotropic,” which means moving toward wholeness (from the Greek “holos,” or whole, and “trepein,” to turn or change). He had previously advocated for a psychology paradigm that included the methodological study of non-ordinary states of consciousness (1985). He came to use the term “holotropic states of consciousness” to label a large subgroup of non-pathological, non-ordinary states that have a healing, transformative and evolutionary potential (2010).

Gibson (2008) notes that Grof’s theoretical framework has advanced the work of Carl G. Jung, who was given credit for initially exposing psychology to the transpersonal.

In holotropic states, consciousness is changed qualitatively in a very profound and fundamental way, but it is not grossly impaired as in organic psychoses or trivial deliria. We experience an invasion of other dimensions of existence that can be very intense and even overwhelming. However, at the same time, we typically remain fully oriented and do not completely lose touch with everyday reality. Holotropic states are characterized by a specific transformation of consciousness associated with dramatic perceptual changes in all sensory areas, intense and often unusual emotions, and profound alterations in the thought processes. They are also usually accompanied by a variety of intense psychosomatic manifestations and unconventional forms of behavior. (1998, p. 334)

Ancient and indigenous peoples worldwide have developed safe and effective techniques for inducing holotropic states, which have been practiced regularly in social and ceremonial contexts such as initiation and rites of passage (Grof, 1998). In such contexts, methods for inducing holotropic states have been sustained through oral tradition, preserved through ceremonial cycles, and woven into cultural fabrics across the world.

For more than half a century, Grof has been researching holotropic states, including extensive studies with psychedelic substances, Holotropic Breathwork, and persons experiencing psychospiritual crises or spiritual emergency. In the latter case, holotropic states occur spontaneously with no known cause
and include a significant transformative potential (Grof & Grof, 1986; Lukoff, 2000; Walsh, 2007).

Holotropic Breathwork is an experiential, self-exploration therapy developed by Stanislav and his wife Christina Grof in the mid-1970s at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. The method involves a combination of circular breathing, evocative music, and a specific style of energy-releasing bodywork that engage holotropic states; with subsequent mandala drawing and group sharing for integration. Many of these elements of the Holotropic Breathwork process show up in traditional Q’eros ceremony.

Based on his research, Grof revised the conceptual framework of the human psyche into three domains. Like his predecessor, C. G. Jung, he did not see the psyche as a product of the brain. According to Grof, Jung saw it as the “creative and generative principle of the cosmos (anima mundi). It permeates all of existence and the individual psyche of each of us is teased out of this unfathomable cosmic matrix” (Grof, 2010, p. 19). In addition to the postnatal/biographical domain shared with traditional psychology, he added the perinatal and transpersonal domains to the conceptual framework of the psyche (1998).

The biographical level of the psyche is the foundational platform recognized by traditional academic psychiatry and psychology. Sigmund Freud asserted that human psychological history began after birth through the interplay of postnatal influences on human behavior and biological instincts. However, the perinatal and transpersonal domains described by Grof challenge the framework of traditional psychology and require a radical revision of the existing theories in order to account for the new information discovered through holotropic states. Grof has compared the theoretical shift to the revolution in physics in the first few decades of the twentieth century when physicists moved from Newtonian physics to quantum-relativistic physics (Grof, 2010).

The perinatal domain is closely related with the trauma of biological birth (Grof, 2010, p. 13). “This region of the unconscious contains the memories of what the fetus experienced in the consecutive stages of the birth process, including all the emotions and physical sensations involved. These memories form four distinct experiential clusters, each of which is related to one of the stages of childbirth” (Grof, 2012a, pp. 146–147).

Grof describes the perinatal domain in terms of four “basic perinatal matrices” (BPM I–IV). BPM I experiences refer to the “undisturbed embryonal existence” before the onset of delivery (1998, p. 351) and can generally be characterized as “good womb” or “bad womb” experiences, depending on the mother’s experience during pregnancy. The stage of BPM II, which occurs at the onset of the delivery as the uterus contracts before the cervix has opened, corresponds with the first clinical stage of labor. BPM II experiences can include “cosmic engulfment,” intense anxiety, and awareness of an imminent and vital threat (1985, p. 111). The BPM III phase “reflects the struggle to be born after the uterine cervix dilates” (2012a, p. 147). This is also known as the
second clinical stage of labor as the fetus passes through the birth canal: an epic journey of struggle for survival, sensations of pressure and memories of contact with biological materials that may include feces and blood. BPM IV refers to the actual emergence into the world, the third clinical stage of labor, after birth until the delivery of the placenta. Related experiences may include reliving specific details of birth such as instrumental intervention, anesthesia, etc., that are often verifiable.

The content of the four BPMs is not limited to memories of biological birth. “Each of them also represents a selective opening into the domains of the historical and archetypal collective unconscious, which contain motifs of similar experiential quality” (2012a, p. 147). Typical experiences might include feelings of an imminent threat, “ego death,” “total annihilation” and “hitting the cosmic bottom.” These may be followed by visions of “blinding white or golden light of supernatural radiance and beauty. It can be associated with astonishing displays of divine archetypal entities, rainbow spectra, or intricate peacock designs” (1985, p. 123). The sense of emergence can be clouded if the birth included heavy anesthesia or has taken a different form, as in the case of a Cesarean section (1998).

The transpersonal domain involves experiences that transcend limitations of the individual ego. Grof has grouped them into three large categories: (a) transcendence of spatial barriers, (b) transcendence of linear time, and (c) experiences of archetypal figures and domains that transcend both spatial barriers and linear time (1998, pp. 353–354) and identification with Cosmic Consciousness, “the creative principle of the universe” (Grof, 2010, p. 13). Biological birth has become an important ground for establishing the ontological basis of the perinatal and transpersonal domains (Gibson, 2008). Individuals may successfully experience rebirth through the perinatal matrices with heuristic and healing results (Grof, 2012b).

The therapeutic use of holotropic states has facilitated a shift from talk therapies to experiential therapies, wherein the innate healing intelligence of the client’s own psyche becomes the guiding force (2010). People experiencing holotropic states in such settings can readily access deep layers of the unconscious wherein lay the roots of trauma and emotional and psychosomatic problems. Grof refers to the complex nature of the phenomena as COEX systems, or systems of condensed experience, where unconscious material forms multilevel dynamic constellations (p. 15).

**INTRODUCTION TO Q’EROS**

The terms “Q’ero” and “Q’eros” refer interchangeably to a cultural group in Peru and their ancestral village (Wissler, 2009). Their native tongue is Quechua, the primary indigenous language of the Andes spoken during the reign of the Inkan Empire. I have studied the language based primarily on Jenkins (1997, 2013) and Wilcox’s (2004) books on the ceremonial traditions of...
Q’eros. Both authors have extensive experience training in the tradition under the guidance of renowned Andean paqos.

Quechua is a phonetic language with no consistent spelling, and I have chosen to respect its ceremonial context instead of using modern-day Quechua dictionaries. Therefore a phonetic ‘k’ is in place of the Spanish ‘c’ in “Inka.” Yet Wilcox’s (2004) notion to pluralize Quechua words with an “s” for the benefit of English-language readers is followed; this pluralization replaced the Quechua derivative -kuna (p. x – xi). Throughout this article “Q’eros” is used instead of “Q’ero” for consistency (Wissler, 2009). I have italicized and explained Andean concepts throughout; geographical locations and formal names are not italicized.

According to Wissler (2009), the Q’eros community consists of around 900 people in 120 families and is spread throughout four river valleys in six village hamlets. Hatun Q’eros, the ceremonial center, is located approximately 200 km East of Cuzco, the site of the Inkan Empire’s ancient capital, in the Paucartambo region. Q’eros use three ecological zones for farming and basic sustenance. They cultivate choclo (a type of corn), squash and peppers in the lowest zone (1,800 – 2,500 m), potatoes, their primary food source, in the middle zone (3,200 – 4,000 m), and they raise alpacas and llamas (South American camelids) in the highest zone (4,000 – 4,800 m) (Flores Ochoa & Fries, 1989 as cited in Wissler, 2009). Q’eros move consistently through their regions by foot that can require up to 3 days of travel (Brush, 1976).

Q’eros are considered the “last Inkas,” a “renown that began with the first academic expedition into Q’eros (1955), which consisted of a multi-disciplinary research team from Cusco University (UNSAAC - Universidad Nacional de San Antonio Abad del Cusco)” (Flores Ochoa & Nuñez del Prado, 2005 as cited in Wissler, 2009, p. 41). Q’eros shared in the legend of Inkarrí, the mythical king who founded the Inkan Empire. “Yet, the Q’eros’ version of the myth often differentiates, indicating that they were the ones who were endowed with spiritual knowledge, while the Incas [Inkas] were bestowed with the political power” (Nuñez del Prado, 1958/2005, p. 201–202 as cited in Wissler, 2009, p. 41). Wissler wrote, “Indeed, they are known and have an international following for their special skill in making ceremonial offerings to the mountain spirits, and are regularly sought by outsiders (urban Peruvians and foreign tourists) for this skill, which today has become a prime source of cash earnings for them” (p. 41).

As in many indigenous wisdom traditions, prophecy is embedded within their lineage and practices and exists in relation with their environment. In order to proceed with a dialogue between TP and Andean concepts, an introduction to Andean ontology is necessary. The following overview is based primarily on Dr. Juan Nuñez del Prado (2006) and Elizabeth Jenkins’ (1997, 2013) extensive investigations into Andean mysticism.

Nuñez del Prado initially approached Q’eros as an anthropologist, following in the footsteps of his father Oscar Nuñez del Prado, who had headed the initial
academic excursion to Q’eros. He was transformed after he met with don Manuel Quispe, a Q’eros Kurak Agulleg, an honorary title given to an initiate of high standing that translates as “great chewer of coca leaves” (Jenkins, 2013). He became a devoted student of Q’eros masters and has since risen to international renown as foremost authority on the mystical tradition. He was a primary teacher of Elizabeth Jenkins, an internationally renowned paqo and teacher, who developed the Wiraqocha Foundation in response to the needs of Q’eros and as a platform for instructing Western paqos in the tradition. I also have drawn on Joan Parisi Wilcox’s (2004) literature. She was endowed with the task of bringing the “word of Q’ero to the world” by Q’eros master don Mariano in 1994 (p. 3). Her work provides a detailed synopsis of the Andean system, along with interviews with Q’eros elders. Because the literature on Andean and Q’eros mysticism is limited, I have reviewed both academic scholarship and popular literature.

Gordon (2001) suggests that the Andean worldview includes patterns of belief, behavior, and assumptions of reality that are unavailable in Western epistemology and that would benefit Western culture. He describes three factors that make it difficult for Westerners to understand the Andes: (a) the challenge of translating one cultural paradigm into another when concepts are not always shared or there is no exact equivalent, (b) the worldviews are divided into different categories, and (c) there are “different assumptions about the basic nature of reality” (Gordon, 2008, p. 5). However, he also suggests that it is possible to translate through mutual respect.

**Holotropic Methods of Q’eros**

The methods by which paqos manifest higher states of consciousness include Haywarikwee ceremonies (commonly known as despachos), karpay (initiation), healings, coca leaf readings, and any situation in which they expand their poq’po (energy bubble/body composed of kawsay4 - “living energy”) in order to communicate with nature (Jenkins, personal communication, March 12, 2014).

*Despachos* often begin with *akulliy*, the ceremonial exchange of *k’intus*, a grouping of three coca leaves pressed one on top of the other, and at times are fanned out. *Coca* leaves are medicinal and used daily by Andeans, often with a bit of quinoa ash. *Coca* is also used ritually as a medium of communication; *paqos* use their breath to mingle refined energies in an exchange that links their poqpo with the three worlds (Wilcox, 2004, p. 40), each other, and the *despacho*.

A *despacho* is a systematic offering. It takes a form similar to a mandala and is composed of natural objects that are positioned on white or wrapping paper based on their energetic properties: *apu* (masculine), *pachamama* (feminine), and a marriage of both (*yanantin*). *Despachos* differ based on a *paqo*’s level of skill and intention. Objects include shells, candy, seeds, salt, *coca*, lama fetus, lama fat, string, cotton, fruit, condor feather, wine, *pisco* (a clear alcohol made from grapes), and confetti. They are infused with Quechua-spoken lineage invocations and prayers. The bundle is wrapped, and then participants’ *mesas*
Mesas are traditional cloth bundles filled with kuyas, power objects gifted from fellow paqos or discovered in moments of epiphany – usually stones or crystals. The mesa is central to the paqos’ path and is a manifestation of their power (Wilcox, 2004). The sounding of small bells, conch shells, and further repetitious prayer occur over the pile of mesas. After some time, the paqo unearths the bundled despacho and performs a limpia – Spanish for “clean.” The bundle is pressed, thumped, and moved along the bodies of participants, removing hoocha (heavy and discordant energy) from their poq’pos. It is then burned or buried.

Despachos are exercised throughout the Andean ceremonial cycle, for communing with nature, healing, and transmitting karpay. Karpay, which directly translates as irrigation, is more popularly understood as an initiation or transmission of a paqo’s personal power. It is considered to be an act of “watering” the qosqo, the naval center, wherein lies the “Inkan Seed” – the entire germinal potential of the Inka (Jenkins, 2013). Karpay can also be received from naturally occurring phenomena such as lightning (Beeler, 2003; Wilcox, 2004).

In a despacho ceremony, streams of Quechua lineage invocations are spoken into the objects, which are held with both hands and pressed close to the lips. Q’eros culminate their invocations by blowing onto them before placing them on the paper. During karpay, Q’eros blow into the crowns of participants’ heads, palms of their hands, and other specific areas of the body. A subtle awareness of kawsay is made accessible through the breath and helps to induce what transpersonal psychologists call holotropic states of consciousness. Yet Q’eros are most always engaging their holotropic awareness through daily living. For Q’eros, all form is regarded in reciprocal exchange with the sacred, in ayni.

Overview of Andean Ontology

Nuñez del Prado (2006) and Jenkins (2013) both detail a hierarchy of Andean psycho-spiritual development as a progression composed of seven levels. Q’eros prophecy indicates cycles of time that correspond with the manifestation of those levels. Nuñez del Prado (2006) describes the Andean hierarchical system as “Transcendental Anthropology.” The “…mentor hierarchy is parallel to the hierarchy of the beings that make up the religious universe in the Andes, as well as to a series of social groups of scalar dimension[,] which constitute the Andean ethno-sociology” (p. 1–2). They are expressed through a paqo who has had an “experience of seeing and being a part of the power” (p. 2).

The first four levels are:

1. Ayllu Alto Mesayoq - an initiate with the power\(^5\) of Ayllu Apu, spirit of the mountain and guardian of a family, small village, or district;
2. Llaqta Alto Mesayoq - an initiate with power of Llaqta Apu, spirit of the mountain and guardian of a city, groups of villages, or a micro-region;
3. Suyu Alto Mesayoq - an initiate with power of Suyu Apu, guardian of an extensive region such as Tawantinsuyu, the Inkan Empire marked by predominant apus such as Ausangate; and
4. *Kuraq Akulleq* - an initiate with the power of *Apuyaya* and *Taytacha*, both names given to the guardian of the universe (Nuñez del Prado, 2006), and with *Teqse*, nature beings on earth with whom everyone has equal access like wind and water (Jenkins, 2013).

These four levels have a training and initiation process. They presently exist through *paqos* exercising their qualities and characteristics and are able to be transmitted to others.

A noted transition at the fourth level pertains to Q’eros prophecy and its present epoch of human evolution. It is characterized by life-giving qualities (Jenkins, personal communication, February 5, 2011), whereas the preceding three levels involve fear and conflict (Jenkins, 2013). Nuñez del Prado has considered most Western cultures as having attained or being on the verge of attaining the fourth level (Wilcox, 2004, p. 11). Jenkins (2013) noted that most of humanity has attained the third level but remains stuck there. Both *paqos* have conferred the *Hatun Karpay*, the fourth level rite of passage. Nuñez del Prado (2006), Jenkins (2013), and Wilcox (2004) have described it as a ten day ritual that includes a series of *despachos* and *karpays*; energetic practices that release accumulated *hoocha* (heavy and discordant energy); a practice to transform identification with the biological mother and father in exchange for identification with *Inti Taita* (Father Sun) and *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) (Jenkins, 2013); and visits to a series of sacred sites in the valleys of Willka Mayu and the Valley of Cuzco. The sites range from Machu Picchu below, to Wiraqocha Temple on top. The *karpay* culminates with a practice that translates as the “coronation of a king.”

The three higher levels are prospective; they are unable to be transferred to others because no *pago* presently exercises them. However, their qualities are recognized and thus serve as a signpost for actualizing prophecy. They are:

5. *Inka Mallku* (male) and *Ñusta* (female) - initiates with the power to cure all ailments without exception through touch;
6. *Sapa Inka* (male) and *Sapa Qoya* (female) - initiates with the power to shine with their own light; and

Nuñez del Prado describes an occurrence called *Pachakuti*, cosmic transmutations between eras, in the Andean system of time (2006). The last *Pachakuti* occurred between 1991 and 1993. During that time the coming epoch was prepared through a “reordering of the cosmos” (p. 4). The new era is called *Taripay Pacha* and marks the wholesomeness of humanity, during which the fifth, sixth, and seventh levels are projected to manifest. Humanity is presently in the beginning stages of the new era, although fifth and sixth level beings were recorded to have existed just 500 years ago (Jenkins, 2013).

The prophecy decrees that the three higher levels come about through *Mosoq Karpay*, or “new initiation.” The *Mosoq Karpay* is transferred by 12 *Inka Mallkus* and *Ñustas* that show up in specific places and times. Wilcox (2004, p. 73–75)
relayed the prophecy according to Nuñez del Prado: once all 12 have gathered at
the Wiraqocha Temple, they reenact the Hatun Karpay and prepare for the
manifestation of the Sapa Inka and Sapa Qoya. Once the sixth level has
manifested, the “golden age” of Taripay Pacha unfolds, and the mystical city
Paytiti is accessible where Ínkarí, the legendary and mythical first Inka, has been
waiting. Manifestation of the seventh level follows.

The 12 Ñustas and Mallkus are responsible for infusing once more the three
worlds into one cohesive whole (Nuñez del Prado, 2006). Hanaq Pacha is the
upper world that consists of sami, or pure and highly refined energy; Kay
Pacha is the world of spirit made manifest, the physical world; and Uku Pacha
is the lower world that consists solely of hoocha, heavy and discordant energy
(Wilcox, 2004, p. 36). The higher levels are achieved through collective
collaboration between humans and nature (Jenkins, 2013). Wilcox explains:

During the Taripay Pacha, an intricate web of interaction will be rewoven
between the human and non-human, the physical and metaphysical, and the
natural and supernatural, an interaction that was once the ordinary state of
being in the dim recesses of history. Thus, the Taripay Pacha is not so much
the creation of a new form as the remembering of an ancient form, when we
lived in sync with the pulse of the cosmos instead of, as we do now, with the
artificial rhythms of manmade time. (Wilcox, 2004, p. 76)

Lesser known is the Q’eros myth of the female sacred city Miskayani. According to Jenkins (2013), “This etheric sanctuary is described as a place of
infinite peace and prosperity ruled by highly evolved female priestesses
possessing profound wisdom and knowledge of the healing arts, as well as
unparalleled beauty and a deep sensuality” (p. 199). Pqos of past had been
known to enter the city, a place of a warm tropical climate in the midst of the
glacial mountain Ausangate.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article reports on and is written as an autoethnography, a personal
narrative. According to Maréchal (2010), “Autoethnography is a form or
method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in
the context of ethnographic field work and writing” (p. 43). Likewise, Ellis
(2004) defined it as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the
autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (p. xix). It
blends autobiography, whereby the writer reflects on past experience, and
ethnography, which utilizes familiar tools such as interviews, journals, and
participant observation (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Personal narratives
denote the researcher as the phenomenon under study (Ellis et al., 2011). They
enable readers to “enter the author’s world” and use what they learn to reflect
on and understand their own lives (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 6).

For example, Anderson (2004) developed a heuristic inquiry on eco-harmony
and her experiences with Q’eros. She followed Moustakas (1990) heuristic
guidelines as a premise for her autoethnography. She stated that her research is valid only within the context of her own self as participant, yet it benefits readers inspired by their own like experiences (p. 3).

In placing myself under the lens of study, I intended to minimize Gordon’s (2008) aforementioned challenges, along with the pitfall of ethnocentrism frequently noted in cultural analysis and comparative studies (Kalweit, 1984). Likewise, Harner (1980) pointed out that traditional academic psychology has an ethnocentric bias (wherein Western materialistic science supersedes all worldviews) and a cognicentric bias (wherein researchers ignore information concerning non-ordinary states of consciousness). Therefore I used personal narrative so that I could articulate Andean notions as insight from experience rather than positing myself as an Andeanist. My additional methods included journaling and self-dialogue. The theoretical framework used in this article was based on interviews, observation and a literature review.

I originally began this research while in Peru, and at the time I had intended to use it to benefit the Q’eros people. But due to life circumstance I am no longer in Peru and suspect that my research has veered from its altruistic intention. Perhaps this article can only benefit myself, and, by extension, fellow Western academics and transpersonal psychologists (Wissler, 2009, p. 41). Yet it offers a way for readers to become informed of holotropic states of consciousness as gleaned through Andean ontology. Jenkins contended that the empirical approach of TP to direct experiential knowledge opens a door to traditional Inkan knowledge (2013). She noted that the integration of Eastern with Western frameworks in TP scholarship remained “human-centric” and pointed out the lack of integration with nature-based wisdom traditions (p. 172).

**A Personal Narrative**

I met don Humberto Sonqo Quispé, doña Bernardina Apaza Florez and their extended family in December 2008 when I was visiting Peru. In October 2009 I relocated to Cuzco and later to Urubamba until February 2011. I worked closely with the Sonqo family through traditional ceremony while pursuing a low residency M.A. in transpersonal psychology from Naropa University. I kept detailed records of my initiatory experiences which often involved holotropic states of consciousness, dreams, and conversations with Q’eros. The following personal narrative describes selected experiences of holotropic states of consciousness. Each entailed a familiar pattern, an archetype termed “birth-death-rebirth” (Gibson, 2008, p. 3).

The archetype refers to the ontological and transitional moment of death (a “baby dies to the maternal universe of the womb”) and birth (“and is reborn in the world”) (Gibson, 2008, p. 4). “The archetype of birth [birth-death-rebirth] not only is grounded ontologically in the birth process, but the intensity of the process manifests in the force and power of archetypes under its panoply. Those archetypes range from light to dark, from liberation to shadow” (Gibson, 2008, p. 4). The archetype denoting death and rebirth has been

“Inkan Doorway of Amaru Muru,” December 2010

The “door” is made of red stone in a large outcropping near Lake Titicaca. The stone was smoothed to a flat surface over 20 feet long, with a T-shaped alcove about a foot in width. It has smooth contours with two columns more than twice its height on either side. There is a small circular indentation in the center of the door.

I was with a group of Westerners and don Humberto’s sons Rolando and Guillermo. After a despacho ceremony, one of our Western group members began drumming. I was sensing kawsay (also “spiritual nectar” (Jenkins, 2013)) accompanied by ordinary perception. I walked to the doorway and placed my mesa on the ground to serve as an umbilicus. I prayed to unite my psyche’s opposing forces. I moved over and into one column and faced the rock wall. I sensed kawsay pulsing, entwined with my body’s circulatory rhythms and neural pathways, clarifying my poq’po. I turned and faced out over the landscape. My attention was no longer focused on the group or drum, but on kawsay. In the next column a spiral of energy opened my heart. In congruence my perception also opened in a luminous display, like a translucent rainbow mandala. I continued to perceive the world around me. I approached the door and knelt before it, touching my mesa.

A separate group of tourists began walking toward the door from the main road. I sensed their intense approach. I began to resist “entering” the door. Regardless, my awareness began spiraling swiftly into it. I relaxed into the surge, moved closer to the stone, and held my mesa. I recalled a memory of a spiral tunnel and light with an immense glow that gained clarity as I neared it, a great spiraling sensation, and then I awakened in another world. It was filled with luminous beings composed of space and translucent hues of light. The world from which I came was no longer perceptible - yet there was memory of having arrived; I was aware of my poq’po. The beings were compassionate and joyous and celebrated my arrival. Their touch felt smooth as silk and I experienced great bliss! My sensory perception again spiraled, this time out of that realm, and I became aware of my physical body still kneeling. The spirals were fast, and I had no control of them save for my choice to relax.

Afterward I began wandering the grounds envisioning hellish realms filled with beings and situations in great anguish. I became anxiety ridden as images of rape and murder flashed through my mind. I sensed an overwhelming rejection and settled on a stone that looked over a distant town. I was dismayed with myself for choosing such a view of society, and yearned to return to a place of natural stillness.
Lightning, January 2010

I was in a hot bath at night when a lightning storm began. I felt a terrifying fear of death and turned within for understanding. My fear echoed the thoughts of my mother and teachers who educated me that water and electricity result in death. Yet I recognized an intense yearning to know lightning. I left the bathhouse and walked to my hut, lay down and focused on my breath.

I relaxed and my perception heightened, sensitive to the lightning each time it shone. I sensed karpay nearing my being and entered a state of serenity. One strike of lightning danced around the outer perimeter of the hut, and I sensed kawsay pulsing – the space within and around the hut inseparable from the space of my own being. Lightning came a second time into the hut, filling the interior space with luminous orbs that appeared like eyes. I entered a state of lucid dreaming to witness a timeless, nonverbal conversation between myself and a radiant, cosmic being composed entirely of white light. Our communication was purely telepathic – my identity was absorbed into her and our inseparable connection. My sense of self as I had known prior quieted into an essential silence. Lightning shone a third time and entered my body, awakening me through its power and precision. I opened my eyes and remained still, witnessing the sensation of lightning traveling through my body and its neural pathways. My perceptual field filled with clarity. That night, I became a new being - I was reborn.

Healing Ceremony, June 2012

I was in New York City with don Humberto and doña Bernardina where I received a mesa healing. From a holotropic perspective, the healing couple, yanantin, unbound me from static sense perceptions of time and space (hoocha). My awareness spiraled into a cosmic sense of being where I encountered a celestial energy, who appeared as a radiant star composed of white light. Humberto and Bernardina used their mesas to restore my sense of identity with the cosmic being and spiraled the sense deep into my body. After leaving the location site of the healing, I desired to lie down but was driven by an indistinguishable force. Against my better judgment, I drove a vehicle and was sideswiped by a taxi cab.

Consistent experiences of karpay, received from don Humberto, doña Bernardina and their family, included expanded sensory perception and tranquility; apparitions of openings through space/time often appeared as a door or threshold, accompanied by a sense of letting go of don Humberto in order to cross. Joy, celebration, and new growth were on the other side, and often a sense of reunion with don Humberto. It was common that immediately afterward, or during time between initiations, I experienced great anguish, anxiety, and depression amidst conflicting life circumstance.

A Holotropic Discourse

This discussion attempts to extract the essential ingredients of Andean ontology and view them within the context of the emerging transpersonal paradigm.
Here I consider both culturally significant contexts as well as content removed from culturally-specific meaning. Grof’s imperative to label the holotropic subgroup of non-ordinary states helps preserve the integrity of the psyche’s potential; Q’eros may not comprehend their direct experiences in the same way.

My approach was to view identity and its expansive process from the standpoint of an initiating paqo. According to Núñez del Prado, Andean levels of consciousness, their distinct qualities, and ontological attainments provide a hierarchy similar to C. G. Jung’s process of individuation (2006). Grof (2010) says that the individuation process leads the individual toward a higher order, organization, and highest unity (p. 19). The culturally distinct significance for Andeans is their explicit progression of a paqo’s spiritual career. Their psychospiritual developmental process is catalyzed by kawsay and achieved through an intimate identification with the paqo’s primary forces.

**Holotropic Identity**

The geographical location of a Q’eros’ birth is a segue to their personal power through their Itu Apu and Paqarina, the presiding male and female nature spirits of their birth location (Jenkins, 2013):

> The Inka masters tell us that we arrive to this world through an energetic door in the sky. Our spirit is attracted to this door, and that door is literally a star in the sky. From our “star door,” our spirit (our sacred or energetic self) looks down upon this earth and chooses two human parents to supply our DNA, as well as two Nature parents who will provide us the requisite living energy to accomplish our destiny. (p. 175)

The Itu Apu, Paqarina, and guiding star are essential composites in a paqos’ identity; they correspond to the individual’s connection with the three worlds. The guiding star is in relation with the Hanaq Pacha, the Itu Apu with the Kay Pacha, and the Paqarina with the Ukhu Pacha. The hierarchical progression occurs through the dynamic interplay of receiving sami from the Hanaq Pacha and releasing hoocha to the Ukhu Pacha; a reciprocal exchange of ayni that harmonizes opposites (yanantin). The primary yanantin (which also signifies marriage) in the life of the paqo is their Itu Apu and Paqarina. Don Humberto Sonqo Quispe says it is not possible to put the healing power of their lineage to use without an established connection with the primary forces (Jenkins, 2013). In turn, their expanding identification with the progression of nature beings cultivates the Inka Muju and propels the increase of a paqo’s energetic capabilities.

Although Q’eros do not comprehend holotropic states in the same way as transpersonal psychologists, the results of individuals undergoing psychospiritual transformation through Q’eros ceremony and experiential therapies like Holotropic Breathwork are remarkably similar.
In this discussion, I have chosen to call identification with the three primary forces a “holotropic identity,” of which holotropic states represent a natural occurrence.

The Andean primary forces may correspond with the three domains of Grof’s cartography - perinatal, postnatal/biographical and transpersonal. When the culturally specific ontology is removed from the collective process outlined in Andean prophecy, it is apparent that the present epoch points at the potential for humanity to recognize the transcending principle: namely, holotropic states and their potential.

A Consciousness Map Infused with Potential

Grof came to understand his present cartography of the psyche by researching holotropic states (1998). Likewise I arrived at my present understanding through my own self-exploration with holotropic states. When I received karpay from Q’eros paqos, I often experienced death and rebirth. Identification with my personality, and at times my physical body, were of a less priority.

The process of transformation could be subtle as I witnessed subconscious ideas about myself and relation in the cosmos become obsolete. At other times it was intense and loud, like a great leap, where I faced my forthcoming death and embraced transmutation. Simultaneously, expanding consciousness phenomena enabled a grander sense of identity, birthing into dimensions of seemingly infinite potential.

Even so, my experiences also included visits with demonic beings and discarnate entities, intense archetypal struggles, identification with human and planetary suffering, visions of intoxication by anesthesia, and deluded sexual representation. These experiences, whether positive or negative, were linked through COEX systems. I recognized these systems as organizing principles of my psyche, and the holotropic states provided the requisite energy to break through and regenerate a new identity. As a Westerner experiencing holotropic states through Andean ceremony, I found don Humberto Soncco Quispe’s verifications of my experiences invaluable. Training with don Humberto and doña Bernardina offered me an opportunity to integrate and put into practice the healing aspect of their lineage.

While my initiatory experiences did not result in a linear progression through the perinatal stages, I noticed a pattern. As I resolved dense thoughts and emotions linked with the perinatal domain, I became more aware of the transpersonal domain. As my transpersonal experiences deepened, my dense thoughts and emotions dissolved. Holotropic states catalyzed movement through domains/realms. My body served as the experiential vehicle, its cognitive process enabled integration (biographical/postnatal domain). The pattern is akin to Gibson’s notion of the “birth-death-rebirth” archetype (2008). Clearly a relation between Andean ontology and Grof’s theoretical framework can now be drawn.
The perinatal domain is analogous to the Andean sense of *Ukhu Pacha* – a realm of *hoocha* habited solely by beings composed of density. The biographical and postnatal domain is consonant with the Andean sense of *Kay Pacha* – the living, tangential world where humans and their potential for progression reside. The transpersonal domain corresponds with the Andean sense of *Hanaq Pacha* – a realm composed solely of *sami*, where encounters with cosmological beings result in great spiritual insight and capabilities for assisting humanity in its progression. Holotropic states of consciousness are similar with the Andean sense of *kawsay*, living energy, and *Kawsay Pacha* – a realm of living energy and purely un-manifest potential. Through ceremony, such as despacho and karpay, kawsay propels the *paqo* in their progressive manifestations.

Q’eros treat *kawsay* as a subtle, inherently interwoven dimension with all form in their daily cultural practices. Perhaps *kawsay* is what C. G. Jung came to refer to as *anima mundi* (Jung, 1938). It would suffice to say that Q’eros are innately aware of their holotropic potential and live that potential on a daily basis sustained by culture and tradition. This observation implies that Westerners who expand their identity to include the perinatal and transpersonal domains would be functioning within the necessary requirements for accessing holotropic states. Furthermore, the Andean progression likened to Jung’s process of individuation (Nuñež del Prado, 2006) can be envisaged as a map within a map: a fractal-like similarity gleaned through a holotropic identity.

**Map Within a Map**

The relationship between Andean ontology and Grof’s theoretical framework is striking in light of Grof’s compelling research concerning the “birth-death-rebirth” archetype evidenced through perinatal voyages of Holotropic Breathwork and psychedelic research participants. In particular, an experience of BPM IV can result with the “termination and resolution of the death-rebirth struggle” (Grof, 1988, p. 30) and a sense of triumph (Grof, 2012b). It also entails an ego-death counterpart (as in Alan Watts’ “skin-encapsulated ego”) experienced systematically throughout the self-exploration process (Grof, 1988, p. 30). The death-rebirth component has been observed widely in indigenous traditions and initiation (Eliade, 1964, 1994; Henderson & Oakes, 1963; Kalweit, 1984; Narby & Huxley, 2001; Walsh, 2007). The *Hatun Karpay* has culminated in participant death-rebirth on an individual level, as noted by Jenkins (1997) and in the course of my personal experience. Yet in consideration of Andean prophecy, the *Hatun Karpay* contains within it the catalyst for collective rebirth.

Accordingly, Grof’s four perinatal matrices may be related to the first four levels of Andean development. The transition from the third into the fourth level through the Great Initiation (*Hatun Karpay*) enables a cycle of planetary and collective rebirth. The three higher levels experientially correspond with Grof’s three categorical interpretations of the transpersonal domain (transcendence of time, transcendence of space, and identification with cosmic
consciousness) (1998). Through repeated initiation, the pago, the postnatal and biographical equivalent, transcends time and space in order to manifest the higher levels for the benefit of family and community, planetary being, and citizenship in the cosmos.

From a transpersonal perspective, where time and space are permeable, Andean psycho-spiritual development parallels Grof’s cartography and points at the catalyzing agent in transformation. Andean prophecy is focused on harmonizing all tensional forces whether individual, collective, or macrocosmic; rebirth occurring in one area has the simultaneous potential of catalyzing evolution in other areas. Thus the dawning of the Taripay Pacha marked humanity’s movement toward higher levels of consciousness based on a pago’s (and/or group of paqos’) progressive identity. The Pachakuti was the process of arriving to that dawning on a planetary level. This marked the collective opportunity for rebirth through Hatun Karpay, the crowning of a queen/king. The fifth, sixth, and seventh levels are intended to come about as individuals recall and sustain their holotropic identities.

Nature-Based Wisdom Traditions

In 2006 His Holiness the Dalai Lama met with a group of Q’eros in Cuzco and publicly discussed the “increasing role of American indigenous traditions in rebalancing the earth” (Garrigues, 2006). The limited yet prevailing Western worldview, backed by historically inaccurate scholarship and scientific understandings, regards indigenous traditions as symbolic in nature. This outdated view is dangerously dissociative and far more pathological than its opposite – experiencing nature and the psyche as living components in an integrative worldview.

Q’eros teach that establishing a relationship with the primary forces, or with the three domains of the psyche, is necessary in order to progress. They “feel great empathy for the pain we experience due to our loss of identity” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 174). Excluding the holotropic dynamic from traditional understandings of the human psyche and its role in society and culture has undoubtedly contributed to our modern-day crises, and the collective dissociation has disastrous consequences on a planetary scale.

Including nature-based wisdom traditions in transpersonal scholarship offers hope for advancing our present understandings of the human psyche. The parallels noted here between indigenous wisdom and transpersonal studies can help the transpersonal paradigm to emerge in full, validating holotropic states and their heuristic and healing potential. The cultural particularities of nature-based wisdom traditions can open new pathways of identity that contribute safe and effective methods for evolving consciousness. Fresh insight on the nature of identity broadens understanding on the human/nature connection and gives meaning and role to evolving members of society. This movement in turn may advance human society toward a harmonious co-existence. A transpersonal-oriented society and culture support wisdom and integration.
CONCLUSION

In this article I have discussed how Andean ontology relates to Grof’s theoretical framework of holotropic states of consciousness and his cartography of the psyche. I have postulated that Grof’s cartography offers an experiential pattern for collective evolution as witnessed through the multi-fold process of Q’eros prophecy and psycho-spiritual development. I have also suggested that the nature-based wisdom tradition informs individuals to assume a holotropic identity inclusive of all three of the psyche’s domains, in order for the natural occurrence of holotropic states to transpire and catalyze the evolutionary process.

Opening the door between traditional Inkan knowledge and transpersonal psychology leads to many important questions. For example, what happens to the intensity of experience that transpires during holotropic states when a substantial amount of humanity is moving closer toward wholeness? When the three worlds represented in Andean prophecy are infused into one, will Grof’s symbiotic cartography further evolve? Is it possible to reverse the effects of planetary crisis through dynamic identification with the wisdom aspect of nature-based wisdom traditions, such as that offered by Andean mysticism?

Further research of both ontologies and their relationship is necessary to deepen the unique perspective they offer when considered together. Including the Andean nature-based wisdom tradition in studies of transpersonal psychology scholarship will further our understanding of holotropic states and Dr. Stanislav Grof’s cartography of the psyche. Moreover, expanding the scholarship of transpersonal psychology to include nature-based wisdom traditions will bring fresh insight on the nature of identity as a dynamic process in human evolution.

NOTES

1 Shambhala is a mythic city or dimension shaped by external, internal, and spiritual levels that correspond with Kalachakra, or cycles of time (Berzin, 2010).

2 Breath, meditative concentration, sound, mandala-like constructs, touch, group process, holotropic states.

3 Their teachers include Q’eros-born don Manuel Q’espi (deceased), don Andreas Espinosa (deceased), don Mariano Apaza and his wife doña Augustina Apaza, don Humberto Sonqo Quispé and his wife doña Bernardina Apaza Florez, Waskar paqo don Benito Qoriwaman (deceased), and internationally renowned mestizo paqos Dr. Juan Nuñez del Prado and Américo Yábar.

4 Kawasy is the fabric of space-time and the essential element that animates the material world, said Peruvian anthropologist Washington Rozas Alvarez (as cited in Wilcox, 2004, p. 122).

5 According to Nuñez del Prado, power is the essential component of the Andean path (Wilcox, 2004). It is the force with which paqos “push” the kawsay pacha, world of energy, to manifest their level of skill.

6 Miskayani refers to a female sacred city, while Paytiti is its male counterpart. Elizabeth Jenkins first heard of the myth from don Manuel in 1996 during the 25th International Conference of the Association of Transpersonal Psychology. Stanislav and Christina Grof had invited don Manuel to attend (Jenkins, 2013).

7 According to Yabar, “If the first ray of lightning hits near you and doesn’t kill you, it breaks your etheric body into pieces and spreads it out. The second lightning strike brings the etheric body back together; the third produces ecstatic contemplation and returns you to an incorruptible unity” (Beeler, 2003, p. 14). He said, “The elements are in charge, producing a karpay, or initiation” placing one into “the dimension of lightning” (p. 14).
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THE PLATEAU EXPERIENCE: AN EXPLORATION OF ITS ORIGINS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND POTENTIAL

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ABSTRACT: In the nineteen months between heart attacks, one near fatal and the other fatal, Abraham Maslow—one of the most influential psychologists of modern times—experienced a significant paradigm shift. During this period he began describing a state of transpersonal consciousness resembling but distinct from his earlier concept of peak experiences, calling it the plateau experience. Despite his enthusiasm, intention to elaborate, and prominence in the field of psychology, after his death this emergent theory largely fizzled into obscurity. Almost fifty years on, this article is an attempt to dust off and look again with fresh eyes at a theory of potentially significant value to the field of transpersonal psychology and beyond in an increasingly troubled world. A review of the relevant literature preceding, bequeathed by, and succeeding Maslow is explored, highlighting the potential this theory holds now and into the future.

On June 8, 1970, at age sixty-two and in the midst of a distinguished career, Abraham Maslow silently collapsed and died from a heart attack. Approximately nineteen months earlier, he had experienced a near-fatal heart attack. This period between heart attacks was marked by a significant shift in his values and awareness—a distinctive experience of transcendence—which he came to call the plateau experience (Krippner, 1972), a name implying a retreat from the peak states or experiences (Heitzman, 2003) for which he had become so well known. In facing death, his attitude towards life changed, prompting a revision and expansion of his earlier thought on self-actualization and self-transcendence, and the relationship between them. Prior to his plateau experience, Maslow had stated, “The greatest attainment of identity, autonomy, or self-hood is itself, a going beyond and above selfhood” (Maslow, 1961, p.105). His plateau experience appears to have provided a deeper embodied understanding of this ultimate existential paradox that he spent the final months of his life seeking to philosophically apprehend (Cleary, 1996). Although his quest remained unfinished at the time of his death (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995), such open-endedness would have likely suited Maslow for, according to his biographer, “he regarded himself as a psychological pioneer, broadly exploring new territories of human experience that later investigators would map in detail” (Hoffman, 2008a, p. 442).

Almost fifty years on his ideas and ideals have not yet been completely assimilated by the psychological sciences, including humanistic and transpersonal, both of which he was instrumental in instigating, leaving behind a rich potential for exploration (Leontiev, 2008). Not only is his enduring hierarchy of human needs inaccurately maintained in psychology texts (Koltko-Rivera,
his work on the plateau experience remains undervalued (Hoffman, 2008b) and obscure (Buckler, 2011) despite holding interest not only as a topic in its own right but also for its potential contributions to understanding and exploring “the farther reaches of human nature” (Maslow, 1971), particularly in regards to transpersonal consciousness, development, and insight (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995).

An academic database title search of “plateau experience” on ProQuest currently generates only three dissertations and two journal articles of relevance. Locating information on the plateau experience is much like entering the rabbit-hole to Wonderland or going up the mountain path both literally (as in The Mountain Path magazine, following a small but significant footnote in one of the few original documents on the plateau experience) and figuratively, as in the high plateau of the spiritual mountain (Osborne, 2001) from which the name is derived. Maslow made few published statements about the plateau experience (International Study Project, 1972; Krippner, 1972; Maslow 1969, 1970, 1971) and left a sprinkling of journal entries (1979). Investigation is scant; a substantial treatment of Maslow’s plateau experience did not emerge until almost three decades later (Clearly, 1996), and it remains the most frequently cited source aside from Maslow’s own statements.

Maslow considered there to be much more to say about the plateau experience and anticipated a more detailed study he had hoped to write (Maslow, 1971). He foresaw studies measuring plateau experience brainwaves and biofeedback (Krippner, 1972), and offered encouragement to those who sought to develop it, even suggesting “classes in miraculousness” (Krippner, 1972, p.114). Moreover, he claimed that “individuals capable of having transcendent experiences lived potentially fuller and healthier lives than the majority of humanity because [they] were able to transcend everyday frustrations and conflicts and were less driven by neurotic tendencies” (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p.6). Clearly, the lacuna between what the plateau experience could contribute and the current state of affairs is apparent.

Maslow’s ideas remain pertinent to our world today and his greatest project for us may yet lie ahead (Leontiev, 2008). His idealism about human nature at its best, which he called metahumanness (Maslow, 1969), offers “optimism in a world where human civilization and humanity itself is at risk” (Hoffman, 2008b, p.457). Maslow was a pragmatic idealist who believed that people with access to transcendent states of being pay more attention to the world and make efforts to altruistically improve it (Maslow, 1970). Yet he cautioned against the “Big-Bang” theory of self-actualization, recognizing one of the tasks of transpersonal psychology is to better communicate an “appreciation of patience … for the miraculous elements in ordinary existence” (Maslow, cited in Krippner, 1972, p.120). That is, beyond the orgasmic peaks of the “mystic gone wild” (Maslow, cited in Krippner, 1972, p.107) exists a less intense and more enduring state of simultaneously miraculous and ordinary consciousness—the plateau (Maslow, 1970)—a state said to be the true final goal of the mystic’s endeavors (Asrani, 1969b).
The great lesson from the true mystics, from the Zen monks, and now also from the Humanistic and Transpersonal psychologists—is that the sacred is in the ordinary, that is to be found in one’s daily life, in one’s neighbors, friends, and family, in one’s back yard. (Maslow, 1970, p.85)

Maslow is not alone in his heuristic observation of the ultimate goal. Ferrer adds,

The goal of the spiritual quest is not to have spiritual experiences, but to stabilize spiritual consciousness, live a spiritual life, and transform the world accordingly ... it is a hallmark of genuine transpersonal development. (2002, p.37)

Despite the personal significance of the plateau experience, Maslow did not engage a comprehensive study of the phenomenon, partly because of his weakened physical condition but also due to his abhorration of the hedonistic 1960s “drug and hippy” American zeitgeist that came to be associated with mysticism (Hoffman, 2008a). Had he continued elaborating his later thoughts, a new general theory of personality may have emerged (Leontiev, 2008). The zeitgeist, meanwhile, has not much matured. Today’s spiritual materialism (Trungpa, 2002), spiritual bypassing (Welwood, 1984), New Age fundamentalism (Babbs, 1991), fast food spirituality (Dasa, 2012), and religious violence on the daily news would likely have Maslow writhing in his grave; the pressing need to understand the positive and negative poles of self-transcendence grows (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Ferrer (2002) points out that Western transpersonal psychology’s emphasis on experiential processes and peak states, towards which Maslow’s earlier ideas play a significant role, have often neglected the proper preparations, maturity, and ethical scaffolding long-standing spiritual traditions usually provide. As a result, in-vogue transient experiences have been able to usurp long-term transformations (Ferrer, 2002), an appetite that arguably continues today. If, as Ram Dass (2014) suggests, becoming enamored in spiritual phenomena often remains “too tasty” to disentangle oneself from in the face of the ordinariness of true spiritual freedom, then perhaps turning towards the plateau experience provides a sound remedy—the promise of staying “turned on” (Maslow, 1970, p. xvi).

Inspired by Maslow’s later vision and intrigued by the lure of an incomplete and largely ignored theory, this discussion seeks to explore the plateau experience through the relevant literature preceding, bequeathed by, and succeeding Maslow. Due to the specific circumstances in which the plateau theory arose, Maslow’s significance to psychology (particularly humanistic and transpersonal), and the lack of literature in this area, the scope of the literature review has been extended to encompass a broad timeframe: Part I explores Maslow’s own statements on the plateau experience; Part II looks at the Asian ideas and philosophies that influenced Maslow’s plateau theory; Part III chronologically presents relevant literature after Maslow’s death that has significantly added to or refined the theory; and Part IV provides an overview of the plateau experience as represented in core reference texts in the field of transpersonal psychology today as well as suggestions for future research.
Despite its potential, the plateau experience continues to lurk under the radar of psychological inquiry. Yet, if Maslow’s conviction about the plateau experience as an enabler for one to live in a world of continual miracles and still “run a grocery store and pay the bills” (Maslow, cited in Krippner, 1972, p.115) is true, then clearly, our work here has only just begun.

I. MASLOW’S STATEMENTS ON THE PLATEAU EXPERIENCE

Defining the plateau experience remains nebulous as Maslow did not provide a succinct characterization and upon his death was still attempting to discern the nuances of his experience. The plateau experience served, for Maslow, more as a term to refer to “a constellation of extraordinary experiences, which shared some similar features with peak experiences, but were also distinctly unique” (Heitzman, 2003, p.2). Nonetheless, the essence of this constellation can be gradually revealed through the morsels available.

Maslow first expounded his ideas about the plateau experience on March 17, 1970, at the University of California, in a discussion on transcending self-actualizers, i.e., “psychologically healthy, fully human highly evolved, fully matured persons” (Maslow, cited in Cleary, 1996, p.226). He called transcending self-actualizers Theory-Z people (Maslow, 1971), characterized by having peak and plateau experiences, and contrasted them to nontranscending self-actualizers, or Theory-Y people. He said,

One of the things that comes with age is that the cognitive elements become greater and greater as the emotional poignancy sort of slackens off and dies out … called the “plateau experience” … the illuminative aspects—the knowledge aspects, the sacralizing of the world—now become very easy and can be turned on and turned off just as I please … The only trouble is that your goddam body can’t keep up with you. (Maslow, cited in Cleary, 1996, pp.229–230)

Indeed, Maslow’s body was struggling to keep up with him, and little time remained between this first public description of the plateau experience and his soon to come fatal heart attack—less than three months. On April 17, 1970, at the Second Interdisciplinary Conference on the Voluntary Control of Internal States, Maslow elaborated his description of the plateau experience. Amidst colleagues from the then dawning field of transpersonal psychology (Krippner, 1972)—the “farthest out group in the country” (Maslow, 4/19/1970)—he shared the following:

Something else happened[,] which has come into my consciousness[,] which is a very precious thing. A sort of precipitation occurred of what might be called the sedimentation or fallout from illuminations, insights, and other life experiences that were very important—tragic experiences included. The result has been a kind of unitive consciousness … the simultaneous perception of the sacred and the ordinary, or the miraculous and the ordinary, or the miraculous and the rather constant or easy-without-effort
sort of thing. I now perceive under the aspect of eternity and become mythic, poetic, and symbolic about ordinary things … one lives in a world of miracles all the time. There is a paradox because it is miraculous and yet it doesn’t produce an autonomic burst. This type of consciousness has certain elements in common with peak experiences—awe, mystery, surprise, and esthetic shock … but are constant rather than climactic … The words I would use to describe this kind of experience would be a “high plateau.” (Maslow, cited in Krippner, 1972, pp. 113–114)

He went on to provide further contrasts with the peak experience, including the plateau experience’s voluntariness as opposed to the involuntariness of peaks, its long lasting serenity as opposed to the quick climactic orgasmic nature of the peak, its essentially cognitive nature as opposed to the emotional intensity of the peak, and its more mundane permanence as opposed to the acute mystical experience (Krippner, 1972, pp.114–115). He intuited the shift from peak to plateau experiences related to the natural ageing process, i.e., “nature’s way of protecting the body” (Krippner, 1972, p.113) from the turmoil peak experiences can produce. Maslow also offered several defining characteristics of the plateau experience with examples derived from personal observation including the “normal” transcendence of time and space, the confrontation and appreciation of one’s mortality, the synthesis of dualities into a single unity, the grasping of the paradoxical nature of one’s simultaneous permanence and impermanence, and a shift in life values “about what’s basic and what’s not basic, what’s important and what’s not important” (Maslow, 4/19/1970, pp.116–119), claims Maslow noted that have been described in many literatures of the world and should not be considered esoteric or mysterious (Krippner, 1972).

An intensive in-depth psychobiographical case study of Maslow’s post-mortem life—the period between heart attacks—by Heitzman (2003), suggests the concept of the plateau experience was Maslow’s philosophical reckoning with his own fear of death, a process he understood to entail transcendence of the ego. She points out that pioneering research into near-death experiences (NDEs) by Ring (2000) suggests Maslow’s state of mind was not unique, as consistent and enduring changes after a NDE often include an enhanced appreciation for life, greater self-acceptance, a concern for others, reverence for life, anti-competitiveness, enhanced spirituality, reduced fear of death, expanded mental awareness, and a quest for knowledge, all of which featured in Maslow’s shifted values after the first heart attack and continued until his ultimate death (Heitzman, 2001). Conclusions Ring makes that further resonate with Maslow’s experience are: (a) the value of a NDE comes from the translation of its wisdom into daily life, which corresponds with Maslow’s sense of the sacred in the ordinary, and (b) significant changes are not always simply a matter of receiving a gift; rather, work is involved to unwrap it (Heitzman, 2003), paralleling Maslow’s belief that “plateau-experiencing can be achieved, learned, [and] earned by hard work” (Maslow, cited in Cleary, 1996, p.224). In the plateau, his life and death became inseparable, along with heightened vulnerability, fragility, preciousness, wonder, and sense of impermanence (Heitzman, 2001).
Maslow’s statements about the plateau experience are poignant, relaxed, and interwoven with empirical disclosures, revealing more of the man behind the theory than previous works. Heitzman (2003) urges consideration of Maslow’s descriptions of the plateau experience take into account his intrapsychic processes at the time, for they provided a catalyst for his emergent theory and influenced the themes he provided. According to her psychobiographical analysis, four topics of great importance at his end of life were: (a) why babies are loveable, (b) aggridance (his term for the superior, dominant, and aggrandizing qualities he observed in primates), (c) evil, and (d) mortality awareness, all of which he believed were connected. She concludes these themes represent internal conflicts he struggled with much of his life, to which he eventually yielded, entering “a more inclusive experience of himself and the world in which he lived … [a] revelation coincid[ing] with the recording of his personal plateau experiences” (Heitzman, 2003, p.iii).

A further description of the plateau experience is found in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1971), which Maslow was about to start revising and expanding when his fatal heart attack struck.

Transcendence can mean to live in the realm of … plateau living … After the insight or the great conversion, or the great mystic experience, or the great illumination, or the great full awakening, one can calm down as the novelty disappears, and as one gets used to good things or even great things, live casually in heaven and be on easy terms with the eternal and infinite … In plateau cognition, one becomes perfect, or can see oneself as perfect, e.g., in that moment I can love all and accept all, forgive all, be reconciled even to the evil that hurts me. I can understand and enjoy the way things are. And I can then even feel some subjective equivalent of what has been attributed to the gods only, i.e., omniscience, omnipotence, ubiquity … Perhaps the best word in order to stress that this is part of human nature, even though at its best, is the word metahumanness. (pp. 265–268)

Maslow was puzzled at his capacity to enjoy the plateau experience (Maslow, 3/28/1970) because it contradicted his own Hierarchy of Needs theory (1943, 1954), which posited survival as the most fundamental human need, and yet it was a threat to his very survival through a NDE that prompted an enhanced sense of awareness (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995). He openly questioned his own assumption that self-transcendent states occur only after satisfying lower needs (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995), criticisms shared by Daniels (1988) and Rowan (1987). He eventually conceded that “the desire to transcend one’s nature was as much an aspect of human nature as lower needs and the denial of this ultimate need might be as harmful as the denial of one’s lower needs” (Maslow, cited in Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p.16). That is, a persistent deprivation of *metaneeds* [i.e., the higher needs in Maslow’s hierarchy] and lack of fulfillment of *metamotivations* [i.e., the natural motivation prompting self-transcendence] could lead to *metapathologies* [i.e., spiritual ailments], such as cynicism, apathy, boredom, loss of zest, despair, hopelessness, a sense of powerlessness, and nihilism (Kolko-Rivera, 2006). Surprisingly, Maslow came to the supposition that self-transcenders would experience *more* pathological
symptoms, i.e., metapathologies, than self-actualizers because if one tries to transcend healthy self-actualization, “then troubles (of the highest type) begin” (Maslow, cited in Kolko-Rivera, 2006, p.305)—troubles he touted and praised. To reconcile the contradiction, he coined the phrases *psychic economy of plenty* (Maslow, 3/28/1970) to “describe how a state of enhanced consciousness could occur despite a threat to survival” (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p.17) and *psychic economy of scarcity*, i.e., when one strives and hopes for something that is perceived lacking (Maslow, 3/28/1970), which encompassed all stages on his Hierarchy of Needs minus the latter added self-transcendence.

Maslow’s private journals, where many of his ideas were first kneaded before formal presentation, provide valuable insight into his understanding of the plateau experience—a topic that garnered greater treatment than his other presentations (Cleary, 1996). They reveal pivotal correspondence with U. A. Asrani, an East Indian colleague from whom he adopted the term *plateau experience* almost three years before he first publicly presented it. Asrani’s influence coincided with the recognition by Maslow and other transpersonalists that integrating classical Asian psychology was desirable because they “appeared to represent an essential part of human nature that needed to be taken into account in any psychological theory attempting to delineate a model for the whole person” (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p.5).

II. ASIAN IDEAS AND PHILOSOPHIES THAT INFLUENCED MASLOW’S PLATEAU THEORY

In an unpublished letter, dated May 5, 1967, to his colleague U. A. Asrani, Associate Professor Emeritus of Physics at Banares Hindu University, Maslow co-opted the term *plateau experience*:

I think your suggested term Plateau Experience is excellent and I shall use it henceforth to describe what I have been calling “serene B-cognition” [Being-cognition]. Apparently, this tends to come with aging or at least that is my experience. The acute and climactic peak experiences seem to lessen in number while the “awakened” cognition or unitive perceiving seems to increase and even come under voluntary control. The happiness then tends to be mild and constant rather than poignant and acute. (Maslow, cited in Heitzman, 2003, p. 34)

Asrani, in turn, credited Arthur Osborne (Asrani, 1969b), founding editor of *The Mountain Path* magazine, a quarterly publication of the Bhaghavan Sri Ramana Maharishi Center in southern India. An extensive search for mention of the plateau experience by Osborne, yielded only two results—one from a posthumously published autobiography (Osborne, 2001) and the other a series of letters to the editor in a now defunct newsletter of the R. M. Bucke Memorial Society for the Study of Religious Experience, one of the first scientific societies investigating religious experience of interest to psychiatry (Bartocci, Rovera, Lalli, & Ascoli, 2006). According to Osborne,
The supreme experience is held in Hindu teaching to be neither spasmodic nor ecstatic but natural and continuous and should therefore not be characterised as a “peak” but as a lofty plateau … This is sahaja or “natural” samadhi in which full spiritual or transcendental consciousness co-exists with full outer awareness but free from ego-sense … the final state is … “stabilization” and is beyond ecstasy … pure, universal consciousness flows through a man, uses his faculties and performs the function which you ascribe to the ego, only much better. [italics added] (1966, pp.13–16)

Here we are provided with a clear definition [see italics] and name for the state—sahaja samadhi—as it is accorded in Hindu teachings. It is unknown whether Maslow ever read Osborne’s descriptions; however, from Osborne’s mention of the “peak” state it is likely he was familiar with Maslow’s work.

Osborne (1966) notes equivalents of the plateau state are found in Sufi teachings [“baqa”], Buddhism [“the Awakened”], and Christ’s teaching of “one who becomes like a little child (i.e., ego-free) can enter the kingdom of heaven” (Osborne, 1966, pp.13–16). This state is characterized by equipoise and mystical “‘sobriety’ in contrast to the ‘inebriation’ of ecstasy” (Osborne, 1966, p.15). He paints a rich mental image of the plateau experience, helping to clarify the original intent of the metaphor:

Imagine people living in a miasma at the foot of a mountain, stunted, undernourished, wasted by disease. They have been told that there is a wonderful plateau on the mountaintop, with fruit and flowers, invigorating air and cool, fresh water. But the ascent is arduous and they would have to leave their hovels and their few miserable possessions behind, or stay where they are. Only a few of the more enterprising, either seeking the mountain summit or simply striving to rise above the heat, miasma and mosquitos of the plain, have climbed up some distance and made themselves dwellings on the hillside. The plain-dwellers would refer to them all alike as ‘people of the hill’ and yet there would be endless differences among them. Some might have developed a farmstead and have fruit, milk and grain to give away to the sick and needy below, while others might be resting in a cave with a little more than their immediate needs. Some might have set forth on a deliberate enterprise to attain the summit, while others were driven merely by the urge to get up higher into cooler air and more beautiful health-giving surroundings, not even knowing that there was a summit to attain. Even among those who started out with a plan of ascent, some might have put it aside till a later, indefinite date, once they had made a home somewhere along the path, while others might regard each pleasure-grove they came to as no more than a resting place from which to plan the next stage of the ascent. (Osborne, 2001, pp.92–93)

In Osborne’s description, the plateau is portrayed as one choice among many of inhabiting and interacting with the metaphorical mountain—choices few accept despite the unpleasantness of the plain. He provided this image in an attempt to differentiate the terms saint, mystic, initiate, yogi, and sage (Osborne, 2001, p.92), using the mountain path as a representation for the
various means in which one can attain Self-realization, i.e., “complete dissolution of the mistaken belief that there ever was any other-than-Self in you” (Osborne, 2001, p.97). Crucially he states, in following the teachings of his guru Sri Bhagavan (commonly referred to as Ramana Maharishi), “there are no stages on this path” (Osborne, 2001, p.95), mirroring Maslow’s experience of the plateau as a constellation of extraordinary experiences (Heitzman, 2003). Osborne also asserts that although one may be blessed with “glimpses of pure Self-realization, beyond all states, which will suffuse and irradiate his whole life … Realization is not normally permanent when first attained” (Osborne, 2001, p.95), a comment that shares likeness with Maslow’s observation that peak experiences are transient and plateau experiences require work to stabilize (Maslow, 1970). Osborne adds that “each aspirant will follow the path that accords with his temperament and that his destiny makes available” (Osborne, 2001, p.96).

Asrani, extending Osborne’s contributions, provides an academic exploration of the plateau experience from an Indian perspective (1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1977) grounded mostly in yogic philosophy and touching also on Buddhism. He came to the plateau experience in much the same way Maslow did, i.e., empirically, following a dangerous and emotionally challenging situation (as a political prisoner) (Asrani, 1977). He and Maslow shared details of their experiences in private correspondence and a face-to-face encounter (Cleary, 1996), which Maslow called “a very good coming together” (Maslow, 4/17/1969); Asrani considered Maslow one of several “to-note western psychologists” (Asrani, 1970, p.50). Asrani elaborated on Osborne’s description of the plateau state in various other traditions; “Sthita Prajna or Jivan Mukta by the Hindus, Baqua or Haquiqat by the Sufis, the Bodhisatva state by the Buddhists, the Vita-Raga state by the Jains, and the Unitive state by the Christians” (Asrani, 1969b, p.98). Like Osborne, he believed it was the true final goal of the mystic’s endeavors, boldly asserting this to be the consensus of mystics the world over with the exception of “the contrary opinion held by certain emotional mystics” (Asrani, 1969b, p.98).

Asrani claimed the plateau experience to be “a state of ideal or optimal mental health far superior to that of the normal mental health which is the goal of psychoanalysts” (Asrani, 1969b, p.99), echoed through Maslow’s metahuman concept. He states,

The sahaja state yields equanimity, a heightened frustration-tolerance and a sense of freedom; one begins to live in the present. It leads to concentration and efficiency in every activity, impartiality and freedom from bias in all judgments; elimination of all mental and emotional tensions; and an elimination of an over-concern with metaphysical questions. That state also enhances aesthetic appreciation and simplifies the pursuit of ethical values because of the unselfish detached attitude which is at the root of that state … like the dynamic equilibrium of a man running stably on two bicycle wheels … taking all the burdens of life on the wheeled vehicle of unselfishness. (Asrani, 1969b, p.99)
According to Cleary (1996), Asrani’s descriptions of the plateau experience bear several characteristics that correspond with Maslow’s report, including the post-mortem life, serenity, wise innocence, synergy, durability, Taoistic receptivity, and an ability to voluntarily enter the experience.

Although seldom cited by Maslow, influencing his articulation of the plateau experience was Taoism, especially the Tao Te Ching (Cleary, 1996)—a classic Chinese text believed to be written by Lao Tzu anywhere between the third and fifth century B.C.E (Chan, 2013). Characterizing Taoism as “an open-minded receptivity in understanding nature and the self” (Maslow, cited in Cleary, 1996, p.168), Maslow adopted and emphasized the concepts of spontaneity, receptive knowing, and flowing with life rather than acting against nature, including one’s psychological nature (Cleary, 1996).

Although the peak and plateau experience both entail a subtle form of what Maslow termed Taoistic receptivity to one’s surroundings, the range of receptivity in the two experiences differs—the plateau experience is receptive to the ordinary and common as well as the extraordinary and phenomenal … and represents an awakening to what had always been there, readily available, but unnoticed or only half-noticed. (Cleary, 1996, pp.202–203)

Cleary (1996) recommends an inquiry into the relationships between the plateau experience and cognate concepts of consciousness in Asian psychologies, stressing the importance of better locating the plateau experience with the detailed maps of consciousness already available. He points out that Walsh and Vaughan (1993) have found descriptions of entire families of peak experiences, along with methods to induce them at will, and that Maslow’s theory would have benefitted had he known more about ancient Asian wisdom and meditation texts (Cleary, 1996). Asrani (1970) agrees with the value of such an inquiry, particularly empirical contributions making use of the plethora of experience and knowledge in India:

A. H. Maslow has contributed valuable literature on an understanding of Jnana Yogic States. From purely observational data, he defines Self-Actualisers (those who actualise their potentialities) and a still higher class of people, whom he calls ‘Transcenders’ who not only have a taste of Peak Experiences, ecstacies, samadhies, etc., but actually live and feel like Jivana Mukta sages … Maslow has done a lot to popularise the concept of the Jivana Mukta State (he calls it ‘Transcendence’, ‘Theory Z’ or ‘Plateau State’) from purely observational and empirical data. We here in India have a widely prevalent practice of Jnana Yoga, and probably much better living Jnana Yogic mystics. We can contribute deeper shades of this research and thus advance the scientific knowledge of the theory and practice of Jnana Yoga much further. (p.61)

To date, any comprehensive research specifically bridging the plateau experience with jivana mukta, Jnana yoga, the sahaja state or Taoism—and other equivalent states from any wisdom traditions from around the world for that matter—is yet to be written.
III. LITERATURE ADDING TO OR REFINING THE PLATEAU THEORY

I now turn chronologically to other literature of significance on the plateau experience; namely, literature from theorists and researchers who have added to that expounded by Maslow (International Study Project, 1972; Krippner, 1972; Maslow, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1979), Asrani (1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1977), and Osborne (1966, 2001). Due to the limited literature of substance available on the topic, as well as the intention to provide a more complete representation of the literature, the window of time has been broadened to include publications since Maslow’s proposal of the plateau experience. Those citing the plateau experience but not adding to the theory are not included.

More than a decade after Maslow’s passing, Keutzer (1982), a clinical psychologist collaborating with physics professor Amit Goswami to bring together quantum mechanics and psychology, wrote an article entitled Physics and Consciousness. In it, she links Maslow’s transcendent plateau experience to “cosmic connection” (Keutzer, 1982, p.75), highlights parallels between this cosmic connection and physics, exposes resistances to a more general acceptance of this unifying state, and provides evidence suggesting, “we are in the midst of a paradigm shift, a transformation, a new metaphor that accepts the existence of this transpersonal consciousness” (Keutzer, 1982, p.77). She encourages another level of explanation, theory, and vision from the transpersonal movement, such as Maslow’s, to help resolve the ontological problem this paradigm shift poses to “an inaccurate model of reality” (Keutzer, 1982, p.77).

Another decade later, in The Higher Stages of Human Development: Perspectives on Adult Growth (1990), a chapter is dedicated to the growth of higher stages of consciousness according to Maharishi’s Vedic psychology of human development, explicating a “universally available sequence of ‘higher stages of consciousness’ that dramatically extends beyond the ordinarily understood endpoint of human development and … the systematic means for their facilitation” (Alexander et al., 1990, p. 286). Without explicitly mentioning the plateau experience, they place Maslow amongst others (Cook-Greuter, 1990; Fowler, 1981; Kohlberg & Ryncarz, 1990; Koplowitz, 1984) in having posited a unified end state beyond abstract representational thought, which they equated with Maharishi’s unity consciousness—a state (and the highest stage) where “all levels of mind and objective reality are experienced in terms of the Self” (Alexander et al., 1990, p.323). None of these theorists, they accord, have provided specific stages in the growth of that unification and hence, they “may have collapsed into one description several distinct levels of growth toward complete unification” (Alexander et al., 1990, p.323)—a claim that is valid in Maslow’s case if the plateau experience does indeed prove to have stages.

Cleary and Shapiro (1995) were the first to truly revive Maslow’s plateau theory, bringing it back to the appropriate attention of the transpersonal community with an article entitled, The Plateau Experience and the Post-Mortem Life: Abraham. H. Maslow’s Unfinished Theory, in The Journal of
Transpersonal Psychology. A brief overview of Maslow’s post-mortem period, how this prompted his plateau experience, the emergent themes at that time, and his shift from discussing peak experiences to plateau, is provided. They urge that the plateau experience holds interest as a topic in itself with possible contributions to better understanding transpersonal consciousness, development, and insight, as well as evolving transpersonal research (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995). Despite their enthusiasm, and Maslow’s certainty that someone would continue his work to completion of “a system of human nature and society” (Maslow, cited in Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p.21), few takers have stepped forth to carry the torch.

Cleary (1996) continued the expedition, giving a comprehensive treatment to the plateau theory, almost three decades after Maslow first publicly mentioned it. He gathered all existing writings by Maslow on the topic, including his personal journal entries, thus providing a complete summation of the experience. He included a thorough comparative analysis with Maslow’s previous peak experience theory and his influence from Asian psychologies, though he evidences Maslow with first using the term plateau experience. Cleary astutely remarks that, “the greatest significance of Maslow’s parting legacy may ultimately be not simply revealing another state of consciousness within the farther reaches of human nature, but of opening a door to openness—pointing the way toward the ceaseless manifestations of the farther reaches of human nature” (Cleary, 1996, p.209). He suggests fruitful further inquiries would be: (a) empirical research into whether or not the plateau experience may be elicited readily, as Maslow suggested, which would shed light on its commonality and/or universality as an experience, (b) more extensive investigation of the relationship between the plateau experience and cognate concepts of consciousness in Asian psychologies (as mentioned), (c) exploration as to whether elements of Maslow’s experience were idiosyncratic, (d) examination of how long plateau experiences actually endure, whether they create lasting changes in consciousness, and if such changes remain undiminished over time, and (e) investigation of the relationship between death awareness and the transcendent, transpersonal, transhuman—a question Maslow himself raised (Cleary, 1996).

In his 1998 work, The Essential Ken Wilber: An introductory reader, Wilber—arguably one of the most prolific, influential, and controversial contributors to transpersonal psychological thought (Combs, 2013; MacDonald, 2007)—locates the plateau experience as one in a series of major phases we tend to traverse as we adapt to higher levels of our own spiritual nature. He lists as follows,

belief (magic, mythic, rational, holistic); faith (which is an intuition, but not yet a direct experience, of the higher realms); peak experience (of the psychic, subtle, casual, or nondual—in no particular order, because peak experiences are usually one-time hits); plateau experience (of the psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual—almost always in that order, because competence at one stage is required for the next); and permanent adaptation (to the psychic, subtle,
casual, and nondual, also in that order, for the same reason). (Wilber, 1998, p.181)

Like Maslow, Wilber understands the plateau experience to be a more permanent state of direct experience than the peaks, leading to eventual stabilization if one engages in prolonged practice. He calls this permanent adaptation or realization *One Taste*—“the purest Emptiness that is one with the entire world of Form” (Wilber, 1998, p.159). Without mention of or credit to Maslow or Asrani, Wilber associates the plateau experience with the *sahaja* state.

[Plateau experiences, with further practice, can become permanent adaptations: constant access to psychic, subtle, casual, and nondual occasions—constant access to nature mysticism, deity mysticism, formless mysticism, and integral mysticism—all as easily available to consciousness as matter, body, and mind now are. And this is likewise evidenced in constant consciousness (*sahaja*) through all three states—waking, dreaming (or *savikalpa samadhi*), and sleeping (or *nirvikalpa samadhi*). (Wilber, 1998, p.181)

Wilber appears to agree with Maslow’s general postulation of a state called the plateau experience, albeit with subtle gradations, i.e., plateau experiences. In considering Wilber’s contribution, it is necessary to note the criticisms his synthesizing theory has drawn, namely that his perennial vision embraces vast amounts of complex information and attempts to place it into universal categories without empirical examination (Ferrer, 2002; Freidman, 2013).

In 2001, Heitzman undertook an in-depth analysis of the plateau experience with a thesis titled *The Plateau Experience and Narcissism: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Maslow’s Last Transpersonal Theory*. She furthered this work in 2003 with the dissertation, *The Plateau Experience in Context: An Intensive In-depth Psychobiographical Case Study of Abraham Maslow’s “Post-Mortem Life.”* The works collectively provide valuable insight into Maslow’s state of mind in the time surrounding and leading up to his conception of the plateau experience, further fleshing out key themes influencing his final years. Perhaps in response to Cleary’s (1996) recommendation for a further study into the idiosyncrasies of Maslow’s plateau experience, Heitzman explored Maslow’s lived experience, seeking connections between his intrapsychic processes, historical and environmental circumstances, and development of his last transpersonal theory. Ultimately, she concludes that Maslow cycled in and out of plateau experiences during the last fifteen months of his life, with ever increasing effect.

I believe Maslow realized that one door to transcendent experience was opened by going into and embracing everyday life, rather than attempting to elevate himself above it … [He] truly yielded to an acceptance of life on its own terms and transcendence of his self-consciousness. (Heitzman, 2003, p.293)
Like a perspicacious psychotherapist, Heitzman carves through Maslow’s psyche, providing a new contextual layer of insight into not just Maslow’s plateau theory but also the man articulating it. Her recommendations (2003) for further investigation include (a) distinguishing Maslow’s actual experiences from possible embellishment of those experiences, (b) a fine-combing of his journals to detect the frequency of themes regarding his concerns as he wrote about the plateau experience, and (c) further psychobiographical case studies of other individuals reporting similar experiences to better discern Maslow’s idiosyncracies. She notes that her own and previous studies have barely scratched the surface of the plateau theory.

In 2003, Hamel, Leclerc, and LeFrançois (2003b) published research on transcendent actualization using an instrument the primary author developed several years earlier, called the Transcendent Actualization Inventory (Hamel, Leclerc, Lefrançois, & Gaulin, 2003a). Although not a direct measure of the plateau experience, transcendent actualization was introduced to psychology by Maslow (1971) to describe the final revised stage on his Hierarchy of Needs—a process where one’s metacognition [unitive consciousness of beings and events] and metamotivations [unifying values of Being in daily life] are discovered and engaged, a process he believed was intrinsic to transcendence (Hamel et al., 2003b) and consequently, the plateau experience. In an exhaustive survey of all that has been published on transcendence in transpersonal psychology, Hamel et al. (2003b) used Maslow’s two indicators of transcendence—metacognition and metamotivation—to analyze and organize the content. This resulted in a four-component classification illuminating how transcendent actualization may be realized. This is significant because although Maslow suspected the transcendent state of the plateau could be taught (Krippner, 1972), he stopped short at offering how this might actually unfold. The four components identified were (a) in-depth perception, i.e., the ability to discern and explore the aspects of one’s life and life in general beyond appearances; (b) holistic perception, i.e., the ability to perceive one’s life and life in general from a detached viewpoint; (c) presence of being, i.e., the ability of one’s personality to live in harmony with the Self; and (d) beyond ego-orientation, i.e., the ability to leave one’s personal preoccupations behind to focus on others, a mission, an altruistic goal (Hamel et al., 2003b). The development of such an instrument opens the door to research with direct implications for the plateau theory; namely, better understanding the various ways individuals “manifest their link with the Self” (Hamel et al., 2003b, p.14) and ultimately, vignettes into how people inhabit the plateau.

In another attempt to revivify Maslow’s later work, Koltko-Rivera (2006) wrote an article highlighting the opportunities for theory, research, and unification within disciplinary psychology if Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs were to be corrected to reflect his later development of thought. He calls for a rewriting of psychology textbooks, which he claims have maintained an inaccurate version of Maslow’s theory for several decades and cites the reasons why this problem persists. He injects fresh impetus into a much-needed amendment, one that would help the greater project of bringing Maslow’s work on self-transcendence, including the plateau experience, to wider
attention. He stresses the gravity of understanding the shadow side of self-transcendence, specifically in light of increasing religious violence and terrorism in the 21st century, and argues the need for confronting some of the less-developed areas of self-transcendent research. He avers that the much-needed correction to Maslow’s theory—one that recognizes spirituality as a basic dimension of the human condition—would assist in a more culturally aware psychology. Citing Swartz’s (1997) groundbreaking research that looked at motivationally distinct types of values from participants in more than twenty countries, and that found one of the top ten values was self-transcendence, Koltko-Rivera suggests Maslow’s later work could provide a bridge between the cross-cultural values literature and a major theory of motivation. Extending this suggestion to a cross-cultural study on the plateau experience would undoubtedly be a valuable contribution, enhancing and deepening the observations made by Osborne (1966) and Asrani (1969b) that the plateau experience is reported in multiple wisdom traditions.

Hartman and Zimberoff (2008), in the article Higher Stages of Human Development, discuss what it takes to become “fully human” as Maslow termed it, making reference, like Koltko-Rivera (2006), to the necessity of considering Maslow’s revised Hierarchy of Needs inclusive of self-transcendence. They emphasize the importance of scaffolding, i.e., practical actions that help support the core experience, in the effort to stabilize higher states of consciousness, including plateau experiences.

Peak experiences such as moments of insight or epiphany are often followed by plateaus. Such insights can fade quickly without the presence of a “scaffolding” for the learning process to assist with making meaning of the unfamiliar experience, such as: (1) having a language and cultural context for the experience; (2) having supportive like-minded community, including contact with more experienced practitioners (also necessary for ego development); (3) encountering or intentionally placing daily reminders of the experience in one’s environment, which in NLP are called anchors; (4) continuing to access similar teachings; or (5) expressing the insight through art, writing or other action (using the sensual alpha brain wave state as a bridge from deep subliminal theta experience to everyday mind beta experience). (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2008, p.38)

These recommendations offer culturally and theologically neutral methods for optimal growth, helping to further bridge the gap in the transitions between self-transcending states. Hartman and Zimberoff also provide a list of nine common ingredients of higher stages of human development, which largely correspond with (and seem to be inspired by) characteristics Maslow identified in self-transcenders: resilience and serenity; increasing transcendence through humility; expanding perspective (visible and invisible worlds); mindfulness, presence, experiencing reality clearly; witness perspective and self-transcendence; high level of purpose or meaning in life; personal freedom; “Taoistic receptivity”; and increasing integration of brain functioning and nervous system-heart synchronicity.
More recently, a psychometric instrument to measure the plateau experience emerged—the PLEX (Plateau Experience measure)—created by Buckler, a professor of applied psychology and research methods. Buckler (2011) accentuates the difference between self-actualization (which he characterizes by peak experiences) versus self-transcendence (characterized by plateau experiences), likening peak experiences to Csikszentmihalyi’s popular flow concept (1996, 1997, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988). Like Maslow, Buckler warns against the over-emphasis and hedonistic pursuit of peak (and therefore flow) states, in which there is much current interest academically and popularly, notably in the burgeoning positive psychology movement, suggesting instead the pursuit of the plateau experience is a more appropriate and sound choice. He developed the PLEX based on a summary of what he identified as the key qualities through the literature he reviewed, the resultant subscales being serenity, mindfulness, and death anxiety. In terms of reliability and validity, the instrument was developed through a sample of 863 respondents with a very high reliability of between .816 to .873 and a three-week test-retest with high reliability of .773 (Buckler, 2011). It remains unused in further empirical research, and Buckler suggests a mixed-methods approach would complement the psychometric. Ultimately, he sees the plateau experience, and even just an awareness of it, as a means of bringing greater serenity and mindfulness to the “frenetic onslaught of daily life” (p.78).

IV. PLATEAU EXPERIENCE IN CORE TEXTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the development of psychometric instruments, decades of literature (albeit limited and sporadic), the potential for future research into the realms of “the farther reaches of human nature” (Maslow, 1971), the cross-cultural invitations, and Maslow’s stature and legacy in psychology, it is remarkable there is not more interest in the plateau experience.

Recent authoritative texts including the Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality (Paloutzian & Park, 2013) and The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality (Miller, 2012)—key reference books for the transpersonal psychological sciences—make no mention of the plateau experience. The SUNY Series in Transpersonal and Humanistic Psychology: Post-conventional Personality (Pfaffenerger, Marko, & Combs, 2011) makes one brief mention of the plateau experience in the context of cosmic consciousness and the development of higher stages of self-actualization. The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology (Freidman & Harte-lius, 2013), considered the most comprehensive and up-to-date source on all matters pertaining to the field it represents, similarly makes only one mention of the plateau experience—a quote by Maslow in a chapter on psychedelics (Roberts & Winkelman, 2013).

Exploration of the plateau experience remains as open as the realms it inhabits. Several worthwhile future studies have already been posited and are yet to be entertained (Asrani, 1970; Buckler, 2011; Cleary, 1996; Hamel et al., 2003b; Heitzman, 2003; Koltko-Rivera, 2006). In addition to these, topics warranting
further inquiry include, but are in no ways limited to (a) personality development and its relevance in the plateau experience, i.e., different styles, approaches, and manifestations of metahumanness; (b) the plateau experience across different cultures and wisdom paths; (c) the relationship between the plateau state and altruism or service to a greater cause; (d) an investigation into metapathologies and their relation to the plateau state; (e) a weighing of the arguments that the plateau experience is a state or stage in a progression of consciousness versus the claim there are no stages; and (f) an exploration of how, if at all, the participatory perspective (Ferrer, 2002)—a relatively new and well received philosophical lens in transpersonal thought (Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013)—adds insight or enhances approaches to understanding the plateau theory.

**CONCLUSION**

Were Maslow alive today, it is difficult to say in which direction he would have taken his “unfinished symphony” (Cleary, 1996, p.209) of the plateau experience and what impact a sustained focus may have had for inquiry, research, and application in the various branches of psychology and beyond. It is also interesting to ponder what he would have made of today’s world, its inhabitants, and our propensity (or lack thereof) for bringing about optimal wellbeing within ourselves and for each other. One of Maslow’s greatest gifts for us is perhaps his unbounded optimism in humanity’s capacity to experience something extraordinary in the ordinariness of everyday life. His emphasis on honoring the natural processes of the human psyche and unfolding of life remain important reminders of how to be more fully human, foibles and all, in an ever-increasing synthetic and complex world.

The plateau experience remains a largely untapped resource of potential wealth—psychically, spiritually, and socially—for humanity today. As outlined, it speaks to a state that has been recognized and mapped by well-respected wisdom traditions and ancient philosophies; the “plateau experience” simply serves as yet another name, a metaphor, for an experience it seems we humans have been having for some time. Maslow’s encounter with the experience is significant to any field concerned with the farther reaches of human nature as it appears to be his best way of articulating a significant evolution in his existing conception and perception of what it is to be human—one that offers an insightful and promising window to the sacred, the mysterious, the miraculous, and the very real.

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OF GODS AND STONES: ALCHEMY, JUNG, AND THE DARK NIGHT OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

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ABSTRACT: John of the Cross' mystical text The Dark Night (DN) presents a candid portrayal of the ego's encounter with the numinous or transpersonal dimensions of the psyche. When viewed through a Jungian alchemical lens, the encounter becomes significantly amplified to reveal novel insights into this psychospiritual ordeal. The article first unpacks and explores the DN through Jung’s Collected Works and Letters, and subsequently offers an in-depth interpretation of the dark night experience through the lens of the alchemical nigredo, including depth psychological and transpersonal perspectives. Finally, the article re-visions the DN in light of the nigredo, albedo, and rubedo stages of Western alchemy, drawing parallels between these and the purgation, illumination, and union stages of the Western Christian mystical tradition. In both instances, a coniunctio or mystical union results, where new self- and god-images arise from the illuminating darkness of night and into conscious integration.

KEYWORDS: John of the Cross, dark night, C.G. Jung, alchemy, nigredo, god image.

John of the Cross’ (1991) 16th century text, The Dark Night (DN), offers a stark portrayal of the soul’s journey to God from purgation to illumination and union. From a Jungian perspective, this journey can be interpreted as the ego’s encounter with the numinous (Otto, 1958) reality of the transpersonal Self. As an archetype that contains both light and dark aspects, the encounter between the Self and the ego can be terrifying and filled with negative affect (Washburn, 1994), which, depending on how it is navigated, can result in a positive disintegration and subsequent renewal of self- and god-images (Welch, 1990).

In this article, two aspects of the DN are considered from both Jungian and transpersonal perspectives: the dark night as (a) an encounter with one’s personal darkness and/or the archetypal shadow of the Self, and (b) as an experience of abandonment following illumination, and preceding union. The DN’s depiction of these aspects are then interpreted through an “alchemical hermeneutic” (Jung, 1963/1970, par. 366). This interpretive lens frames the dark night in a new dark light by entering more deeply into the text through the nigredo, albedo, and rubedo of Western alchemy. The alchemical hermeneutic reveals a parallel process between these stages and the purgation, illumination, and union of the Western Christian mystical tradition where, following Washburn’s (1994) “spiral path” (p. 237), both self- and god-images dissolve in order that a renewed and functional ego-Self axis (Edinger, 1972) might emerge.

THE DARK NIGHT IN JUNG’S COLLECTED WORKS

Jung’s writings on the DN are scattered, but can be pieced together to formulate at least two perspectives. The first is the DN as an example of the
encounter with the dark side of the Self, or archetypal shadow. In a 1948 letter to Canon H.G. England, Jung (1973) writes:

We like to imagine that God is all light, but S. Johannes à Cruce has the truly psychological notion of the darkness and the seeming remoteness of God as an effect of the divine presence. This state of darkness is by far the most trying and most dangerous part of the mystical experiences. (p. 485)

In a 1953 letter to Victor White, Jung continues this line of thinking, comparing the dark night experience to Christ’s abandonment on the cross. He writes, “This is exactly what S. Johannes à Cruce describes as the ‘dark night of the soul.’ It is the reign of darkness, which is also God, but an ordeal for Man” (1975, p. 134).

Each of these letters, written relatively late in Jung’s life, need to be framed in the context of his work on the shadow of the deity, or the “dark side” of the Self (Jung, 1952, 1959/1968). To Jung, darkness and “evil” are not representative of the absence of God per the early Christian doctrine of privatio boni (evil as “privation of the good”); rather they are direct attributes or characteristics of the god-archetype itself (Jung, 1959/1968, par. 74). Jung interprets the DN as a continued amplification of such an encounter with “God’s shadow” (Lammers, 1994), interpreted here as the dark side of the Self.

A further amplification of these letters might also focus on the abandonment experience, which Jung (1975) describes as “the reign of darkness, which is also God, but an ordeal for Man” (p. 134). Jung (1973) describes this aspect of the DN as “the seeming remoteness of God,” and considers it, “the most trying and…dangerous part” of the mystical journey (p. 485). According to Underhill (1911/1990), abandonment is an essential stage of the DN journey; preceding union through a further purification of the soul. While abandonment is not an element of the DN that Jung reflects upon at length, it does have important transpersonal and alchemical implications that will be further outlined below.

A second interpretation that Jung offers to the DN regards its alchemical significance. In “The Psychology of the Transference,” Jung’s (1946) psychological commentary on the alchemical treatise The Rosarium Philosphorum (Smith, 2003), he writes:

… the fact that medieval alchemy had connections with the mysticism of the age, or rather was itself a form of mysticism, allows us to adduce as a parallel to the nigredo the writings of St. John of the Cross concerning the ‘dark night.’ The author conceives the ‘spiritual night’ of the soul as a supremely positive state, in which the invisible – and therefore dark – radiance of God comes to pierce and purify the soul. (par. 479)

Jung interprets the DN “as a parallel” to the nigredo state of Western alchemy, and draws connections between not only the historical significance between each (both Western alchemical practices and the Christian mystical tradition
were very much alive in the 16th century), but also the purifying nature and purpose of both the dark night and nigredo experiences.

Jung’s writings on the DN are unfortunately brief and amplify the dark night encounter as nigredo only in passing. My intention in this article is to continue this alchemical-hermeneutic inquiry where Jung has left it, offering a more thorough treatment of the dark night as a psychological experience. Before proceeding, it is necessary to first understand the DN as described by John of the Cross (1991). I will then expand John’s encounter with the dark night through the inclusion of more contemporary post-Jungian and transpersonal perspectives before offering an alchemical interpretation of the DN text.

**THE SOUL OF THE DARK NIGHT**

_The Dark Night_ was written as a commentary to the poem of the same name in the latter part of the 16th century in Spain by the Carmelite priest and Catholic “Doctor of the Church,” John of the Cross (1991). It is the continuation of a previous work, _The Ascent to Mt. Carmel_, which outlines the structure of John’s psychologically sophisticated mystical theology. In _The Ascent_, John (1991) describes the “active” nights of the senses and spirit, whereby a spiritual practitioner of her own volition (hence “active”) purifies herself from both sensate and spiritual attachment through ascetic practices.

In the DN, John (1991) continues this theme, dealing specifically with the passive nights of both sense and spirit. In the passive night it is God, rather than the practitioner, that “does” the purifying. The purpose, or result, of such purgation is a closer union between the individual and her Beloved. From a Jungian perspective, this union serves as an alchemical coniunctio, or differentiated union of ego and Self (Edinger, 1985). There also occurs in the passive night an integration of “sense and spirit” (John of the Cross, 1991, p. 398) through their mutual purification, which can similarly be understood as a coniunctio in and of itself.

The focus of this article’s alchemical interpretation is on Book Two of the DN text, where John describes in detail the passive night of the spirit. I believe it is to this experience that Jung (1946, 1973) refers when interpreting the dark night as the ego’s contact with archetypal shadow material as well as alchemical nigredo, and subsequent abandonment experience by God. John (1991) describes the passive night of the spirit in rich detail:

> God divests the [mental] faculties, affections, and senses, both spiritual and sensory, interior and exterior. He leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in emptiness, and the affections in supreme affliction, bitterness, and anguish by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously obtained from spiritual blessings. (p. 399)

This passage offers evidence to support Jung’s (1946) parallel between the dark night and the nigredo of Western alchemy. Additionally, John’s detailed
description furthers Jung’s (1963/1970) dictum that, “the experience of the [archetypal] self is always a defeat for the ego” (par. 778). It is the “radical relativizing” (Corbett, 1996, p. 23) of the ego that is experienced as both alchemical nigredo and dark night, and underscores Welch’s (1990) interpretation of the DN as a death of self- and god-images.

The afflictive nature of the experience, however, is only one aspect of the encounter with the darkness. For John, the passive night of the spirit is also, paradoxically, an encounter with the light aspect of the deity. He writes: “This dark night is an inflow of God” that “produces two principal effects in the soul: by both purging and illumining, this contemplation prepares the soul for union with God through love. Hence [it is] the same loving wisdom that [both] purges and illumines” (p. 401). In this sense, the dark night experiences of purification and illumination serve as a parallel to the alchemical nigredo and its following stage, the albedo, or whitening (Metzner, 1986/1998).

John (1991) follows his description of the paradoxical nature of the night with the following question: “Why, if it is a divine light…does the soul call it a dark night?” (p. 401). His answer to this question can be seen, from a psychological perspective, as an articulation of the encounter with the shadow. He writes, “The brighter the light, the more the owl is blinded…. Hence when the divine light of contemplation strikes a soul not yet entirely illumined, it causes spiritual darkness.” When viewed from Edinger’s (1972) perspective, this passage reads as the “alienated ego” (p. 38) (here, “the soul”) coming into contact with the transpersonal numinosum of the Self (“the divine light of contemplation”). To the ego still persona-identified, the Self appears in its “dark” or malefic aspect, threatening to devour the ego and its self-image. While the experience is meant to liberate the ego from its attachment to external sources, if it is over-identified with the persona, the ego experiences the encounter as a death. There is too much consciousness for the ego, still attached or immersed in the unconsciousness of shadow, to handle.

This aspect of the dark night experience is equally crucial to Welch’s (1990) understanding of how god-images “die.” An important element of Jung’s (1952) theory of continuing the incarnation is that it is the dark or shadow aspect of the deity that need to increase in consciousness. It is through the dark night experience that the ego is granted awareness of both its own shadow as well as that of the archetype. Through the “dark light” emanating from contact with the Self, the ego undergoes a successive purgation, which it experiences as a death. Thus, “the hand of God, though light and gentle, [feels] so heavy and contrary” (John of the Cross, 1991, p. 403).

As the light of the night increases, so does the pain, as the shadow aspects of both the ego and the Self reveal themselves more transparently, with the ego bearing an increasing burden of both its own dark shadow and that of the god-image (Edinger, 1984, 1992, 1996). John (1991) writes: “Both the sense and the spirit, as though under an immense and dark load, undergo such agony and pain that the soul would consider death a relief” (p. 403). When considered from an alchemical perspective, this aspect of the DN takes the form of the
nigredo, the “blackening” of consciousness that not only precedes, but follows illumination (albedo), and leads to an eventual union (rubedo). It is to this alchemical hermeneutic that I now turn.

ALCHEMICAL HERMENEUTICS

Practically, Jung (1946, 1953/1968) applied the processes and transformational states of Western alchemy to the analytic hour in order to understand his patients’ unconscious dreams, fantasies, and behaviors. Theoretically, Jung (1942/1954, 1963/1970) utilized alchemical stages as a lens to interpret religious and spiritual texts. The use of an “alchemical hermeneutic” (Jung 1963/1970, par. 366) enabled Jung to interpret or translate religious phenomena and mystical experiences into psychological terminology as evidence in support of his developing practice and theory.

The use of an alchemical hermeneutic serves as a tool for interpreting religious experiences through a psychological lens, thus affording a deeper level of sophistication to the interpretation of the text. In the context of this article, alchemical categories such as nigredo, albedo, and rubedo are used to interpret the purgative, illuminative, and union stages of the DN. Additionally, the alchemical processes of each stage, such as mortificatio, putrefactio, sublimatio, and coniunctio are also utilized to offer a greater variety of psychological subtlety and depth to the DN text.

THE NIGREDO IN WESTERN ALCHEMY

As cited above, Jung (1946) interpreted the nigredo of Western alchemy as parallel to John’s (1991) dark night experience. This section serves to further amplify the dark night experience using the alchemical hermeneutic lens of the nigredo. The purpose of applying this alchemical lens is to offer a parallel amplification between the DN and the nigredo aspect of the alchemical opus, of which Jung (1946) intuited a connection. I believe this helps to see the dark night in a new “dark light” and further tease out the already acute symptoms of this rare psychological and spiritual ordeal.

The nigredo was viewed as the beginning of the alchemical work. Abraham (1998) writes that in the nigredo, “the old outmoded state of being is killed, putrefied and dissolved... in order that it may be renovated and re-born in a new form (p. 135). To the alchemist, “there could be no regeneration without corruption” (p. 135). The nigredo marked a “death” in the prima materia, or “black earth,” that mysterious substance which contained the seeds of the alchemical goal, the lapis or philosopher’s stone (Rulandus, 1893/1964). As the Rosarium explains, “Take of it [the prima materia] but very little, divide the whole, grind it earnestly, until it be possessed with death of the intensity of blackness like dust” (Smith, 2003, p. 44).
Considered the “Key of the Work,” (Smith, 2003, p. 44), it was through the “torture” of this original material that the alchemical opus began its circular procedures. It was from the nigredo state through the albedo, or whitening phase, and onto the rubedo, or reddening, that the original material underwent an innumerable number of transmutations until the final, miraculous birth of the stone (Waite, 1896).

Lead, represented by the planet Saturn, is the element most associated with the nigredo and plays an important role in the alchemical process. Abraham (1998) writes, “Lead, Saturn and melancholia are inextricably linked in alchemy. The nigredo is a time of suffering and lamentation as the dark shadow of melancholia is cast over the alchemist witnessing the events in the alembic” (p. 116). It is the “circular distillation” of the alchemical process that begins “with the black lead, with the darkness, coldness, and malignity of the malefic Saturn” (Jung, 1963/1970, par. 303). Lead was a key element in the alchemical process, specifically in the nigredo stage where it was one of the base elements utilized in the purification process. It is due to its common, yet important, value that lead/Saturn, came to be viewed as “inverted gold” (Evola, 1995, p. 82).

Depth Psychological Interpretation

As with the passive night of the spirit in John’s (1991) DN, the alchemical nigredo with its lead-like quality can also be interpreted psychologically as an encounter with the shadow at both personal and transpersonal levels. Edinger (1985) writes, “In psychological terms blackness refers to the shadow,” which when confronted, “is born the light...[i.e., the] positive consequences of being aware of one’s shadow” (pp. 149-50).

Von Franz (1980) highlights the particularly leaden quality of the nigredo as a “death” of shadow projections, and subsequently superficial or out-worn self- and god-images. She relays the Egyptian legend of Seth, who tricks Osiris into entering a lead coffin, quickly covers it with additional lead and throws it into the sea, killing him (p. 84). Von Franz interprets the story as an analogy to what happens when a person stops projecting unconscious contents and instead begins to look at herself in more honest light (p. 86). She writes that the process of withdrawing projections is “like suffocation, a kind of death,” (p. 87) for the impulse to project outside oneself is killed – an alchemical mortificatio.

As with the dark night encounter, containment in the “lead tomb” or sealed alchemical vessel intensifies the psychological process. In an important interpretive passage, Von Franz (1980) writes that the person undergoing this dark journey becomes “roasted in what one is... cooked in one’s own juice, and is therefore the tomb, the container of the tomb, the suffocated one, and the suffocator, the coffin, and the dead god in it” (p. 87). Importantly, she adds, “The one within is naturally not the ego, but your whole being,” implying that
it is one's entire psyche, including god-images, archetypes, and shadow projections, that are all being “cooked” (p. 87).

It is through the transformation of the individual personality that the god not only dies, but it is reborn. Von Franz (1980) writes, “The analogy is Seth catching Osiris, and now because he has been caught by Seth...[representing] the powerful principle of evil, he is transformed and resurrected” (p. 85). In other words, it is through consciously making contact with the shadow aspects of one's self (the “principle of evil”) and the subsequent withdrawal of projections onto artificial or less than adequate self- and god-images (“suffocation”) that the relationship between the ego and the archetype (the Self) is transformed and a renewed relationship forms.

As with the dark night, it is the paradoxical leaden “blackness” of the nigredo that also contains the essence of what is to become alchemical gold. Jung (1975) defines the nigredo in a 1958 letter as “night, chaos, evil and the essence of corruption, yet the prima materia of gold, sun, and eternal incorruptibility” (p. 440). He concludes this letter, written upon reception of an art piece, with a curious statement, “I understand your picture as a confession of the secret of our time” (p. 440).5 Does this secret contain the “seed” of a more complete, whole, and psychologically integrated relationship between ego and transpersonal Self? Perhaps it is this “dark light” that can serve as a key to unlocking the mysterious birth of a new, transfigured or more fully incarnated Self.

Transpersonal Perspectives

A depth psychological interpretation approaches the nigredo through the lens of the shadow, and the perspective that old images of self and God might die in order that the birthing of a new god-image that incarnates both “light” and “dark” aspects of each might be born. From the perspective of transpersonal psychology, the DN can be further interpreted from an aspect of the nigredo not yet touched upon, the experience of what John (1991) describes as abandonment by God.

Similar to Jung, Metzner (1986/1998) also considers the DN in light of the nigredo and defines it as a “dark night of the ego” (p. 171). He describes the DN, following Underhill (1911/1990), as occurring “after an initial awakening but before the final illumination and union with God” (Metzner, 1986/1998, p. 171). Metzner emphasizes the frustration, pain, and confusion that the ego encounters in the dark night, but, departing from Jung, views the soul or Self as a “being of light” (p. 172) rather than one equally composed of divine darkness.6

Washburn's (1994) in-depth treatment of the DN offers a transpersonal perspective founded upon psychoanalytic insights. His approach focuses particularly on the passive aspect of the DN, a process that he considers as a “journey of regression, regeneration, and higher integration” (p. 239) that is
both alchemical and archetypal. It is through the regressive elements of the DN that the ego experiences “negative oedipal and pre-oedipal object representations” (p. 244), particularly in personal relationships. This has important implications when considering John’s (1991) emphasis on abandonment, which Washburn (1994) also connects to negative affects, particularly of the borderline state, encountered in the DN, which include experiences of unworthiness, engulfment, and dread. These processes and encounters, when undergone with a certain consciousness and faith, however, lead to a marked re-integration, which Washburn (1994) interprets as the goal of the process and a “new beginning” (p. 315).

Alchemy and Abandonment

The path of the DN, when interpreted as a “pattern of departure and higher return” (Washburn, 1994, p. 293) has an important corollary in the alchemical dictum of *solve et coagula* (Abraham, 1998). This motto references the core of the art, which is that all alchemical materials must first be reduced, separated out, or dissolved completely, before any authentic re-integration might occur. This absence, interpreted alchemically, and encountered in the DN as a painful separation or loss of God, leads to the purgative darkness of the nigredo. If followed faithfully, the illumination of insight occurs; however, only to be followed by another loss. This “second nigredo,” the passive night of the spirit, leads to the desired goal, conjoining (*coniunctio*) with the Beloved through the rubedo.

To John (1991), it is the wound of love left by the memory of union post-departure that spurs the soul onward towards God, despite the tremendous pain and suffering of abandonment. As Underhill (1911/1990) writes, “For the mystic who has once known the Beatific Vision there can be no greater grief than the withdrawal of this Object from [the] field of consciousness” (p. 389). This withdrawal and absence of the Beloved can certainly lead to feelings of annihilation and dread of which John (1991) and Washburn (1994) speak. However, it is an experience that is fueled by the initial union of the ego and the Self, and the ego’s longing to re-experience that union. This process, defined by Washburn (1994) as a “spiral path” (p. 237) and “pattern of departure and higher return” (p. 293), marks not only the alchemical *opus* and the overarching movement of the DN, but of Jung’s individuation process as well (Schwartz-Salant, 1998; Stein, 2006).

**Purgation and Nigredo**

Now that the nigredo of Western alchemy has been amplified from both depth psychological and transpersonal perspectives, I offer a more thorough treatment of the purgative aspect of the DN specifically as interpreted through the lens of the nigredo. John (1991) describes the purgative nature of the dark night experience as follows:
The divine…strikes in order to renew the soul and divinize it (by stripping it of the habitual affections and properties of the old self to which the soul is strongly united, attached, and conformed), it so disentangles and dissolves the spiritual substance – absorbing it in a profound darkness – that the soul at the sight of its miseries feels that it is melting away and being undone by a cruel spiritual death. If feels as if it were swallowed by a beast and being digested in the dark belly, and it suffers an anguish comparable to Jonah’s in the belly of the whale. (p. 404)

Read alchemically, this same passage outlines the various stages and processes of the alchemical work indicative of the nigredo state:

The divine…strikes in order to renew the soul and divinize it…it so disentangles [separatio] and dissolves [solutio] the spiritual substance – absorbing it in a profound darkness [prima materia] – that the soul at the sight of its miseries feels that it is melting away [solutio] and being undone by a cruel spiritual death [mortificatio].

As Edinger (1985) makes clear, each of these stages of the alchemical work serves in the process of alchemical nigredo: separatio, the separating out or differentiating aspect of the work experienced as a “death” of the material; solutio, the dissolution of the material in order to cleanse and purify; and mortificatio, the alchemical “killing” of a material to reduce it to its original essence or “chaos” (prima materia). Each of these processes adds increasingly subtle layers of insights to the text. As with Jung’s (1953/1968) intuition of the therapeutic wisdom within the alchemical arts, applying the alchemical lens to the DN reveals similar psychological gold in the text.7

**ALBEDO AND RUBEDO: ILLUMINATION AND UNION**

Just as John’s (1991) journey through the dark night does not end with purgation, neither does the circular work of Western alchemy end with the nigredo. In order to complete an alchemical interpretation of the DN text, the amplification needs to consider the remaining Western alchemical processes of the albedo and rubedo and the stages of illumination and union in the DN. Up to this point, the primary focus has been on the purgative encounter with darkness in the DN and its alchemical counterpart, the nigredo. Both nigredo and the purgative phase of the passive night of the soul are preliminary phases, when the painful processes of mortificatio and putrefactio reduce the prima materia of the psyche to a blinding darkness. Old gods die, whether those created in the ego’s own name or archaic images of the divine no longer in service to the psyche.

However, as the via longissima of psychological life and the circulatio of the elements unfold, stirrings and possibilities of Washburn’s (1994) “new beginning” (p. 315) emerge. The alchemical “whitening” of albedo follows the blackening of nigredo, and serves as a lens for which to interpret the
illuminative experience that follows the purgative and precedes union in the 
*DN*.

**Albedo as Illumination in The Dark Night**

In the *albedo* phase of Western alchemy, “the body” (the alchemical materials) reaches a state of purification or “whitening.” Abraham (1998) writes, “The albedo occurs after the blackened matter, the putrefied body of the metal or matter for the Stone, lying dead at the bottom of the alembic [the alchemical vessel], has been washed to whiteness” (p. 4). She continues, “When the matter reaches the albedo it has become pure and spotless…. The body has been whitened and spiritualized…and the soul has been prepared to receive illumination from the spirit” (Abraham, 1998, p. 5). As the *Rosarium* (Smith, 2003) says, “The spirit enters not into bodies, unless [they are] clean” (p. 51) and depicts the *albedo* as a descent of dew from the heavens falling upon the putrefied or mortified crowned hermaphrodite (representing the “lesser coniunctio”) in the tomb (p. 50).8

Jung (1946) interprets the “dew falling from heaven [as] the divine gift of illumination and wisdom” (par. 484). He writes, “The falling dew signals resuscitation and a new light: the ever deeper descent into the unconscious suddenly becomes illumination from above” (par. 493). Hillman (2010) similarly equates the *albedo* to the “white and gleaming condition of the soul” and views this stage as a “transition of soul between despair [*nigredo*] and passion [*rubedo*], between emptiness and fullness, abandonment and the kingdom” (p. 128). From a transpersonal perspective, the *albedo* represents “the emergence of psychological consciousness, the ability to hear psychologically, and to perceive fantasy creating reality” (p. 158). In other words, the work of “whitening” represents the increase of consciousness necessary for the task of psychological work, particularly when it involves shadow material. This is not shadow that is “washed away,” however, but one that, according to Hillman (2010), is “built into the psyche’s body and becomes transparent enough for anyone to see” (p. 169).9

Jung (1946) likens the *albedo* to the “sunrise; it is the light, the illumination, that follows the darkness” (par. 484). In this sense, I see the *albedo* as a fitting alchemical lens through which to interpret the illuminative stage of the *DN*. John (1991) describes the illuminative effect that occurs through the purgative process:

This divine and dark light causes deep immersion of the mind in the knowledge and feeling of one’s own miseries and evils; it brings all these miseries into relief so the soul sees clearly that of itself it will never possess anything else. (p. 403)

I interpret this passage from two perspectives. The first is that through undergoing the purgative (*nigredo*) experience involving the death of self- and god-images, the ego is left with the only option but to befriend its own
shadow(s). The illuminative gift of the dark night is the insight into shadow ("one's own miseries and evils"). It is unconscious aspects that are brought "into relief" so that the "soul sees clearly." This is the purity and "new light... illumination from above" that Jung (1946, par. 493) writes about when describing the albedo.

A second perspective from which to interpret this passage is that without a conscious connection to the archetypal Self, the ego "sees clearly that of itself it will never possess anything else" (John, 1991, p. 403). In other words, without "illumination from above" (Jung, 1946, par. 493) offered from the archetypal Self or functional god-image, the ego remains lost in its own dark shadow. From this perspective, it is the benevolence of the Self, rather than its malevolent aspect (as sol niger) that blesses the ego with meaning, vitality, wholeness, and the gift of consciousness or insight, as depicted by Edinger's (1972) functional ego-Self axis.10

In addition to the increase in consciousness and formation of positive relationship between the ego and Self, it is important to highlight that in the illuminative phase it is the purification of the specifically mental functions that directly result in an increase in consciousness. The "intellect, will, memory, and imagination" (McGonigle, 1993, p. 530) are the aspects of consciousness that become "whitened" in order to "see." From this perspective, both albedo and illuminative stages "work" upon the mental faculties, in order that, through the purgative aspect of nigredo and dark night, the practitioner, or "soul," begins to understand "how reality becomes psychic; and psyche, real" (Hillman, 2010, p. 154).

There occurs an interior yoking of these mental aspects to create a psychological unification of both sense and spirit, human and divine, which marks the dawning of the alchemical rubedo, or union of the Western Christian mystical tradition. Shifting now from the illuminative nature of the albedo and into the unitive nature of rubedo, a discernable union of consciousness and unconsciousness appears. Here emerges the philosopher's stone, the new god-image that may be born out of the alchemical night.

Rubedo and Union in The Dark Night

The rubedo stage in the Western alchemical process marks the "reddening" of the work, the bringing of blood and life back into the material. Following the separatio of consciousness from unconsciousness that allows clarity to "dawn" in the albedo, the rubedo signals a joyous re-joining or coniunctio of spirit and matter, soul and body. Abraham (1998) writes: "At the rubedo the silvery moonlight and dawn light of the albedo phase develop into the golden illumination of the midday sun, symbolizing the attainment of the philosopher's stone" (p. 174). The material, purified through the purgation of nigredo and the illumination of albedo, is "now ready to be reunited with the spirit.... At this union, the supreme chemical wedding, the body is resurrected into eternal life" (p. 174; Smith, 2003). In this "reuniting of consciousness and the
body” (Stavish, 2006, p. 149), spirit and matter, body and soul re-join in the differentiated union of *rubedo* marking the creation of the philosopher’s stone.

From a psychological perspective, the *rubedo* can be interpreted as the revitalization of psychic life. After piercing *separatio*, drowning in *solutio*, and the death-knell of *mortificatio*, matter and spirit once again re-unite in the *coniunctio* of *rubedo*. Psychologically, Jung (1963/1970) describes the process as follows:

This dawning light [illumination] corresponds to the *albedo*, the moonlight which…heralds the rising sun. The growing redness (*rubedo*) which now follows denotes an increase of warmth and light coming from the sun, consciousness. This corresponds to the increasing participation of consciousness, which now begins to react emotionally to the contents produced by the unconscious. At first the process of integration is a ‘fiery’ conflict, but gradually it leads over to the ‘melting’ or synthesis of the opposites. The alchemists termed this the rubedo, in which the marriage of the red man and the white woman, Sol and Luna, is consummated. (par. 307)

The *rubedo* re-unites the instincts (emotional “reactions”) with the white pure body (alchemical materials), re-animating life and birthing the philosopher’s stone. *Rubedo* marks a conscious integration, or differentiated union of nature and spirit, body and soul, “above and below” (*The Emerald Tablet of Hermes*, 2002).

Hillman (2010) interprets the *rubedo* as a “sensous…felt…libidinal reality, an Aphroditic reality” (p. 261). He cites the woodcut engraving in the *Rosarium* titled, “vivification” (Smith, 2003, p. 95), where the female soul descends from the sky towards the mortified hermaphroditic king/queen. In Hillman’s translation of the text (Pérot, 1973) the commentary reads, “The soul descends here from heaven, beautiful and glad” (Hillman, 2010, p. 261). Hillman remarks, “Without beauty and pleasure of the world, why save it? … Only the object libido can fully reconnect us. Not duty but beauty, and the pleasing in all things” (pp. 261-2). From Hillman’s perspective, the *rubedo* is a sensuous vision, a felt, and lived experience, a “revivification” of embodied and soulful living.

This is certainly true of the highly erotic bridal mysticism of the Western Christian tradition (Feuerstein, 1992/2003). Despite Hillman’s (2010) critique against a “spiritualized and Christianized alchemy” (p. 260), a “red” and “libidinal” sensuality certainly occurred among medieval mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux (1987), Mechtild of Magdeburg (1997), John Ruusbroec (1986), Theresa of Avila (1979), and certainly John of the Cross (1991). 11 John’s (1991) nuptial poetry of the bridegroom longing for his beloved follows the profound tradition begun by the Cistercian monastic tradition with their evocative commentaries on the *Song of Songs* (“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine,” Sg 1:2, *NRSV*) and continued throughout the medieval Christian tradition (McGinn, 1996, 1998).
John’s (1991) *Spiritual Canticle* evidences to the erotic, “libinal,” and “Aphroditic” nature of the mystical union:

In the inner wine cellar  
I drank of my Beloved, and, when I went abroad  
through all this valley  
I no longer knew anything,  
and lost the herd that I was following.

There he gave me his breast;  
there he taught me a sweet and living knowledge;  
and I gave myself to him,  
keeping nothing back;  
there I promised to be his bride. (p. 475)

In his commentary on this stanza, John (1991) writes: “[T]he soul that has reached this state of spiritual espousal knows how to do nothing else than love and walk always with its Bridegroom in the delights of love” (p. 583). The soul in this state of union “is as it were divine and deified” (p. 582). In the DN text, the unitive encounter between the soul and God occurs, as does John’s (1991) entire spiritual journey, in darkness. Egan (1993a) writes, “For John of the Cross, night is for the sake of light and love, since the dark night prepares the soul for union with God in love” (p. 247). Following the nigredo of the dark night, and the illuminative albedo, the soul has finally returned to its beloved and betrothed: the body, cleansed and purified, ready for the divine union of the sacred “chemical wedding” (Godwin, 1991).

### A “Second” Nigredo

Underhill (1911/1990) in her classic study positions the dark night of the spirit, not as an initial purgation, but following illumination, and preceding union. While she – admittedly – departs from the “classic” tripartite structure of Western mysticism, when viewed from an alchemical perspective, her developmental outline makes sense. Alchemically, the stages of the work (nigredo, albedo, rubedo) do not exist in a linear or codified fashion, but occur in a *circulatio*, a repetition that revolves the work cyclically (Abraham, 1998). Underhill’s (1911/1990) interpretation of the mystical journey as a path of purgation, illumination, darkness, and then union, finds a counterpart in the alchemical *opus*.

Interpreted alchemically, the process would involve the repetition of a “second” nigredo, following the albedo (illumination), and preceding the rubedo (union) of which there is ample evidence in the tradition, particularly in the 16th century text, the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Smith, 2003), which Jung (1946) commented upon extensively in his initial studies of alchemy. In this series of twenty woodcut prints, a male and female couple undergoes a series of transformations, each depicting the various procedures of the alchemical *opus*. After each coupling or conjoining (*coniunctio*), there follows a subsequent
“death” (*mortificatio*). This process follows the alchemical dictum *solve et coagula*, dissolve and congeal (Smith, 2003), a process that repeats multiple times throughout the work and represents from a psychological perspective the continual re-organization and increase in consciousness that follows Washburn’s (1994) understanding of a “regression in the service of transcendence” and subsequent “regeneration in spirit” (p. 238) as outlined above. Through the *circulatio*, the alchemical materials continue their transformation from black to white to black to red along a path similar to Washburn’s (1994) “spiral journey” (p. 239), as the work progresses along its transmutation towards the philosopher’s stone.

**FROM GREEN TO RED IN THE DARK NIGHT**

The First Garment: White

Towards the conclusion of the *DN*, John (1991) adds an interesting “twist” to the alchemical matrix this far considered of black, white, and red. Towards the conclusion of the text, John encourages the reader to clothe herself in white, green, and red garments, corresponding to the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which are corollary to the three enemies of the soul: the devil, the world, and the flesh (p. 446). The purpose of the three garments is to “disguise” the soul and make her “more secure against her adversaries” (p. 446). John (1991) describes the first garment, representing faith as “an inner tunic of… pure whiteness” that “blinds the sight of every intellect” and provides “strong protection” against the devil, “the mightiest and most astute enemy” (p. 446). “If you desire, soul,” John (1991) writes, “union and espousal with me, you must come interiorly clothed in faith” (p. 446).

The Second Garment: Green

Over the white cloak, the soul is instructed to place a “second colored garment, a green coat of mail,” signifying “the virtue of hope” (John of the Cross, 1991, p. 447). This “green…disguise” protects the soul from “its second enemy, the world.” John (1991) describes the protective function of faith as a form of detachment from material desire, so that one does not “become absorbed in worldly things” (p. 447). The result of the coat of faith is that “one always gazes on God,” “looks at nothing else,” and is “content save with [God] alone” (p. 447). This interesting addition of the “greenness of living hope” (John of the Cross, 1991, p. 447) deserves specific alchemical attention.

Jung (1953/1968) remarks how the original four colors of the alchemical process (black, white, yellow, and red) were reduced during the 15th or 16th century (John’s cultural heritage) to three colors: black, white, and red. However, Jung (1953/1968) writes: “the *viriditas* [“greening’] sometimes appears [following the *nigredo*] though it was never generally recognized” (p. 229). What is one to make of this mysterious alchemical “greening”? The color green is in the alchemical tradition rich with symbolism and importance.
Abraham (1998) describes the appearance of the color green as a signal that the ‘‘infant Stone is animated and is growing to maturity’’ and is ‘‘associated with the alchemical generation which (sic) occurs after the chemical wedding of the two seeds of metals,’’ male (Sol) with female (Luna) (p. 91). Green is also a signal, however, that the work is not yet complete or ‘‘ripe.’’ Abraham (1998) writes: ‘‘Green in alchemy indicates that the matter in the vessel is in a state of unripeness, immaturity, or youth…[signifying that] the metal has [not yet] been dissolved into its first matter or prima materia’’ (pp. 91-92). Reference to the ‘‘green lion’’ in alchemical manuscripts speaks to this still ‘‘volatile’’ state of the material that needs further reduction and purification (Abraham, 1998, p. 92). ‘‘Greenness’’ represents, then, growth and renewal, and its appearance shows that the process of transformation is not (yet) fixed. Green goes on as the circulation of the elements continues. In the case of the DN, as with alchemy, green changes to red.

The Third Garment: Red

The third garment in the DN, ‘‘a precious red toga,’’ is the ‘‘finishing touch,’’ and represents charity, which ‘‘elevates the soul as to place her near God’’ (John of the Cross, 1991, p. 448). John (1991) cites a passage from the Song of Songs, ‘‘I am black, O daughters of Jerusalem, I am beautiful, and for this reason the king has loved me and brought me into his chamber’’ (p. 448; Sg. 1:5).13 I see it as highly significant that John cites this passage during his extrapolation of the red toga (rubedo). This passage can be seen as a crowning statement of both the DN and the alchemical landscape of which this article has traversed. It is the ‘‘black’’ that has become elevated to red, to union, with the Beloved. What once was ‘‘black,’’ corrupted, dead, putrefied, has been purified (made ‘‘white’’) and now re-unites in red. In the red (rubedo) of the DN the contunctio finds completion in the ‘‘union of the three faculties (intellect, memory, and will)’’ of the soul with God (John of the Cross, 1991, p. 448).

Conclusion: Of Gods and Stones

In the alchemical process, the nigredo marks not an end, but a beginning. As Edinger (1985) reminds us, ‘‘death is the conception of the Philosopher’s Stone’’ (p. 163). In this context I view the creation of the Stone as the equivalent to not only the birth of new god-images, but also as a symbolic representation of Washburn’s (1994) spiral journey: the regression in service of transcendence, and subsequent re-integration in spirit. Jung (1953/1968, 1963/1970) came to see the Stone as a symbol of the Self, and just as the Stone is born from the nigredo, the Self emerges from the encounter with one’s own personal darkness or shadow. The Stone, Self, or god-image that arises from this dark night appears as a coincidentia oppositorum, an archetypal image that represents and unites the opposites in a complex whole. In alchemy, this god-image manifests through the creation of a Stone that is male and female, light and dark, and integrates the worlds of matter and spirit. In the DN, it is an
encounter with a God who is dark yet light, who loves and yet abandons and wounds, through the apparent withdrawal or absence of love.

I view the DN journey as an important amplification of the death of god-images and removal of shadow projections, but also as an honest look at how a new psychological attitude toward numinous or transpersonal aspects is born. To John (1991), the “new” god remains cloaked in nada, “nothingness” (see his Ascent to Mt. Carmel); perhaps it is this divine imago cloaked in paradox that is able to contain the multitude of opposite and contradictory aspects of the human experience. In a 1952 letter to Neumann, Jung (1975) writes:

The humiliation allotted to each of us is implicit in his character. If he seeks his wholeness seriously, he will step unawares into the hole destined for him, and out of this darkness the light will rise…. The light cannot see its own peculiar blackness. But if it dims, and he follows his twilight as he followed his light, then he will get into the night that is his. (p. 35)

This, I believe, is the dark heart of the nigredo, the dark night encounter, and the deep psychological impetus from which any authentic integration arises.

My intention in this article has been to interpret the purgative, illuminative, and unitive periods of the DN through the alchemical lens of nigredo, albedo, and rubedo in order to offer a more penetrating amplification of the dark night encounter from a psychological perspective. When read through an alchemical hermeneutic, the DN offers further evidence of the dark process and leaden despair, as well as radiant hope and joy, that accompanies the death and rebirth of both self- and god-images. I believe the dark night as articulated by John of the Cross when read through the lens of Western alchemy speaks to this experience of psychological and spiritual death while encompassing its totality of depth and magnitude, beauty and terror.

NOTES

1 Thus serving as a coincidentia or complexio oppositorum, a unifying symbol marked by an integration of opposites, which can be interpreted as a symbol of the Self (see Jung, 1963/1970, par. 176: a “figure…at once bright as day and dark as night”).

2 John (1991, p. 402) cites the “ray of darkness” of the Pseudo-Dionysius (1987), an important figure in the history and development of apophatic mystical theology in the Christian tradition, of which John of the Cross can be seen as a culminating figure (see Louth, 2002, 2007; Turner, 1995). Apophatic (Gk, apophatikos, “negative”) spirituality can be defined as the “abandonment of all concepts, thoughts, images, and symbols – even and especially those of God” who can only be known, “through negation, unknowing, and darkness of mind” (Egan, 1993b, p. 700).

3 John (1991) writes, “divine and dark light causes deep immersion of the mind in the knowledge and feeling of one’s own miseries and evils; it brings all these miseries [shadow aspects] into relief” (p. 403) so the soul may see itself, and, I argue, the deity as well, more clearly.

4 In using the term alchemical hermeneutics I refer to the methodology employed by Jung (1963/1970) and Hillman (2010) as a theoretical model for interpretive (hermeneutic) inquiry, and which I have applied elsewhere to the understanding of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras (Odorisio, in press). Romanyszyn (2007) has developed a qualitative depth psychological methodology by the same name, which differs greatly from Jung’s use of the term/method.
This letter was written in response to a painting sent by the Welsh artist Ceri Richards. It contains in the center what could be interpreted as a “seed” imbedded within a heart. The colors are dark and grey, interspersed with light.

Wittine (2003) also considers the “dark night of the ego” from a transpersonal perspective, considering it a death of the *persona* as well as one’s god-images.

Consider also the following example of another strongly alchemical-psychological account of the purgative element in the *DN*: “[I]n order to burn away the rust of the affections the soul must, as it were, be annihilated and undone in the measure that these passions and imperfections are connatural to it” (John, 1991, p. 405). In other words, the same psychological “heat” that formed the initial “rust of the affections” (i.e., complexes, trauma-induced defenses, etc.) must similarly be applied in order for the same complexes and defenses to be unraveled.

Edinger (1984) marks the distinction between the “lesser” and “greater” coniunctio as follows: the lesser coniunctio is incomplete and requires additional separation (*separatio*) and coagulation (*coagulatio*), while the “greater” coniunctio marks the creation of the philosopher’s stone.

Hillman (2010) is quick to point out that the “transition to white” is not without its own unique dangers (p. 169), namely discernment between “The urge to white” and the “escape from black” (p. 170). I see this as an alchemical rendition of the pitfall conveyed by the modern term *spiritual bypassing* (Welwood, 1984; Masters, 2010).

John (1991) further illustrates the illuminative nature of the dark night with his famous example of the “ray of sunlight shining through a window,” which is only seen in proportion to the “dust particles in the air” (p. 411; see also *Ascent*, p. 194). I interpret this as follows: The more the ego-complex is worked upon, the more the light from the archetypal Self can shine through, often hidden and unseen, in order to more fully “incarnate.”

“Because we have been held in a spiritualized and Christianized alchemy, the *rubedo* has remained enigmatic, usually explained in terms of Christ” (Hillman, 2010, p. 260). Perhaps contextualizing the Western alchemical tradition within the larger scope of the Western mystical tradition helps to restore some amount of “red” enfleshment to the *rubedo*.

From a psychological perspective, I interpret the devil as the struggle with personal and archetypal evil; the world as attachment to persona or ego; and the flesh as the encounter with the instincts. Of course, all three can be interpreted as the cultural/collective shadow of the Christianity of John’s time.

It is significant that the author of *Aurora* also cites the identical passage (*Song of Songs* 1:5) to illuminate the alchemical coniunctio (Von Franz, 2000, p. 133). Von Franz (2000) interprets “the black woman” as “an embodiment of the nigredo” (p. 363).

**REFERENCES**


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EMPIRICAL RATIONALISM AND TRANSPERSONAL EMPIRICISM: BRIDGING THE TWO EPISTEMIC CULTURES OF TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: The purposes of this article are to provide a meaningful and critical discourse on the state of the field, identify key obstacles to an intersubjectively shared transpersonal vision, discuss whether transpersonal phenomena disclose the existence of actual transcendent realities, and propose an integrative framework on which the field of transpersonal psychology might proceed that bridges psychological science and transpersonal spirit. Two epistemic cultures of transpersonal psychology can be distinguished—empirical rationalism and transpersonal empiricism—that appear to work in counteraction to one another, yet merge for common purposes in a single academic field in which each plays a part. If the field is to endure in the 21st century as a bona fide academic discipline in its own right, then the two cultures need to blend in a certain fashion for best results. KEYWORDS: transpersonal psychology, science, empiricism, rationalism, transcendence.

The Two Epistemic Cultures of Transpersonal Psychology

Transpersonal psychology explores some of the most diverse kinds of psychological phenomena currently studied. It investigates altered states of consciousness, apparition and encounter experiences, channeling, creativity, dreaming, exceptional human experiences, extrasensory perception, hypnosis, meditation, mind-body healing, near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, past-life memories, peak experiences, psychedelic-induced experiences, psychodynamic processes, psychospiritual integrative practices, sexual experiences, shamanism, spiritual emergencies, spontaneous healing, survival of consciousness, and transformative learning (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013). Transpersonal psychology represents the great variety of ideas and extremes of thought of our time, from most conventional to most unusual.

Under its overall auspices are some of the most conventional establishment-oriented concepts and methodologies devoted to continuing traditional ideas in psychology (e.g., Friedman, 1983; Laughlin, McManus, & d’Aquili, 1990; MacDonald & Friedman, 2002; Scotton, Chinen, & Battista, 1996; Wilber, Engler, & Brown, 1986). It also includes a body of theories, research, and practices devoted to quite anti-establishment ideas and concepts—a range of psychic, scientific, and religious eccentricities and anomalies—and other matters that contradict mainstream scientific psychology and challenge it at every point (e.g., Anderson & Braud, 2011; Garcia-Romeu & Tart, 2013; Grof, 1985; Kelly et al., 2007; Krippner & Friedman, 2010; Lancaster, 2004; Murphy, 1992; Palmer & Hastings, 2013; Stevenson, 1997; Tart, 2009; Van Lommel, 2010). The field
tries to fly ahead with avant-garde ideas of psychotherapy and personal and social transformation, while simultaneously protecting its flank with scientific theory and research.

The metaphor of “Two Cultures” has been applied in other contexts (e.g., the differences between experimental vs. correlational research, Cronbach, 1975; sciences vs. humanities, Snow, 1959/1964) and provides an evocative way of framing the current state of affairs within the field of transpersonal psychology. For purposes of this article, culture is defined as “a set of attitudes, behaviors, and symbols shared by a large group of people and usually communicated from one generation to the next” (Shiraev & Levy, 2013, p. 3). The distinction between the two cultures of transpersonal psychology can perhaps be best framed as a difference of monophasic and polyphasic cultures relative to ways of knowing and what counts as knowledge in a science of transpersonal psychology (cf. Cettina, 1999; Laughlin, 2013).

Broadly conceived, one epistemic culture is constituted by a scientifically conditioned empirical rationalism that emphasizes the sensory, the literal, the cognitive, the rational, the objective, and the social in its epistemology and ontology. The other culture is a psychically oriented transpersonal empiricism that emphasizes the imaginative, the symbolic, the affective, the intuitive, the subjective, and the personal. Transpersonal psychology as a subdiscipline of general psychology bridges these two paradigms.

By combining powers of the physical senses, intellect, and social discourse with powers of the imagination, intuitions, and private subjectivity, transpersonal psychology does more than it knows it does in uniting two ends of the species’ divided psyche and in cultivating what Merton (1974/1989) called “the hidden wholeness in all things” (p. 506). With its books, professional organizations, conferences, undergraduate courses, and graduate degree programs, transpersonal psychology informs and instructs people in two different perspectives on experience and reality, and in this way serves an important educational function for the species’ psychical and spiritual evolution (Rowe & Braud, 2013).

Transpersonal psychology is always to some extent in a state of creative dialectical tension as its counterparts play out “opposite” aspects of each other, yet merge for common purposes in a single academic field. The two frameworks challenge each other in different ways with tendencies that appear to be at odds, but that, as I argue in this paper, are instead different ways of approaching the same goal (Dupré, 1993). Because of those divisions there is a great leeway possible for examining a diverse range of phenomena, concepts, and ideas in theory, research, therapy, and education that otherwise could not mingle in psychology. The two cultures, each with different features and characteristics, reflect different frames of reference, points of view, and habits of mind within transpersonal psychology and mirror the conscious and unconscious intent of individuals who identify themselves as transpersonal psychologists.

The two epistemic cultures do not operate as monolithic structures completely separate from one another, however. The apparent boundaries are functional.
boundaries—distinguished only for convenience’s sake in order to bring
differences between the two paradigms into sharp relief. The two cultures often
appear separately, so that one transpersonal psychologist will be highly
conventional and dislike the field’s nonscientific tendencies, while another
might be highly responsive to emotionally exciting and avant-garde work. The
two cultures can also appear combined within the same individual who will
express great enthusiasm over work that is highly creative and intuitional and
for ideas that challenge the hidden assumptions behind behavioral research at
every point and also have great respect for established theory, research, and
practice in traditional psychology. The substantial “intra-cultural” diversity
within the field of transpersonal psychology is not to be overlooked. Although
the two epistemic cultures for purposes of discussion are conceptually
distinguished in a strong way in this article, they are both part of other
actions whose integrated function is designed to mediate a more adequate
(adequatio) understanding of transpersonal phenomena overall.

Mainstream psychology knows how to deal with so-called supernatural
phenomena and metaphysical beliefs (Coon, 1992). It knows how to deal with
what it considers pseudo-science (Hornstein, 1992) and with conventional ideas
and practices. In a fashion, transpersonal psychology combines all of those
elements and transcends them (Combs, 2013). Transpersonal psychology is too
anti-establishment to be in introductory psychology college textbooks, but far
too empirical and rational to be considered an eccentric pseudo-science. Many
orthodox psychologists recognize that reputable scientists and psychothera-
pists work in the transpersonal field, contributing to collective understanding
of the human condition; especially what Maslow (1969a) called “the farther
reaches of human nature” (p. 1).

However, orthodox psychology does not know whether or not transpersonal
phenomena are fact or fiction, human potential or human illusion, because it
does not have a worldview or a concept of self to begin to explain such realities.
Transpersonal psychology may propose fascinating theories that contain
creatively valid hypothetical constructs, but mainstream psychology remains
uncertain whether such ideas or constructs refer to any kind of scientifically
valid hardbed reality. This situation poses problems for transpersonal
psychologists who view themselves as guardians of the orthodox scientific
worldview within the field and who renounce any kind of radical subjectivity
that might threaten or undermine its tenuous scientific reputation (e.g.,
Daniels, 2001, 2005; Friedman, 2002, 2013; Hartelius, Friedman, & Pappas,
2013; MacDonald, 2013).

Transpersonal psychology is attempting to insert new ideas into the world as it
now is and recognizes that the two epistemic cultures of psychological science
and transpersonal spirit need to be bridged for best results. If the field is to
endure in the 21st century as a bona fide academic discipline in its own right
and not become further marginalized within general psychology, absorbed as
a fringe specialization of religious studies, or continue to be dismissed by
positive psychology as unscientific, then its relation to empirical science must
continue to remain a topic of conversation among transpersonal psychologists. As Wilber (1993) so succinctly noted:

The single greatest issue today facing transpersonal psychology is its relation to empirical science. For, the argument goes, if transpersonal psychology is not an empirical science, then it has no valid epistemology, no valid means of acquiring knowledge. There is no use trying to figure out the range or scope or methods of knowledge of the new and “higher” field of transpersonal psychology until you can demonstrate that you have actual knowledge of any sort to begin with. (p. 184)

What Wilber said 22 years ago is as true now as it was then and is one reason why the two cultures of transpersonal psychology have evolved the way they have. Whether or not transpersonal psychology—or the entire field of behavioral sciences, for that matter (Slife & Williams, 1995)—can legitimately be called a “science” in the same way that physics and biology are sciences continues to be a controversial issue to this day (Friedman, 2013; Ferrer, 2014).

This article is a contribution to that ongoing conversation. It examines ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments of transpersonal psychology’s two epistemic cultures—empirical rationalism and transpersonal empiricism. First, I provide a critical analysis of empirical rationalism’s culture on several grounds: (a) the ideal of empirical accessibility and the problem of perception, (b) the problem of scientifically conditioned reasoning, (c) the scientific method as an epistemological strategy, and (d) neo-Kantian ontological neutrality as an epistemological doctrine. Second, I outline the characteristic features of the culture of transpersonal empiricism in relationship to the culture of empirical rationalism and how they differ. Third, I examine the question of whether or not transpersonal empiricism reveals the existence of actual transcendent realities. Fourth, I propose an ontology of mind that has the potential of moving transpersonal psychology several steps further “beyond ego” and away from a position of neo-Kantian ontological neutrality in order to expand the nature of its own epistemological and ontological commitments so that it can be aware of a more profound version of reality than it may presently perceive.

Part 1

The Epistemic Culture of Empirical Rationalism

The culture of empirical rationalism firmly situates transpersonal theory, research, and practice in a knowledge framework grounded in the empiricism of the physical senses combined with a scientifically conditioned rationalism characteristic of the physical and natural sciences. As Ferrer (2014) pointed out, empirical rationalism carries its own set of ontological commitments (i.e., the real is material, sensory, publically observable, consensually validated) and epistemological assumptions (i.e., only physical existence is valid and can be known; other realities not accessible to the physical senses or consensually
validated cannot be known). It carries its own methods and “solutions” to problems, its own means of achieving ends and satisfying its curiosity (i.e., the scientific method; Myers & Hansen, 2012). These commitments, assumptions, and methods suit certain kinds of people better than others, even while empirical rationalism still carries its disadvantages.

The Ideal of Empirical Accessibility and the Problem of Perception

In empirical rationalism, the reasoning mind (or what used to be called the “intellect”) has been conditioned to operate in concert with the physical senses. Inasmuch as transpersonal psychologists must sensorily perceive what they are looking for, their knowledge is dependent upon physical senses. Sense data are important. Nevertheless, there must be a balance. A psychology that confines itself to only what it can reasonably prove on the basis of experience via the physical senses cannot perceive or even allow itself to acknowledge the existence of a rich nonphysical, nonsensory dimension of inside psychological depth and complexity to either nature or the self. Subjective experience will not be considered as valid unless it is accessible to experience via the senses, despite the fact that a psychological experience that may have no observable physical effect can change a personality to a large degree.

One of the main difficulties with empirical rationalism is that it will not accept as evidence anything that is not perceivable in one manner or another through the physical senses. Sensations do not exhaust psychological life, however. Nor is perception an infallible guide to knowledge. A frog, a star, a tree, a flower, a human brain and body must be considered solid, as it is in the world of physical sensation and perception. In other quite as factual physical terms in the larger framework of facts of modern physics, however, none of these is solid at all, as no objects are. Perception of them makes them appear to be relatively stable and solid, and biologically the species is tuned in to that perception.

Empiricism of the physical senses and their extension through the use of material instruments cannot provide the necessary foundation of an adequate theory of knowledge for transpersonal psychology for eight important reasons:

1. Sensory experience is a function of the perceptual apparatus.
2. Every act of sensation involves a change in the stimulus.
3. Every act of sensation involves a change in the perceiver.
4. The temporal properties of sensation limit perception.
5. Perception is an active process that always involves some contribution from the perceiver.
6. Sensory perception is only one of many possible ways of perceiving basic reality.
7. Consensual validation is culturally relative.
8. Scientific instruments are subject to the same limitations and produce similar distortions as the physical senses they are designed to extend.
Sensory psychology clearly demonstrates that the observer does not have clear, direct, immediate access to an already-out-there-now “real” world via the physical senses and that the information that is accessible to experience is often incomplete, distorted, prejudiced, and misleading (Wolfe et al., 2015).

**Sensory experience is a function of the perceptual apparatus.** First, the nature of the perceptual apparatus operative at any given time determines the information accessible to experience via the senses, not the physical stimulus. Johannes Muller (1843) in his doctrine of specific nerve energies recognized long ago that perception of physical reality is limited to the types of sense receptors that an organism possesses. The physical senses are quite limited in certain terms, acting as *inhibitors* of perception that encode only stimuli that fall within a specific range of frequencies that the organism’s perceptual apparatus is physiologically designed to detect.

Physically, the human observer can handle only so much data at once and is dependent in that respect upon the neurological structure. What falls outside its range is psychologically invisible, limiting what the individual might otherwise perceive with a different perceptual apparatus. Other species have specialized sensory modalities that permit them to focus on fields of energy not detected by human physical senses at all (Jenkins, 2014). Many quite real physical phenomena cannot be perceived by human physical senses. There is always more to physical reality than human physical senses can show.

Because the physical senses have evolved only to sense physical data, they do not perceive nonphysical data. The focus of attention upon sensory data forms boundaries in perception that predispose human observers to imagine that what they cannot or do not perceive must be nonexistent. Modern physical theory has demonstrated, however, that what appears to be “empty” space where nothing is perceived is not really empty, but instead filled with a swirling commotion of atoms and molecules, electromagnetic waves, thermal energies, and so forth (Stapp, 2004). The sensory receptors simply do not allow observers to tune into these other ranges of activity. Any action perceived using physical senses, therefore, may be only a portion of the true dimensionality of that event and represent but a mere fraction of what reality is. Just because physical data are accessible to experience via the senses does not mean that physical reality is the only reality. It is simply the only reality perceived using physical senses.

**Every act of sensation involves a change in the stimulus.** Second, when sensory receptors or their extensions detect available stimulus energies, these are automatically altered and modified through transduction into the sort of data that the nervous system can handle (e.g., electrochemical energy) or that the technological machine was built to encode. Each sense is a *living transducer* that transforms otherwise unknowable stimulus energies (e.g., electromagnetic energy, vibrating air waves, frequencies of mechanical stimulation, gas and liquid atoms and molecules) into other knowable sensory terms (color, sound, temperature, pressure, taste, odors). The physical senses force the observer to translate experience into sensory terms that physical reality does not inherently possess but that the observer perceives it to have (e.g., qualia of solidity,
duration, color, loudness, sweetness, cold). Sense data do have a reality; however, this reality does not solely reside in the stimulus.

It was Herman von Helmholtz (b.1821–d.1894) who recognized the sensory fact that the physical senses actualize aspects of reality that otherwise exist only as potential experiences. Sensation and creation are far more intimately connected than is recognized, and, in a very real manner, physical senses manufacture the reality that they perceive:

> Our perceptual experience is not only shaped by the nervous system, as in the example of rod and cone vision, but—in cases such as color vision, hearing, taste, and smell—the very essence of our experience is created by the nervous system. (Goldstein, 2014, p. 222)

Gestalt psychologists demonstrated that what is accessible to conscious experience via the senses differs from what is physically present and that perceptions are structured in ways that sensory stimulation is not (Koffka, 1935). Binocular disparity of the human physical senses necessitate the perception of three-dimensional space, for instance. Using the physical senses, human beings can perceive physical reality in no other way.

**Every act of sensation involves a change in the perceiver.** Third, not only are available stimulus energies translated by the medium or machine through which they are detected and encoded, but also the perceptual apparatus itself (i.e., the sensory receptors, bodily electromagnetic system, and neurological structure of the perceiver) is altered by the action of transduction. Any sensation instantly changes the perceiver as sensory information automatically intermingles and becomes enmeshed with the perceiver’s entire nervous system. The perceiver (noesis) and thing perceived (noema) are part of the same action, each changing the other. *Any* interpretation of an event alters it.

The changes occur so automatically and seamlessly that the instant transformations are not noticed at a conscious level. The changes bring both the perceiver and the thing perceived into correspondence with one another, and the perceiver takes the physical appearance that is perceived for reality itself (e.g., naïve realism of common sense; Robinson, 1994). It is taken for granted that information accessible to experience via the senses is an actual and direct representation of what is sensed. Nothing, however, about the physical nature of any sensation is neutral or “objective” in these terms.

**The temporal properties of sensation limit perception.** A fourth reason why the empiricism of the physical senses cannot provide the necessary foundation for an adequate theory of knowledge for transpersonal psychology is related to physical perception’s temporal properties. Time, as we experience it, is arguably an illusion caused by the perceiver’s neurological structure, forcing the person to perceive action a little bit “at a time;” thereby presenting a camouflaged, highly limited and limiting version of basic reality (Slife, 1993). We must perceive what we do of physical actions through our physical senses, and physical senses cannot perceive events until they have already occurred.
The reasoning mind is, therefore, forced to rely upon a limited amount of physical evidence available at any given time in the present in order to make deductions about information it wants that is not physically present. It must try to deduce the nature of the whole that it cannot perceive from the portions available to experience that it can perceive in the present via the senses. The validity of these deductions depends on the accuracy and completeness of the sensory information that, while present, is not inevitably all the evidence available. Other facts and comprehensions that are available may not be consciously perceived or accepted for one reason or another. There is always more going on than sense data show and the reasoning mind knows.

**Perception is an active process that always involves some contribution from the perceiver.** Fifth, sensory-based knowledge depends as much on who the observer is as it depends on what stimulus is perceived. Helmholtz (like Kant before him) recognized that the perceiver transforms what the senses provide by making an active contribution to the perception in the form of idea constructions—personal chains of conditioned associations, fantasies, emotions, and memories that embellish sensory information and convert pre-categorical sensation into meaningful perception. Cognitive psychology explains how these idea constructions are created (Matlin, 2013, pp. 272-290). Information accessible to experience via the senses is selectively detected and encoded in accordance with the observer’s beliefs and expectations, meaning is abstracted and what is thought to be unimportant is ignored or overlooked. Inferences are made to fill in gaps of missing information based on past experience, and the idea construction that remains becomes integrated with previously acquired information.

Physical senses are highly discriminating and induce a conscious focusing of attention along certain limited lines, forcing the observer to ignore discontinuities in sensory information and concentrate instead upon similarities and continuities in experience, making a pattern of them using Gestalt principles of organization as perceptual heuristics. Patterns perceived as belonging to the stimulus are actually ones that the observer has transposed upon the sensory data and are constructed in a manner consistent with the senses that the perceiver happens to have operative at the time. It is impossible not to structure stimuli to some extent in sensory terms if it is to be perceived by physical senses (Gregory, 1970).

**Sensory perception is only one of many possible ways of perceiving basic reality.** Sixth, as Kant noted, human beings are born by design and already conditioned to perceive reality in a particular manner. Those perceptions would have no meaning were it not for the species’ own unique kind of consciousness. Each species perceives a flower’s reality through its own set of specialized senses and as such it is valid. The human species cannot perceive the valid reality of that flower in any context but its own -- nor in a form any more basic than other species.

The flower exists, but it takes a shape and form that the human species recognizes only in its own perception. The flower itself and its perceived reality...
may exist in far different terms. This does not mean that sensory perception of
the physical world is false or that sensory perception is not a legitimate and
valid way of obtaining knowledge about human experience and behavior. It
does mean that the sensory picture is only one of many possible ways of
perceiving the guises through which basic reality discloses itself, appearing in
terms that the perceiving organism can understand (Ackerman, 1990).

Physical reality is lively, messy, and complicated, and the observer must close
herself or himself off from some stimuli in order to more fully utilize perceived
stimuli. The observer’s own concepts, expectations, and memories serve as
organizational schemata that screen out certain information or stimuli that
would automatically catch another individual’s attention. The observer views
the physical world from his or her own perceptive focus—a highly limited one
in certain terms—and sees one version of an event or object as it seems to exist
at the moment of perception. The same stimulus can also give rise to different
perceptions depending on the context in which it is observed. For any
perception, other perceptions are always possible.

**Consensual validation is culturally relative.** Seventh, the reasoning mind
wants to see the world as it is seen by the minds of others because it is, by
nature, socially oriented. It therefore looks for agreement among individuals’
idea constructions in terms of their logical consistency by organizing sensory
perceptions and deductions along the lines of certain ideas and by finding data
that serve to give those ideas validity. The reasoning mind is, in a sense,
a cultural phenomenon that can orient itself along the lines of the idea
constructions or general knowledge of any given historical period or culture,
using its reasoning abilities to bring such a world picture into focus, collecting
data that agree and rejecting what does not, using sensory data to justify and
validate its own conclusions (e.g., the world is flat vs. the world is round). By
translating perceptual information into its proper “cultural” context, the
reasoning mind helps create both the cultural environment and the consensual
validation that it seeks (Ross, 2003).

Like statistics, the reasoning mind can be used to come to almost any
conclusion, and, because it must have a reason for everything, it collects
evidence to prove its point. Starting from the same basic premises or body of
evidence, highly rational minds can use logic to arrive at diametrically opposed
conclusion by taking into consideration within any given system of reasoning
only evidence that agrees with the system’s premises (Slife, 2013). Foundational
premises include the system’s epistemological assumptions (e.g., what is
knowable vs. unknowable, true vs. false, reasonable vs. unreasonable) and
ontological assumptions (e.g., what is real vs. unreal, possible vs. impossible,
natural vs. supernatural). These epistemic and ontic assumptions guide the
early bottom-up processing of sensory stimuli and influence top-down
perceptual experience, especially when the stimulus array is incomplete,
ambiguous, complicated, or indistinct (Matlin, 2013).

Physical senses thus force human observers to perceive an available field of
energy in physical terms, imposing a highly specialized and patterned idea
construction upon the stimulus array. This is the result of almost simultaneous "bottom-up" sensory analysis of the stimulus and "top-down" influence of concepts, expectations, and memory upon perceptual processes (Goldstein, 2014). Although individuals may agree along certain lines that they see the same object by virtue of similar neurological mechanisms, social conditioning, collective public knowledge, and other factors (e.g., telepathic communication), they do not perceive the same object, only their own idea constructions and not those of others. Nothing about the psychological nature of any perception is neutral or "objective" in these terms.

Scientific instruments are subject to the same limitations and produce similar distortions as the physical senses they are designed to extend. Eight, epistemological and ontological assumptions are also built into the design of instruments specifically constructed to be able to sense (and measure) energies and aspects of reality that the human physical apparatus is not evolutionarily prepared to perceive directly (Uttal, 2001, pp. 29-87). Scientific instruments constructed to visualize the living human brain (i.e., CT, MRI, PET, fMRI), for example, are all designed to capture certain stimulus energies and translate what they apparently "see" into specific kinds of sensory patterns with which the scientist's physical senses are familiar. The instruments themselves do this transformation—transforming the idea of religious experience, for instance, into radio-frequency waves, radioactivity, electricity, or electromagnetism—translating data the perceiver cannot understand into sensory terms that can be understood.

Translation often involves extensive and elaborate pre-processing of imaging data—"data cleaning" methods involving complex statistical filtering, transformations, standardization, corrections, and manipulation of raw data. This results in the creation of highly standardized and simplified "model" brain images totally unlike the brain image of any individual subject to the detriment of understanding the true variety of religious experience and the nature of underlying brain activations. The instruments do not deal with direct perception of neural or cognitive processes but with the transduction and encoding of those processes into sensory patterns and thus have built-in distortive effects. What results is so simplified, watered down, and distorted out of shape that the original data become hardly discernible, and any glimmer of understanding that might have been reached about the neural and cognitive correlates of spiritual practice is lost sight of (Cunningham, 2011a; Dumit, 2012). Being part and parcel of the physical reality they are designed to detect, the instruments reduce reality to their terms, just like the physical senses they are designed to extend.

Physical instruments are useless in themselves as far as enabling perception of subjective experience or other dimensions of reality outside physical systems of reference because this is not their function. The one instrument that is more important than any other for discovering the existence of spiritual referents and subtle, energetic dimensions of reality is the mind. The mind is the connection between the physical and the nonphysical, the meeting place of inner and outer senses, the tool of discovery of inner and outer realities. To
become aware of the existence of transcendent realities, it is *within* the psyche that one must probe and it is with inner tools that one must work with—the imagination, the intuitions, and the reasoning mind.

### The Problem of Scientifically Conditioned Rationality

In the present age, however, the reasoning mind has become so scientifically conditioned that reason is now identified with the scientific method and rational thinking equated with scientific ideas (Halpern, 2013; Stanovich, 2012). Because of definitions individuals have been taught through social and cultural conditioning, it seems there is only one narrow kind of empiricism and rationality—the empiricism of the physical senses and rationality of the scientific method and the ideas generated under its auspices. Part of the difficulty is that scientific *theories* sometimes come to be regarded as more or less statements of literal *fact* by virtue of the identification of reason with the scientific method (Schick & Vaughn, 2013; Vyse, 2013). Scientific propositions that life began by accident (Big Bang Theory), that daily events are governed by chance (Normal Distribution Curve), and that the purpose of human existence is reproductive success of the species (neo-Darwinism) appear the most reasonable and logical of “facts” of daily life because of their purported scientific status.

**The reasoning animal.** A prototypical example is the scientific blend of rationalism that defines the individual as a “reasoning” animal in strictly Darwinian terms, and which most of human society now takes more or less for granted as literally true, but that has serious shortcomings as a theory of human nature (Nagel, 2012; Rose & Rose, 2000). As a consequence of this creative hypothesis, the species has come to view itself as the flowering blossom at the end of a long progressive series of evolving material entities organized into a great “chain of being” culminating with humans as the *reasoning* animal. Within this Darwinian scheme, the species’ identity is first and foremost connected with the reasoning mind or intellect.

Evolution’s flower is a frail blossom, however, when Darwin’s scheme becomes embedded within the context of other scientific theories that are also taken for granted as literal fact. Add as cosmological context the deadly and prosaic Big Bang Theory of a physical universe fortuitously created 13.7 billion years ago and you have, by implication, a human species that is itself created by chance with no intrinsic purpose other than its own survival and reproduction. Then endow such a species with a compartmentalized ego and an intellect that is in conflict with dangerous emotions and an untrustworthy subjectivity, and we end up with a throw-away species accidentally formed by mindless matter that is divided against itself. Such beliefs are indeed more false than true from the viewpoint of transpersonal empiricism. They are an important cause of the sense of powerlessness that people feel in the face of events that they do not understand and believe they cannot control. The reasoning mind is not to blame for the difficulty that it has been put into, however, and does the best it can under the sway of a material naturalism that it has accepted as a fact about its own experience and reality.
Closed naturalism. The material naturalism of empirical rationalism assigns the world of nature to the realm of exterior events and therefore views it as inherently mechanistic. From the Darwinian point of view, human beings reason, nature does not. It then does indeed seem that the species is somehow apart from nature. When the scientifically conditioned reasoning mind declares that all of the complicated behavior of other species operates by blind instinct or mindless fixed action patterns, then the gulf between the reasoning mind and nature seems to deepen. Non-human animals (i.e., mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, birds, and invertebrates) are denied much subjective dimension and certainly no reasoning capabilities or “objective” knowledge of their own being—as if an individual animal exists without knowing it exists or knowing what it is (Rollin, 1989).

Ethologists and comparative animal psychologists have demonstrated, however, that animals do reason, do understand cause and effect, and display curiosity, even though it may not be applied in the same areas or at the same levels of activity as human reasoning (Bekoff, Allen, & Burghardt, 2002; Griffin, 2001; Wynne & Udell, 2013). It remains difficult for the human species, nevertheless, to consider the possibility that a sense of identity and self-awareness can occur without a human intellect when the species identifies so strongly with a particular (neo-Darwinian) scientific explanation of its own reasoning abilities (Suddendorf, 2013). Perhaps animals do not reflect upon the nature of their own identities in the same way humans do because they have no need to. Perhaps it is intuitively grasped and self-evident to them in a way that human identity is not to the human ego, being a different kind of selfhood and a different way to experience self-awareness.

Identifying its sense of selfhood almost exclusively with cognitive activity, the human species comes to think of the conscious mind with its intellect not as a part of its identity but as containing its identity. Its reasoning mind becomes localized somewhere between two ears behind the forehead with emotions situated somewhere else in the body, often operating in what seems to be quite contradictory fashions. For the species, identifying primarily with one’s mind and brain, other equally vital elements of personhood such as the imagination and the intuitions come to be more or less cast aside. Forced to operate philosophically isolated from other portions of the personality (in the Cartesian sense) and trying to solve all problems through the use of reason alone (in the Kantian sense), science with its scientific method becomes cut off from other sources of information, feedback, and the support of those very abilities that it needs in order to do its proper work.

The Scientific Method as an Epistemological Strategy

Like the physical senses and reasoning mind on which it relies, the scientific method is programmed to induce a conscious focusing upon similarities in experience and minimize variance. Grounding its logic on the rules of language and grouping its concepts into narrow true-and-false categories, the scientific method is designed to force the reasoning mind to be selectively aware of certain category relations that fit into preconceived deductive and inductive
patterns that the researcher has transposed upon the phenomenon (Slife & Williams, 1995). Theories are built and hypotheses are formulated to fit temporally conditioned cause-and-effect schemes, forcing the phenomenon being investigated to display only a certain face to the researcher. This is why non-experimental evidence remains such an extremely important source of information concerning the nature, limits and existence of transpersonal phenomena that can be adequately understood only in its natural setting.

Experiments are designed to place specific constraints upon the phenomenon and thus bring the researcher into correspondence with the results most likely to lead to a theory’s affirmation. Some scientists may come to believe that recreating in a laboratory setting portions of a phenomenon gives him or her mastery and control over it. The more precise and faithful the re-creation, the more complete the mastery. This has quite magical connotations. The evidence produced generally carries the weight of strong validity within its own framework and convincingly works only as long as one stays within the framework and generates the hypotheses that such frameworks automatically entail. Scientists are left with “workable” facts that help them manipulate within their chosen framework but that do not apply when they try to venture outside that context. Insisting that any discovered facts must “fit in” with already known facts and established scientific theories, the reasoning mind builds up a particular kind of picture of reality by collecting all evidence that fits.

Researchers are bound to find the “facts” they are looking for because their perceptions quite naturally lead them to dismiss anomalies and ignore the larger arrangements of data that do not “work” (Barber, 1961; Brewer & Chinn, 1994; Kuhn, 1970; Rubic, 1997). Other quite real, quite valid physical evidence always apparent at any given time is not focused upon and gradually becomes discarded because it does not fit into the so-called rational picture that has been developed. The epistemology of empirical rationalism is thus left with the unenviable situation of being unable to discover truly new facts that would lead to greater knowledge.

**Divide and conquer.** This particular approach for achieving scientific ends (scientia, knowledge through causes) prefers to divide up the whole of a phenomenon into bits and pieces, label and categorize those parts into conceptually distinguishable components that are then analyzed and studied in an exterior manner. This “divide-and-conquer” strategy has been applied broadly to all fields of human knowledge, resulting in the creation of separate academic disciplines, each with its own group of facts, none reducible to the other, with no separate discipline or content area that combines or unifies them all to everyone’s satisfaction. The strategy has been used with great success by physical and natural sciences in producing unprecedented technological advances and in solving real-world problems. The analytical nature of this strategy, however, tends to overlook the cooperative and unifying forces of nature and of the psyche that are every bit as real. As a result, empirical rationalism cannot offer or even suggest a hypothesis that would provide any comprehensive idea of what basic reality really is and where intent, purpose, or desire figure in.
Within such a knowledge framework, the imagination, creativity, intuition, and individual subjectivity are considered sources of error variance and quite unrespectable as an origin of knowledge in a scientific psychology that seeks to standardize “correct” thought so that it conforms to ideals of empirical accessibility, repeatability, and consensual validation. Subjective visions and private interpretations of what William James (1902/1936) called “the higher part of the universe” (p. 507) may be theoretically fascinating and creatively valid, but like poetry, religion, and works of fiction do not necessarily contain any statement about scientifically valid hardbed reality. Objective knowledge claims can never be justified on the basis of individual subjective experience alone but require consensual validation by appropriately trained observers who can exactly replicate the experience within themselves.

“Normal” science. Corresponding philosophies of science—such as a neo-Kantian epistemology or an empiricist ontology of material naturalism—that are fervently believed in and repeated often enough with the best of intentions by revered mentors during early years of scientific training, soon become uncritically accepted and act like strong hypnotic suggestions that trigger behaviors strongly implied by those beliefs. No longer examined, these scientifically conditioned philosophies about the nature of reality and human knowing are taken for granted as literal truth and appear to be statements of fact, proven “true” by the simple process of excluding anything that seems contradictory. In the end, the ontological commitments and epistemological beliefs of empirical rationalism appear as the only logical kind of knowledge framework that can so well and exactly identify the mechanisms by which inert, lifeless elements mindlessly come together to produce life and behavior in plants and animals alike (Searle, 2000). To strive for any other scientific ideal and still claim itself to be a legitimate scientific subdiscipline of orthodox psychology is to engage in unethical, hypocritical, and possibly illegal behavior (Friedman, 2013).

Normal science and the knowledge frameworks that it generates may thus structure the researcher’s experience and behavior to such an extent that alternative theories, hypotheses, and methods seem foolhardy, untrustworthy, or completely impossible as a source of knowledge. Information generated using this particular way of knowing (i.e., the scientific method) is deemed somehow superior, more important, and nearer to the truth, than information produced by other ways of knowing. Conditioned by such beliefs, science becomes “ego bound”—a tyrant that does not want to admit the existence of any dimensions of basic reality other than those with which it is familiar and comfortable and accepts.

Separating itself from the more intuitive and affective portions of its overall identity, science (like the ego) then becomes isolated, paranoid, and held in a kind of spiritual rigidity that limits its understanding of the nature of outer and inner reality. Trained to be unemotional and to stand solely on the side of reason, scientists learn to separate themselves from the subjects they study and distrust their subjectivity even while they must use it and be vividly aware of it in the passionate pursuit of their research (Birke & Smith, 1995). As feminist
scholars and philosophers of science have indicated, however, this theoretic “ideal” does not accurately reflect science’s intrinsic nature in practice (Bauer, 1994; Clarke, 2009; Fishman, 2007; Padovani, Richardson, & Tsou, 2015). The reasoning mind is far more resilient, curious, creative, and eager to learn than is generally supposed. The scientific method is quite capable of allowing freedom to the inner self’s intuitions so that knowledge of basic reality’s own greater “unknown” dimensions can be made known through personal experience.

Ontological Neutrality as an Epistemological Doctrine

The determination to be “scientific” like the physical and natural sciences, however, brings about a particular brand of transpersonal psychology that is a relatively narrow one, resulting in a certain artificial shrinking of what constitutes transpersonal phenomena to those aspects that can be studied in an exterior fashion. What cannot be defined in operational terms for experimental control and manipulation, measured in psychometric terms for statistical analysis, or imaged by brain scanning devices is presumed not to exist in any real way. The reasoning mind is stripped down to bare essentials, perceiving the spectacular complexity of interior and exterior reality in the simplest of terms (Occam’s razor), and concentrating upon only certain material information (i.e., sensory) derived from a particular way of knowing (i.e., the physical senses in concert with the intellect).

Some transpersonal authors embrace the epistemology of empirical rationalism despite its disadvantages in an effort to maintain what they think of as a balanced viewpoint and open mind. Actually, this brand of science is neither balanced nor open. It accepts only certain areas of inquiry as appropriate for study and areas outside its boundaries become off-limits and taboo subjects. Clear and distinct boundaries are erected between “scientific” transpersonal psychology and its so-called pseudoscientific counterparts (e.g., New Age ideas and related esoteric theosophical and anthroposophical speculations; Hangegraaff, 1998). The very word “transcendent” becomes suspect as the divide-and-conquer strategy is applied to the entire realm of transpersonal phenomena so that it is separated into two halves—a knowable nontranscendent portion accessible to experience via the physical senses and an unknowable transcendent portion, declared not to be even a part of the natural order because it possesses non-material, non-sensory, and non-spatial qualia (Daniels, 2001, 2005; Friedman, 2013).

Because nothing is “given” in sensory experience regarding the material existence of spiritual referents or subtle energetic dimensions of reality, the actuality of such intangible entities is categorically declared to be empirically and logically unknowable (neo-Kantianism). Since nothing can be known about such realities using the physical senses (or their instrumental extensions), then nothing can or should be said—a doctrine called “ontological neutrality” (cf. Friedman, 2002; Nelson, 1990). On this neo-Kantian view, a truly scientific transpersonal psychology requires the conceptual splitting of epistemology from ontology and keeping the two groups of facts separate (if the existence of

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ontological facts is even granted at all). As a consequence of this doctrine, the philosophical movement within transpersonal psychology remains to this day very limited (Walach, 2013). Cultural beliefs are sufficient to account for religious experiences and behaviors without the need for ontological foundations beyond their psycho-cultural constructed nature (cf. Katz, 1992).

**Scientific realism.** Paradoxically, those who would automatically apply the doctrine of ontological neutrality to transpersonal phenomena do not apply it in an even-handed way to phenomena that the natural and physical sciences study and whose ontological status is taken for granted. The scientific realism of empirical rationalism confidently (a) presupposes the reality-status of the “given” physical objects that it studies, (b) assumes that such objects are directly and immediately accessible to experience via the physical senses (i.e., we “see” actual physical objects), and (c) takes for granted that consensually validated perceptions provide the most accurate representations of an “already-out-there-now-real” world as it exists independent of the human observer (Ross, 1970). The truth of these ontological assumptions (i.e., the real is material, sensory, publically observable, and consensually validated) is claimed to be demonstrated by their fruits (e.g., technological advances and practical solutions to real-world problems).

Without the ontological commitments of scientific realism, it has been argued that science in general and cognitive neuroscience in particular, as we know it, could not be done (cf. Bunge, 2006; Mahner, 2012; Uttal, 2011). To believe that the empirical-rationalistic scientific method operates without implied assumptions of its own regarding the ontological status of the phenomenon that it studies is, therefore, a false belief (Ferrer, 2014). Ideas and concepts about what is real and unreal, what is possible and impossible, provide the context for all ways of knowing and have important implications for what is deemed knowable and unknowable.

In a universe defined by the ontological commitments of scientific realism, telekinesis (Braude, 1997), reincarnation (Ten Dam, 2003), and post-mortem survival (Braude, 2003) cannot exist because the laws of nature formulated through direct or indirect interpretations of matter as perceived through the physical senses make their occurrence appear to be a logical impossibility. Yet modern physical theory has been increasingly forced to acknowledge a relational view of reality supported by Einstein’s relativity and Heisenberg’s quantum mechanics and an ontological holism characterized by entanglement and emergence that makes such phenomena a theoretical possibility (Radin, 2006; Zajonc, 1993).

The culture of empirical rationalism, despite its outward appearing scientific face, however, still acts as if such concepts have no application to understanding the nature of personality action. It prefers to build models of experience and behavior along the lines of Newtonian mechanics and ignore those very scientific theories that could give ontological status to an inner, multidimensional transpersonal Self that operates beyond the margins of normal waking consciousness in other dimensions of actuality (Kelly et al., 2007).
The nominal existence of a transpersonal self may be given lip service but any investigation into its ontological status beyond the ego’s conception of its own self-expansiveness is steadfastly prohibited. Consequently, transcendence of the ego becomes defined, not in terms of an individual’s self-validating experience of other dimensions of reality, but delimited to a person’s willingness to attribute certain concepts to one’s egoic identity in response to the question, “Who Am I?” (e.g., Self-Expansiveness Scale; Friedman, 1983, 2013). This inevitably results in a certain scaling down of what constitutes transcendence (Maslow, 1969b; 1971, Chap. 21) and turns the notion of transcendence into a construct of the personal ego who now regards itself as the Self (cf. Ferrer, 2014).

The selective application of the doctrine of ontological neutrality to transpersonal phenomena, however, is problematic and highly questionable (Curd & Cover, 1997; Davidson, 1984; Harman, 1994; Rothberg, 2000; Schillbrack, 2014; Tarnas, 1991). Ferrer (2014) recently called attention to the conceptual and methodological difficulties that accompany the epistemological agnosticism and skepticism implied by any transpersonal psychology that brackets the ontological status of spiritual referents. Such an epistemology presupposes the validity of an ontology in which the world and consciousness are judged to be two radically different things with an unbridgeable gap between them whose crossing remains forever doubtful.

To acknowledge that transpersonal experiences exist, without also acknowledging the distinctly real possibility of a corresponding ontological context that grounds them, moreover, is epistemologically suspect and spiritually alienating (Huxley, 1940/1970). When transpersonal psychology declares (a) that it is neutral in regards to the validity and legitimacy of spiritual experiences as states of knowledge, (b) that conventional and transpersonal research methods can never reveal the distinctly real existence of nonphysical entities and other dimensions of actuality, or (c) that certain kinds of knowledge and value-fulfillment are outside its framework of reference, it implies that transpersonal experiences, their epistemic and affective content, and the kinds of value-fulfillment that they generate are without basis, whether it intends to or not, and that we must forever remain ignorant of our spiritual heritage.

I do not want to give the impression that rational empiricism is inappropriate for solving many central problems in the field of transpersonal psychology or that it is not a worthwhile means for achieving meaningful ends important to transpersonal psychologists. Indeed, transpersonal psychology’s scientific reputation in many ways has depended on its ability to implement and integrate rational empiricism’s disciplined and consistent methodology into its research agenda (Anderson & Braud, 2011). No transpersonal scholar embraces empirical rationalism completely to the exclusion of other ways of transpersonal knowing (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013). Most recognize that the world of the psyche exists alongside the world of matter and both worlds intersect such that certain methods of perception work better in one area and others work better in the other.

When this distinction is ignored or denied, however, because only a small aspect of basic reality is granted as valid and “real,” or because no significant
subjective experience is allowed to intrude into empirical rationalism’s calculations, then devastating results can occur as has arguably happened in the field of mainstream psychology today. The physical senses and the reasoning mind turn their sights completely away from any recognition of their deeper source and as a consequence come to dismiss other portions of the personality—such as imagination, dreams, and feelings—as mere uninformed by-products accidentally formed by mindless matter of the physical brain. The argument here is that enlarging its definition of empiricism and accepting new methods of perception into its repertoire will enable empirical rationalism to greatly expand its present form and transcend the limitations that it sometimes feels forced to impose on the field of transpersonal psychology because of its particular epistemological and ontological commitments (Wilber, 1990).

Part 2
The Epistemic Culture of Transpersonal Empiricism

Transpersonal empiricism transcends the limitations that empirical rationalism puts upon transpersonal psychology by expanding the abilities of the reasoning mind and what counts as knowledge. It considers the reasoning mind as a vital, inherent portion of individual identity that is part of a greater field of interrelatedness that includes the emotions, creativity, imagination, and intuitions. The culture of transpersonal empiricism enlarges the scope of abilities of the reasoning mind to include these often shunted-aside psychodynamically active aspects of the human psyche so that their richness, depth, and vitality may be added to characteristics of human cognition and to the defining features of transpersonal psychology (Braud, 2006).

The reasoning mind’s deeper rationality. The reasoning mind can be far more flexible and creative than it is presently allowed to be, operating as it does in research contexts that force it to become something less than it is. The questioning power of the reasoning mind—its critical thinking and analytical aspect—is just one of its functions, but not its primary purpose. The reasoning mind is basically able to handle many kinds of information and several world views at once, operating with separate assumptions that apply to different realities, realizing that each framework are methods of perceiving and approaching a basic reality that is simultaneously immanent and transcendent, physical and nonphysical. When the reasoning mind is offered only one acceptable worldview and only one main approach to transpersonal phenomena, however, then its orderly nature causes it to throw out all information that does not fit, resulting in a jigsaw puzzle picture that contains only half or maybe one third of the pieces. Life’s meaning and purpose become inscrutable under such conditions and answers to the question of life’s tragedies become unsatisfactory, incomplete, and misleading.

When the reasoning mind is enriched by having in its possession several world views and methods of perception that apply to different realities, then it can do an excellent job of sorting information, merging it into meaningful
patterns, and better answering the questions put to it (Sturrock, 2009). It is not that transpersonal empiricism overlooks physical data, but that it regards them differently. It uses sensory, cognitive, rational, social processes and imaginative, emotional, intuitive, personal processes in a more unified fashion (Ferrer, 2003). Using the same reasoning process as empirical rationalism, a more expansive picture of basic reality and of human knowing is built up that in one way or another brings about a different, more creative field of transpersonal psychology guided by different ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments.

**Ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments.** Transpersonal empiricism presupposes that the environment and the individual are uniquely suited to work together, for example, and that every human being is a united creature fulfilling purposes in nature even as animals do—whether or not those purposes are rationally understood (Fox, 1990). It believes that the means for development are within each individual and that the life of any individual will develop and mature and fulfill itself naturally (Assagioli, 1991; Sutich, 1972). Transpersonal empiricism is open to the possibility that each person might live beyond his or her own biological death and have a fulfilling future even though death may be tomorrow (Braude, 2003; Fontana, 2005; Gauld, 1982; Myers, 1903; Spong, 1987; Stevenson, 1977; Van Lommel, 2010). Concepts such as “soul” and “spirit” are routinely used to describe human identity's entire complexity and the multidimensional nature of life, mind, and consciousness (e.g., Assagioli, 1991; Cortright, 1997; Hardy, 1987; Yeomans, 1992).

Transpersonal psychologists who acknowledge these commitments may identify more with their intuitive self and with their imagination, and these to some extent direct the uses to which they put their physical senses and reasoning mind. They may believe that the whole Self carries its own comprehensions that can support the individual throughout all of his or her physical existence beyond what the ego with its physical senses and intellect can provide alone. They may recognize that some answers cannot be deduced from what is presently known and must gradually unfold as individuals rediscover a larger sense of personal identity that accepts the intuitions, feelings, and imagination as vital characteristics of personhood. They may regard remembered dreams, so-called goofs and mistakes, and those decision-making processes whose logic only appears in hindsight as indications of trans-rational creative problem solving and self-corrective actions that represent the free flow of information from other areas of the psyche, reassuring the reasoning mind of its deeper support by the personality’s greater natural body of knowledge found in the self beyond ego (Assagioli, 1991; Gowan, 1975; Washburn, 1995).

From the viewpoint of empirical rationalism, such propositions may be considered the most Pollyannaish of speculations and examples of irrational, counterfactual, and magical thinking unsubstantiated by the physical senses and inconsistent with scientifically established fact (Mandel, Hilton, & Catellani, 2005; Shermer, 2002; Vyse, 2013), and whose legitimacy and significance is currently beyond the awareness or perception of the culture of empirical rationalism because of its own preferred epistemological and ontological
commitments (cf. Hartelius et al., 2013). From the viewpoint of transpersonal empiricism, however, these ideas are biologically pertinent for the physical health of the organism and generate the impetus for constructive psychosocial growth and spiritual development (Benor, 2001; Lawlis, 1996; Schlitz & Micozzi, 2005). As Maslow (1968) put it, “Without the transcendent and the transpersonal, we get sick, violent, and nihilistic, or else hopeless and apathetic” (p. iv).

**Does Transpersonal Empiricism RevealActual Transcendent Realities?**

The proposition that “transcendent realities cannot be empirically known” is both a true statement and a false statement. On the one hand, it is true inasmuch as (a) the meaning of the term “empirical” is confined to the data of sense, (b) what is “real” is narrowed to what is material, takes up physical space, and has measurable duration in time, and (c) what is “knowable” is limited to phenomena that are accessible to the physical senses and can be consensually validated by the experience of others. On the other hand, it is false to say that the existence of transcendent realities cannot be empirically known inasmuch as (a) the term “empirical” is expanded to include the data of consciousness (i.e., actions and events that occur within consciousness), (b) what is “real” embraces nonmaterial phenomena that do not take up physical space (e.g., a thought, an emotion, a dream), and (c) what is “knowable” incorporates phenomena that are accessible to intraceptive, inner ways of knowing including intuition (Kautz, 2005; Vaughan, 1979), extrasensory perception (Tart, 2009), active imagination (Johnson, 1986), meditation (Tart, 2001), trance (Masters & Houston, 1972), imaginal dialogues (Watkins, 2000), and first- and second-person approaches to the data of consciousness (e.g., Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000; Heron, 1998; Palmer, 1998; Varela & Shear, 1999).

The empiricism of intraceptive perceptual processes provides the necessary foundation for an adequate theory of knowledge for transpersonal psychology. Complementing the empiricism of the outer senses characteristic of empirical rationalism, the “inner senses” of transpersonal empiricism perceive psychological action as a whole instead of in bits and pieces, construct rather than deconstruct, are more spontaneous than planful, and follow emotional associations to a greater degree than logical cause-and-effect sequences of verbal thought. They work with images and symbols rather than words, which better enables them to see “the pattern that connects” and emotionally feel the content and validity of a concept.

These inner ways of knowing have accumulated their own collection of empirical evidence (i.e., grounded in experience) having its source in subconscious realms of the human psyche that disclose the existence of a larger version of metaphysical facts out of which the world of physical fact emerges (cf. Chittick, 1989; Corbin, 1969; Hollenback, 1996). Governments, societies, religions, the arts and sciences, and cultural achievements of all kinds are offshoots of ideas that originated in the larger factual reality of the imagination, for example. Daily waking experience is itself directed, maintained, and formed largely through the human imagination (Brann,
Imagine theories and constructs such as Christianity’s concept of the sinful self, Darwin’s theory of evolution, and astronomy’s Big Bang Theory have literally shaped generations of people’s experience of self, others, and the universe.

**Can subjective experience ever justify objective knowledge claims?** Empirical rationalism’s declaration that one can never justify objective knowledge claims based on subjective experience is repudiated by the culture of transpersonal empiricism. It remains one of the most curious ironies in the history of modern psychology that the basis of an individual’s most intimate experience and the framework behind all organized forms of religious and political structures, cultures and civilizations, arts and sciences rests upon the reality of a subjective psyche that is not considered valid by the very academic discipline that was formed through its auspices (i.e., psychology). After all, it is individual (inter-) subjectivity that gave birth to the constructs of “empirical accessibility,” “consensual validation,” and “objectivity” in the first place and that continually infuses them with meaning.

Empirical rationalism’s “objective” knowledge claims are themselves grounded in the subjective sensory experience of individual perceivers and in the magnification of individual subjective reality that combines and enlarges to form consensual validation of shared events. It is through one’s own private experience that each individual contributes to and collectively forms the human cultural world in which consensual validation is sought. Ultimately, subjective experience *is* the only reality, even for empirical rationalism. It has always been the reasoning mind’s task to translate that inner knowledge of private experience and imagination outward to the world of sense, make it physically available, and put it to practical use.

The existence of other (transcendent) systems of reality beside the physical one is denied on *a priori* grounds in the monophasic culture of empirical rationalism “that privilege[s] experiences had in what is called ‘normal waking states’ as opposed to ‘alternate states’ such as dreaming, visions, drug trips, ritual enactments, and so forth” (Laughlin, 2013, pp. 43-44). Most “transcendent” experiences (i.e., that go beyond the present understanding of the comprehending ego), however, are either the result of or produce an altered state of consciousness in the percipient (Evans, 1987). Ferrer (2014) drew attention to the important but underdeveloped state-specific sciences proposed by Tart (1975) as one methodological pathway to the recovery of an empirical rationalism with a psyche.

To study a phenomenon adequately, one needs to immerse oneself in the medium in which the phenomenon occurs and train one’s faculties beyond their usual but undeveloped range of functioning. Many quite real phenomena (e.g., lucid dreaming; Gackenbach & LaBerge, 1988) cannot be perceived by physical senses but must be plunged into and experienced from within using one’s inner senses. Models of alternate states of consciousness are often based on an explanatory framework that gives a legitimate role to human imagination and human subjectivity in efforts to make sense of experience (Cardeña & Winkelman, 2011). This means that an integral approach utilizes both emic
(culture-specific) ways of knowing and etic (culture-general) research methods when assessing the validity of knowledge claims in the two cultures of transpersonal psychology (Berry, 1969; Roth, 2008).

**Can the existence of transcendent realities be empirically known?** Is belief in the existence of transcendent realities a rationally plausible one, and is there any empirical evidence or logical argument that they can be known? Williams James wrote, “If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, it is enough if you prove one single crow to be white” (Murphy & Ballou, 1973, p. 41). Evidence exists that we have not one white crow but many, pointing to the distinctly real possibility that basic reality is profoundly multidimensional and can be experienced, understood, and affirmed as such (Barrow, Davies, & Harper, 2004; Bohm, 1980; Greene, 2011; Lewis, 1986).

I have written elsewhere about the rational plausibility of a basic reality that is infinitely creative and multidimensional in nature—a basic reality in which consciousness has causal relevance as an intrinsic aspect of physical matter and where the function of the material brain is to transmit (transmissive function) rather than produce (productive function) an essentially independent, non-material mind that exists as a form of electrical action within the electric system of reality (Cunningham, 2013). As a theory of consciousness, it is admittedly speculative as are all such theories and difficult to verify through consensual validation. However,

> Even in the absence of intersubjective observation, there are numerous criteria available for the evaluation of such theories: simplicity, internal coherence, coherence with other theories in other domains, the ability to reproduce properties of experience that are familiar in our own case, and even an overall fit with the dictates of common sense. (Chalmers, 1997, p. 22)

What is noteworthy about this particular approach to the “hard problem” of consciousness is that it derives from a corpus of channeled writings (i.e., the Seth material of Jane Roberts and Robert Butts; Roberts, 1997-2002) that are arguably transpersonal in nature (Hastings, 1991) and that form a basis for the ontology, epistemology, and axiology of what has been termed the “New Age” movement (Hanegraff, 1998; Hughes, 1991; York, 2004). Whether or not one recognizes the ontological actuality of a theoretical Seth entity or acknowledges the rational plausibility of his independent existence as a personality-energy-gestalt [as he calls himself], will depend “on one’s conscious or unconscious metaphysical commitments” (Ferrer, 2014, p. 174). An author’s organic status or psychological constitution, however, is insufficient grounds and an inappropriate basis on which to accept or refute a particular hypothesis or a theory of consciousness, even in the culture of empirical rationalism.

Transpersonal empiricism is aligned with William James’ pragmatic criterion of truth and reality with regard to the question of whether transpersonal experiences reveal the existence of actual transcendent realities: “That which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself” (James, 1902/1936, p. 507). Like the dark matter theorized to be the major component
of the physical universe but that cannot be observed directly (Sanders, 2014),
the vitality of the universe is not itself perceived by the physical senses, but has
*effects* that are. Exceptional human experiences are not merely hypothetical
constructs or theoretical entities, but have practical consequences in the
physical world. When individuals experience them, observable effects may be
felt in the human personality (Palmer & Hastings, 2013; Ring, 2000).

On this account, we have no philosophic excuse for calling the Seth entity
unreal when it produces tangible effects in the human cultural world (Heelas,
1996), when people who interact with the Seth entity report work actually
being done upon their personalities (Watkins, 1999), and the communications
prove to be an internally coherent and rational source of information for
hypotheses about the nature of physical reality and human personality (cf.
Friedman, 1994). The communiqûes are important not because they come from
Seth or because they are channeled by Jane Roberts but because they *may*
be communications from other dimensions of actuality telling the species about its
own nature. As such, the phenomenon offers its own kind of evidence for “the
ontological integrity of spiritual referents and the plausibility of subtle
dimensions of reality” (Ferrer, 2014, p. 174) and deserves further serious
study by transpersonal psychologists (Cunningham, 2012).

Ferrer (2014) discussed the epistemological challenge that shared entheogenic
visions present to the transpersonal researcher. He argued that it is the
intersubjective or consensual agreement obtained among shared visual
perception of nonphysical entities that may be considered the hallmark of its
“objectivity” or “reality” (p. 173). I have reported elsewhere on a different
kind of *intersubjectively shared outer vision*—the collectively perceived
apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Medjugorje in the Republic of
Bosnia-Herzegovina of the former Yugoslavia (Cunningham, 2011b). Collec-
tively perceived apparitions are one of the most provocative subsets of psychic
phenomena catalogued in the history of parapsychological research because of
their pseudo-material features, which may include casting a shadow, occluding
the view of background objects and being occluded by foreground objects,
detection by animals, reflection in mirrors, making responsive adjustments to
people and objects, and capacity to be viewed from different positions with
corresponding differences in perception (Sidgwick, 1962; Stevenson, 1982).

Such encounter experiences present a curious mixture of subjective and
objective elements and are often accompanied by consensually validated
evidence that telepathy on the part of the living, the dying, or the dead may be
involved (Myers, 1889; Tyrrell, 1942/1953). The semi-objective features and
intersubjective nature of these phenomena call into question commonly held
assumptions that such shared visions are purely subjective, exclusively
pathological, or merely physiological. They offer empirical evidence for
a second “white crow” and “the ontological integrity of spiritual referents and
the plausibility of subtle dimensions of reality” (Ferrer, 2014, p. 174). To call
such psychical phenomena “supernatural” is beside the point, since they occur
within the natural framework and a part of the physical system of reality and
not outside of it.
Open naturalism. The world of nature with its diverse flora and fauna has become so strongly identified with the physical elements that compose it and with its exterior form that the term “naturalistic” has come to refer to its material aspects alone. From the standpoint of transpersonal empiricism, however, the conceptual distinctions between natural and supernatural, material and non-material, physical and metaphysical are false dichotomies differentiated for convenience only. Just as transpersonal psychology does not stand outside of the personal but includes it, so also the supernatural does not stand outside the natural but includes it and transcends it.

Nature is “super natural” (Kripal, 2014, p. 172) in the sense that the natural world cannot be its own source (Bohm, 1980). The world of nature is a miraculous physical system, and what the empirical rationalism of the physical and natural sciences learns about its wondrous properties and complex structure is meant to lead the species to question its own source and into the nature of the soul (Roberts, 1979). Categorical divisions between natural and supernatural do not operate in such a worldview.

Mind and body, body and world, personal self and transpersonal self are complex, interweaving actions that are natural and supernatural at once. The mind is as physical as the body, and the body is as mental as the mind. The spirit speaks with a physical voice, and the physical body is a creation of the spirit. We do not live outside reality or the world, outside our psyche and our body, but within them (Chemero, 2009; Noë, 2009; Shapiro, 2014). Only when they are viewed as radically different things, does the Cartesian gap between knowable and unknowable realities seem unbridgeable and their crossing incomprehensible.

Panpsychism. The ontology of mind known as panpsychism has been advocated by some of the greatest thinkers in Eastern and Western civilization (Skrbina, 2005) and deserves serious consideration by transpersonal psychologists who are looking for an ontology that “bridges the epistemic gap between human experience and reality that is intrinsic to neo-Kantianism” (Ferrer, 2014, p. 169). On this view, transcendental realities can be empirically known (i.e., through experience) because both the knower (noesis) and the known (noema) have the same source and are composed of the same “stuff.” That stuff is the inner vitality of consciousness and is known by many names—élan vital (Bergson, 1911), chi (Chinese), prana (Indian), mana (Polynesian), wakonda (Lakota Sioux), and pneuma (ancient Greek). Human beings are not separated from the rest of the natural world by virtue of possessing an inner consciousness but are part of a basic reality in which such consciousness permeates all forms of life, including so-called “non-living” entities. To say that all matter possesses consciousness is not to personify physical matter with human traits, but to affirm that human traits are the result of physical matter’s characteristics.

When one critically considers the possibility that consciousness has causal relevance as an intrinsic aspect of physical matter and goes “all the way down”
to the most basic elements of matter itself (de Quincey, 2002; Nagel, 2012; Pfeiffer, Mack, & Devereux, 2007), one can understand how matter and consciousness may both emerge out of what the world is and that despite physical appearances to the contrary, each is a materialization of the other. If mysticism is “an ocean with many shores” (Ferrer, 2002, pp. 144-149), then “our normal waking consciousness is a part of that mystic ocean all the time, composed of the same ingredients, participating in its motions” (Roberts, 1976, p. 296). Panpsychism represents a metaphysical commitment that forbids a premature closing of our understanding of how transcendental experiences can reveal actual transcendent realities.

According to the ontology of panpsychism, consciousness not only created the physical universe, but also continues to do so on a subconscious basis by every individual identity in it—mineral, plant, and animal. The condensed gestalt comprehension of electrons and protons forming atoms, atoms forming molecules, molecules forming cells, cells forming organs, and organs forming organisms result in different kinds of “interior” natures, different qualities of experience, and different ways of perceiving basic reality—a true “plurality of enacted spiritual worlds” (Ferrer, 2014, p. 168). Building upon and extending Ferrer’s (2002) insight that stresses human cocreation in the enaction of religious worlds, panpsychism discloses nonhuman cocreation in the enaction of the physical world. Not only humans, but all forms of life, great and small, contribute to the formation of the physical universe and are “vehicles through which reality or being self-manifests... [and] directly participate in the self-disclosure of the world” (Ferrer, 2014, p. 159).

**Beyond Ontological Neutrality to Noetic Pluralism**

**Basic reality.** Modern altered state of consciousness research has revealed that “reality” is experienced very differently according to the perceptual apparatus, focus of consciousness, and layer of the psyche to which the individual has access (Grof, 2013). Altered state of consciousness research also suggests the possibility that the intraceptive perceptual processes that operate during transpersonal experiences of transcendent realities (e.g., the Seth entity channeled by Jane Roberts, the prolonged Marian apparition at Medjugorje) may be analogous to transduction processes that occur during sensory perception of physical reality but at another level. The human act of perception transduces *that which is perceived* of transcendent reality into a “packaged” form that the comprehending ego can understand. The act of transduction creates a new basic reality and *that* is what is perceived—a new reality whose legitimacy and basis for existence lies in the perception of it (Roberts, 1997-2002).

On this view, that which is experienced as transcendent reality is thus a product of perception while always remaining “that which is” and the basis of new perceptions and new realities. Every organism’s perceptual and conceptual apparatus responds to the available field of stimulus energies in highly individualistic ways to reveal a *different* probable aspect of basic reality—
a creative and legitimate version that is produced by the very act of perceiving it. There are as many probable transcendent realities as there are individuals who encounter and experience them—an epistemological position William James called “noetic pluralism” (James, 1909/1971; Taylor, 1996, p. 134).

From one point of view of transpersonal empiricism, there is no single physical environment that each species simply perceives differently, as the objectivism of empirical rationalism presumes (Megill, 1994). The physical environment is not a separate thing divorced from the perceiver but a dynamic field of energy whose perception is the result of a highly specialized set of senses and perceptual patterns determined by psychological structures (Noë, 2009). The physical world rises up before our eyes while those eyes are a part of the world they perceive. On this view, basic reality is not a pre-established, completed thing in which all one needs to do to know it as it is is to take a really good look at what is “already out there now real” (Lonergan, 1957, pp. 250-254). Nor is it a static entity or completed act that simply recreates itself as it is in various guises. Basic reality is more profoundly participatory than this. The difficulty is that empirical rationalism does not appreciate the full extent to which the perceiver and basic reality co-create each other, or the full degree to which subjective continuity is always a part of any reality that is perceived and interpreted (Bernstein, 1985; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008).

On the one hand, basic reality is, whether or not it is perceived and is not dependent upon our belief in order that it can exist. On the other hand, basic reality is an ever-present, creative, latent, undifferentiated field of action that is forever acting upon itself, always in the process of creation, constantly forming from itself new probable versions of itself, manifesting and actualizing these new possibilities spontaneously and instantaneously. Continually growing in terms of knowledge of itself and endlessly expanding in its fulfillment of Being-values, basic reality ensures its own stability and permanency through such constant change (Roberts, 1997-2002).

The view advanced here is aligned with Ferrer’s (2002, 2008) participatory spirituality in that it affirms “an undetermined mystery or creative power as the generative source of all spiritual enactions” (Ferrer, 2014, p. 168) called basic reality. In contrast with Ferrer’s (2002) view that basic reality itself is not pregiven, however, the present view affirms that there is “something” out there—for the ever-actual integrity of the natural world is not to be denied and contains within itself its own recognition of itself. The form that “something” takes, however, is not pre-given. Basic reality springs into being as the spectrum of consciousness encounters it and patterns it according to its own perceptive focus. Each encounter adds to basic reality and gives rise to new basic realities, bringing forth new aspects of itself and of the consciousness that encounters it. Any given encounter, therefore, does not necessarily lead to an essentially “final” manifestation or expression of basic reality. Each transpersonal or transcendent experience automatically gives rise to a new basic reality. There is no end to transcendent realities in these terms or to their source or to their supply because basic reality expands through such
encounters. Through such encounters, basic reality renews itself and knows its own reality.

In order to be perceived at all, basic reality must be tailored to some extent according to the perceiver’s own purposes and needs. Sifted through the perceiver’s own individuality, basic reality becomes manifested in sensory images personally tailored for the perceiver and that others do not perceive because of their different perceptive focus. One person experiences one probable event as felt reality, while someone else may experience a version of that event that becomes that individual’s felt reality. Each aspect of transcendent basic reality may be quite different, and the separate interpretations made be quite valid explanations of the separate variations. After all, if photographs of the exterior physical world vary according to who, when, where, and how the picture is taken, then why should pictures or experiences of interior nonphysical realities be expected or required to look alike?

One transcendent reality may exist in many different ways in the same way that flowers behave differently in different circumstances. Flowers can be white or red, tall or short, found in a tree or on the ground or in a vase without being contradictory to the nature of a flower. If the reasoning mind makes its deductions according to a single consensually validated picture of a flower, there will be correlations that apply—but only to that small specific and limited area. The oftentimes greater dissimilarities in experience are overlooked.

The individual’s experience is not false but creative and an interpretation of basic reality experienced through a state of limited perception and filtered through the subconscious of the experiencing subject. Personal experiences and private interpretations of encounters with so-called transcendent realities are not therefore unreal and “mistaken,” but represent one of an infinite number of ways of perceiving the various probable guises that basic reality takes. The perceiver experiences a representation or symbol, but the symbol is quite real and a quite valid aspect of basic reality. Behind the representations, however, are larger “unknown” multidimensional realities.

Understanding the nature of such a basic reality can move transpersonal psychology beyond its current Two Culture syndrome and avoid the fragmented, specialized, and sometimes contradictory and mutually-exclusive explanation of human experience and behavior that has come to characterize modern scientific psychology (Koch, 1993; Staats, 1991). The two epistemic cultures of transpersonal psychology—empirical rationalism and transpersonal empiricism—challenge each other in different ways with ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments that seem to be opposite, but are instead different ways of exploring different aspects of the same overall basic reality and merge for common purposes in a single academic field. “Only by such a comprehensive approach can we hope for a vision that reflects the extraordinary richness and possibilities of humankind and the cosmos: a transpersonal vision” (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993a, p. 205).
Conclusion: Bridging Psychological Science and Transpersonal Spirit

The two counterparts of transpersonal psychology can learn much from each other and can merge, while retaining their unique identities, to form a more robust transpersonal psychology able to cast new light on their combined purposes. The inherent flexibility, playfulness, and creativity of the human mind has allowed the species great variation in its psychological, cultural, political, and religious activities, and it is these qualities that can be counted on to bring what appears to be two opposing paradigms within transpersonal psychology together into a more harmonious synergy.

Understanding that prime freedom, Ferrer (2014) invited us to consider “the plausibility of a deep and ample multidimensional cosmos in which the sensible world (as narrowly conceived by modern naturalism) does not exhaust the possibilities of the Real” (p. 170) (italics in the original). Transpersonal empiricism encourages empirical rationalism to take a more generous view of the nature of reality as a way of making sense of the broadest spectrum of human experience and behavior. From the viewpoint of transpersonal empiricism that is presented here, if transpersonal psychology is to persevere as a “higher” psychology, it needs to retain its vision of itself as a psychology that is “transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interest, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like” (Maslow, 1968, p. iv). It needs to retain a view of reality that is “bigger than we are” that we can “commit ourselves to in a new, naturalistic, empirical, non-churchly sense, perhaps as Thoreau and Whitman, William James, and John Dewey did” (Maslow, 1968, p. iv).

**Ontic pluralism.** First of all, it would help to attempt a larger view of reality. As long as physical existence is categorically believed to be the only valid one—existence in a material body that experiences a sensorily accessible, consensually validated, “already-out-there-now-real” world (Lonergan, 1957, pp. 250-254)—then the search for nonphysical or subtle transcendent realities will not occur. Reality is not limited; it is only our perception that is limited within the framework of three-dimensional physical reality.

The fact is that science must change, as it discovers its net of evidence is equipped only to catch certain kinds of fish, and that it is constructed of webs of assumptions that can only hold certain varieties of reality, while others escape its net entirely. (Roberts, 1981, p. 137)

To admit as evidence only data accessible to physical senses and consensually validated in the experience of others is an extreme form of parsimony that is simplicity itself, producing a body of knowledge that may lack full validity since only half or maybe a third of basic reality may be actually considered.

**Psychical pluralism.** Second, the inner attitude toward human subjectivity on the part of empirical rationalism must be completely changed, although the scientific method need not necessarily change. The version of psychological science that the culture of empirical rationalism represents does have the right to
set its own rules of empirical accessibility, consensual validation, repeatability and falsifiability, but not set itself up as the final arbiter of reality. The time has come for the culture of empirical rationalism in transpersonal psychology to take several steps further “beyond ego” to expand the nature of its own knowing and consider more profound enactments of reality that it presently either does not consciously perceive or of which it is not consciously aware.

Expanding the boundaries of experience and knowledge beyond the margins of normal waking consciousness in the form of an experimental psychology of the unconscious may give some legitimacy to the reality of multiple states of consciousness and multiplex models of human personality in the eyes of empirical-rationalistic science (Beahrs, 1982; Ellenberger, 1970; Kelly et al., 2007; Taylor, 1996). Such an expansion could ground logical arguments for more profound versions of reality and provide alternative frames of reference in which so-called anomalous phenomena can be more adequately explained (e.g., Cardeña, Lynn, & Krippner; 2013).

**Epistemic pluralism.** Third, an expansion of the definition of “empiricism” to mean “experiential” more broadly (i.e., grounded in experience) would also help. Transpersonal empiricism is aligned with Ferrer’s (2014) call for a *naturalism* that is “[open] to the heuristic value and potential validity of alternate epistemic and metaphysical frameworks...[such that] multiple methodological standpoints, epistemologies, and metaphysical frameworks could be considered to discern the more appropriate account of the perceived phenomena” (pp. 174-175). This is what transpersonal psychology has historically done (Anderson & Braud, 2013). Sensory data accessible to experience via physical senses is only one of several equally legitimate types of empiricism. “Experience” legitimately and logically includes the data of consciousness (e.g., mental images, thoughts, dreams, feelings) perceived by inner methods of perception that are equipped to apprehend data as they exist independently of the transformations imposed upon them by physical senses.

**The transpersonal vision.** The form that transpersonal psychology takes at any given moment in time is extremely important, but forms change constantly, and the form of transpersonal psychology that Maslow and others initiated in 1969 is not the same form of transpersonal psychology today. The definitions of transpersonal psychology likewise have evolved over the years to reflect this change in form and will likely continue to change in the future. But beneath each evolving definition and every changing form is what Walsh and Vaughan (1993b) described as the transpersonal vision. The field’s current form is already in transition as the transpersonal vision beneath is ever ready to adopt a new shape.

The two epistemic cultures of transpersonal psychology represent dual channels or mediums through which the transpersonal vision currently flows, each suggesting to some degree its own form of the field. The transpersonal vision that flows through each culture is highly individual, reflecting the interests and styles of thinking of each of its members who embody that vision in physical terms. The development of transpersonal psychology in this way
comes naturally from within its members, even while the general form of these visions follow along certain lines that I have attempted to characterize as the two “cultures” of transpersonal psychology.

Each culture gives direction to each member’s uniquely original style of thinking and each culture is the result of each member’s own transpersonal vision freely followed. In order to accomplish a meaningful bridging of psychological science and transpersonal spirit it is important, therefore, to give the transpersonal vision its own freedom. The transpersonal vision implies and sometimes even dictates its own form, but the form of transpersonal psychology should always exist as an attribute of the vision and not be imposed upon it. The transpersonal vision must always be allowed freedom, for it is greater than its form. When the vision is given freedom to shape itself, then the form and vision become one.

Let us, then, concern ourselves with the transpersonal vision and let the form of transpersonal psychology take care of itself. By allowing the vision to freely express itself in form, and not attempting to impose any particular culture upon the vision, then the form of transpersonal psychology at any given moment will naturally grow out of the vision.

Our task, then, is to realize the transpersonal vision for ourselves through practicing a transpersonal discipline; to test and refine this vision through study, reflection and critical thinking; to embody and express it in our lives; to share and communicate it where we can; to use it to help the healing of our world; and to let it use us as willing servants for the wakening and welfare of all. This is the transpersonal vision. This is what we have been privileged to help birth during its first twenty-five years. Who can even guess what the next twenty-five years will bring? Our challenges are matched only by our opportunities. (Walsh, 1993, p. 136)

This kind of orientation can bridge the two epistemic cultures of transpersonal psychology and represents in my opinion the truest picture that can be given so far of transpersonal psychology’s natural relationship with itself and with the transpersonal vision that it seeks to actualize in the human cultural world.

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Paul Cunningham, Ph.D., is a tenured, full-time Professor of Psychology at Rivier University in Nashua, NH and former Dean of Arts and Sciences. He received his bachelor’s degree in Philosophy from Our Lady of Providence Seminary (Providence, RI), his Master of Science degree in Educational Psychology from Purdue University (W. Lafayette, IN), and his Ph.D. degree in General/Experimental Psychology from the University of Tennessee (Knoxville, TN). He was elected 44th President of the New England Psychological Association from 2003–2004. He is currently writing an introductory textbook on transpersonal psychology for use in the college classroom.
Ed Dale’s *Completing Piaget’s Project* is a strikingly original integration of the transpersonal psychology of higher states of consciousness with an expanded neo-Piagetian developmental perspective. Dale convincingly demonstrates the larger transpersonal context of Jean Piaget’s (1896-1980) life work, as revealed by both Piaget’s hitherto untranslated early (1920’s) empirical studies of religious understanding in childhood and in his personal spiritual awakening dramatized in an early (1918) thinly disguised autobiographical novel. Dale compares this late adolescent crisis and its resolution in mystical experience to Grof on “spiritual emergency.” He also outlines the young Piaget’s ambition for a convergence between modern science and a spirituality based on his own “ecstatic” response to the philosopher Bergson’s “identification of God with life itself” (p. 3) and shows how this ambition is still reflected in Piaget’s final philosophy of science writings. It is interesting to note Bernard’s (2011) recent overview of this same integrative potential in Bergson’s vitalist spirituality.

For Dale then, the overall integrative perspective of Piaget’s developmental psychology is transpersonal, “Piaget’s spirituality can be viewed as the primary motivation behind the psychological studies which revolutionized psychology” (p. 25). Dale suggests that it was the predominantly secular orientation of the academic psychology on which Piaget later had such an impact that left these transpersonal concerns untranslated by Piaget’s own choice. Part of the interest of Dale’s findings here is their further extension of what we can see as the transpersonal foundations of much early academic psychology – William James obviously, but also including Fechner, Wundt, and the developmentalists James Mark Baldwin and G. Stanley Hall, whose central concern with religious experience we can now see the Piagetian enterprise as seeking to complete.

A second major strand in Dale’s analysis comes from adding to Piaget’s own anticipations of complexity systems in science his own neo-Piagetian understanding of non-linear open systems, also similar to recent attempts by Combs (2002) and the philosopher Nagel (2012) to establish a direction toward integrative complexity in the living systems of both human consciousness and evolutionary biology. Dale extends this systems analysis into Stephan Jay Gould’s “punctuated evolution” account of more qualitative or formal changes in evolution as based on “heterochronous” reorganizations in the temporal sequencing of adult and juvenile characteristics. Dale will apply this same principle to the level of an individual epigenesis of the differential activations of transpersonal capacities possible across life-span development –
ranging from developmental precocities in early childhood to the flowering in old age described by Erik Erikson.

The third major strand in this complex book is Dale’s further development of Piaget’s own view, still not widely appreciated, of separate lines of development for representational thought, culminating in the abstract or formal operations of mathematics and scientific reasoning, and a distinct line for the “affective schemata,” which on Dale’s analysis, also citing the similar views of this reviewer on “presentational” intelligence (Hunt, 1995), would culminate in its own formal (and post formal) operations, albeit one more individually variable, in the form of spiritual or transpersonal realization. This model of separate developmental lines, a simpler version of Gardner’s (1983) widely influential view of multiple frames of intelligence (including the personal/emotional), would replace the more narrowly conceived single “ladder” models for all intelligence associated with the earlier Wilber (1984) and Alexander (1990). For the latter, formal operations in the representational symbolisms will be followed by the exclusively “post formal” stages of transpersonal realization best reflected in the meditative traditions of the world religions. In addition to avoiding this perhaps arbitrary privileging of one form of intelligence over all others, Dale’s extending of Piaget’s multiple line approach has the virtue of more parsimoniously accounting for the multiple timings of individual transpersonal development that become a major focus of the book – the late life maturation of Erikson, the mid-life self-actualization of Maslow and Jung, continuous development in spiritual savants (either life-long or beginning in early adulthood), the rare meditational developments in late childhood in traditional monastic cultures, and the spontaneous early childhood precocities of mystical experience that have always proved the most difficult for exclusively “post formal” single ladder models of the transpersonal.

At this point Dale also sees an alternative within this completion of Piaget’s original project. On the one hand, there is the above duality of representational and affective lines, with spirituality first appearing as formal operations in the latter, or in its early precocities so like those in music and art, and on the other, there is Dale’s own preference for transpersonal development as its own initially independent third line. It is this second view to which he applies the principles of biological “heterochrony” to explain the above variations in its life-span manifestation, and to suggest that its modern “atypicality” reflects an earlier Paleolithic appearance necessary for the group solidarity now secured by more secular forces – leaving its present development as of primarily individual significance.

Here questions might arise over which approach – formal and post formal operations in affect or an entirely separate line – would offer the more parsimonious account, as well as whether an exclusive use of a biological level of analysis might come at the price of ignoring equally persuasive personological and cultural-historical dimensions that would constitute their own emergent realities – outside even this open-systems understanding of evolutionary biology. Thus the “atypicalities” of transpersonal development
can also be considered in terms of the emotional fixations and traumas that have always tended to hold an affective-presentational line to “egocentricity” and/or variously delay its fuller spiritual maturation into mid-life or beyond. Similarly, perhaps, on a sociological level (Weber, Sorokin), there is the historical alternation in all major civilizations between sacred and secular eras – with the latter now more globalized in modernity, along with its fundamentalist and new age counter-reactions.

Be all this as it may, or may not, Dale’s important book is far more diverse in its consideration of these alternative approaches, along with potentials for a future transpersonal philosophy, and the convergences between transpersonal psychology and systems approaches in contemporary science, than can be addressed in this review. Its reach, range, and originality are indeed, impressive. Dale’s neo-Piagetian understanding of spirituality, very much in the tradition of the Bergson who so inspired the young Piaget, warrants the attention of all those concerned with the “living” foundations of transpersonal psychology and their further development.

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**Neo-Piagetian Transpersonal Psychology:**

**Dancing In-Between Pluralism and Perennialism**

**Essay Review**

Building on a number of prior publications (e.g., Dale, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014a, 2014b), Edward J. Dale (2014c) has written a very significant book that not only settles long-standing transpersonal disputes, but also bridges transpersonal and mainstream psychologies—and originally advances the development of a pluralistic transpersonal philosophy. In a way, Dale’s new work contains two related-but-different books. The first part focuses on what I call “the transpersonal Piaget,” that is, the largely overlooked spiritual experiences, interests, and motivations in Piaget’s life and work. Comprising most of the book, the second part applies insights from neo-Piagetian thinking and modern evolutionary biology to central questions of transpersonal studies, such as the dynamics of spiritual development and the challenges raised by religious pluralism. Since I have no scholarly expertise in (neo-)Piagetian psychology, in this review I summarize the first part before discussing the second part in greater detail. I then identify three possible tensions or ambiguities in the book, which arguably emerge from Dale’s commendable attempt to pave a middle path between a naïve universalism and a fragmented pluralism in transpersonal studies. I conclude with a strong endorsement of the book’s merits, as well as a recommendation to transpersonal scholars to study it with the care and attention it surely deserves.

**Neo-Piagetian Transpersonal Psychology**

This section provides a short overview of Dale’s account of Piaget’s transpersonal leanings. I also discuss Dale’s nonlinear paradigm of spiritual development and his related pluralistic vision of transpersonal philosophy.

**The Transpersonal Piaget**

Dale begins his book by developing a powerful case for the transpersonal foundations and ultimate goals of Piaget’s life work. Through a comprehensive analysis of Piaget’s writings, Dale has demonstrated that Piaget underwent
a profound spiritual emergency (S. Grof & C. Grof, 1989) during his adolescence, was interested in the moral dimension of nonordinary states of consciousness, developed an immanentist theory of the divine, understood evolution as a journey toward God-realization, and sought to unify science and religion. Dale has argued that modern psychologists have consistently ignored these spiritual themes in Piaget's life and work, and that the recognition of the “little known spiritual side of Piaget” (p. 27) not only establishes “Piaget [as] a transpersonal thinker ahead of his time” (p. 1), but also can influence “the direction of psychology in the future” (p. 27).

While scholars of Piaget have yet to comment on Dale’s exegesis of Piaget’s corpus, Dale’s alignment of one of the most influential psychologists of all time with transpersonal matters doubtlessly provides an invaluable service to the field of transpersonal psychology. On the one hand, Dale argues that transpersonal psychology has “the potential to complete aspects of [Piaget’s] work that he was unable to substantiate during his life” (p. 27). On the other hand, Dale shows that the combination of Piagetian insights with recent developments in both modern biology and transpersonal psychology shapes a neo-Piagetian or genetic transpersonal psychology. He then characterizes genetic transpersonal psychology as not only intrinsically nonlinear and strongly pluralistic, but also crucial for the future of psychological research in general. As the two main features of Dale’s neo-Piagetian psychology are of particular importance to contemporary transpersonal debates, the next two sections address nonlinear transpersonal development and a pluralistic transpersonal philosophy, which are interrelated.

**Neo-Piagetian Transpersonal Psychology: Nonlinear Transpersonal Development**

Dale has persuasively argued that transpersonal development is nonlinear (i.e., atypical and indeterministic) and that eminently linear approaches such as Wilber’s (2000, 2006) consequently fail to account for many of the central dynamics of transpersonal development. Whereas for some individuals transpersonal development begins at a young age and unfolds gradually over a lifetime, for others it begins at a young age but fades after childhood and might re-emerge later in adulthood; for yet others, transpersonal awareness only develops in later life. The application of nonlinear methods emerging from 21st-century mathematics, physics, and systems biology allows Dale to support the existence of multiple—developmental and evolutionary—transpersonal pathways that branch out through “specializing diversification” (p. 219). Rather than a single spiritual itinerary, these pathways follow collateral developmental lines.

One important upshot of Dale’s nonlinear transpersonal paradigm is that it arguably resolves important disputes in the transpersonal literature, in particular those around the competing developmental models of Washburn (1988, 1990, 1998, 2003) and Wilber (1990, 1995, 1999, 2001). If transpersonal developmental is both nonlinear and pluralistic, then there is no need to choose between these supposedly conflicting developmental models; instead, both can
be recognized as (at least potentially) equally valid accounts of different individuals’ developmental pathways. To illustrate this diversity, Dale described five transpersonal developmental patterns associated with different transpersonal theories—such as Wilber (1996), Assagioli (1988/2007), Hunt (1995), Washburn (1988), and Maslow (1971), among others—as well as various triggers of transpersonal growth such as meditation practices and psychodynamic maturation.

This pluralistic account of transpersonal development is supported by—and actually helps to explain—Thomas, Brewer, Kraus, and Rosen’s (1993) important (and unfairly overlooked) empirical findings about the two patterns of transcendence articulated by Washburn (1988, 1990) and Wilber (1990, 1996). After studying the developmental trajectories of English and Indian elders assessed as spiritually mature, Thomas et al. discovered that half of those who had reached transpersonal levels had undergone a regressive transition period (which supported Washburn’s model), while the other half did not (which supported Wilber’s model). The authors wrote:

In sum, rather than finding a uniform pattern of transition to higher spiritual levels..., what we find is considerable variation in the spiritual paths of our respondents....To suggest that there is one uniform path to spiritual development goes in the face of major spiritual traditions and empirical psychology. (p. 79)

In his discussion, Dale acknowledged that such a pluralistic account of transpersonal development had been proposed by both myself (Ferrer, 2002, 2008) and Rawlinson (1997); see also Schlamm (2001). Dale’s application of nonlinear logic, however, brings superior explanatory power and scientific weight to the aforementioned proposals. As Dale explained, classical linear approaches to transpersonal development followed an anagenetic view of evolution (i.e., ordering species—or states/stages of consciousness—from lowest to highest in a single line), but modern evolutionary theory follows a cladogenetic view in which species (and by extension transpersonal states/stages) branch out via collateral modules or lines toward an ever-greater plurality and diversification. By bringing this modern evolutionary logic to transpersonal theory, Dale indicated, “many of the positions that are usually considered incompatible or antagonistic can be synthesized into a unified framework, creating a transpersonal psychology based around plurality and complexity rather than universal structuralism” (p. 37).

In addition, Dale advanced an original hypothesis regarding the impact of learning environments on the general validity and reliability of stage models of spiritual development—another highly contested topic in transpersonal scholarship (see, e.g., Ferrer, 2002; Rothberg, 1998, 1999; Wilber, 1999). Specifically, Dale suggested that stage-like patterns more naturally unfold under what he called “ideal learning conditions” (p. 182), such as those provided by traditional monastic environments. In “suboptimal” learning conditions (e.g., Western lay settings), however, stages of transpersonal development become less likely or even non-evident. Although I consider this
empirical hypothesis plausible, I wonder whether it could be realistically tested. An assessment would seem to entail decades-long longitudinal studies involving large-scale groups of contemplative practitioners in both monastic (optimal) and lay (suboptimal) environments, as well as the control of a vast number of other variables, such as daily practice time, intensive retreat time, biographical and personality factors, and so forth. Even if these studies were carried out, I strongly suspect—in alignment with Dale’s nonlinear, pluralistic approach—important individual differences would be found not only *between* but also *within* these two groups.

Dale’s nonlinear transpersonal paradigm also has important methodological implications for transpersonal psychology. Since essential aspects of transpersonal experience and development are nonlinear (i.e., indeterministic and thus defying statistical predictability), they cannot be captured by the conventional quantitative methods of mainstream psychology (see also Almendro, 2014; Almendro & Weber, 2012). In other words, because transpersonal trajectories are developmentally atypical, individual case studies are more informative about transpersonal growth than are statistical analyses based on group studies. In the study of transpersonal phenomena, therefore, mainstream (linear) quantitative methods should be supplemented with nonlinear methodologies because “statistical averaging techniques…will not give a true picture of the highly pluralistic landscape of transpersonal development” (p. 191). For this reason, Dale argued, transpersonal studies should privilege nonlinear methodologies over statistical approaches without abandoning the latter: “nonlinear transpersonal theory needs to be able to include the linear averaging approach, much as Einstein’s physics includes Newton’s” (p. 265). Furthermore, for Dale, “a transpersonal theory based around complexity, nonlinearity, and evolutionary developmental biology would expect development to be pluralistic” (p. 121). This consideration introduces the next theme of Dale’s work: pluralistic transpersonal philosophy.

**Neo-Piagetian Transpersonal Psychology: Pluralistic Transpersonal Philosophy**

In his brief history of transpersonal investigation, Dale situated the “pluralistic-participatory movement” (p. 108) as the prevalent growing force (*agglomeration*, in his terms) in transpersonal scholarship in the 21st century, after Wilber’s hierarchical neo-perennialism and the East–West synthesis of the 1960s and 1970s that spawned the birth of transpersonal psychology. Participatory pluralism is actually Dale’s sixth and most recent agglomeration, with neo-perennialism as the fifth and the transpersonal East–West synthesis as the fourth. He also identified three earlier agglomerations in transpersonal thinking: a premodern mystical world philosophy as the first agglomeration, 19th-century German idealism as the second, and 20th-century early introspectionist/cognitive science as the third. According to Dale, only the pluralistic-participatory movement is aligned with the nonlinear paradigm in contemporary science (i.e., moving beyond mainstream psychology’s linear statistical averaging) that provides the best explanation of transpersonal inquiry and development. Although participatory pluralism “is yet to arrive at its period of greatest influence” (p. 116), Dale stated, “a chronological
ascendancy in period of dominance is also a striking characteristic of the agglomerations identified” (p. 116).

More substantially, Dale further developed the pluralistic-participatory vision of religious diversity that is introduced in my past writings (Ferrer, 2002, 2008, 2010, 2012; see also Ferrer, forthcoming) and had been gradually emerging in the field of religious studies (e.g., Heim, 1995; Irwin, 1996; Kaplan, 2002; Lanzetta, 2007; Sharma, 2005). After considering the possible convergence of religions, Dale presented an alternative view “in which religions achieve shared knowledge of the nature of spiritual reality through the diversification of dogmas, practices, and experiences rather than through their convergence” (p. 258). In this scenario, spiritual convergence will be achieved, not through any kind of perennialist synthesis or underlying spiritual meta-ultimate, but through “the coordination of the knowledge that arises from multiple viewpoints” (p. 262). Paradoxically, spiritual diversification might lead to shared spiritual knowledge because “it is through the coordination of divergent viewpoints that the fullest overall picture of spiritual reality or spiritual realities is possible” (p. 281). I believe that Dale’s coordination approach (see below) represents an important contribution to transpersonal studies, participatory theory, interreligious dialogue, and the philosophy of religious pluralism—in articulating a vision that synergically honors both spiritual diversification and communion across differences.

TENSIONS AND QUESTIONS

At this point it is no secret to the reader that I feel very sympathetic to Dale’s project. Nonetheless, I find three tensions (or questions I ponder aloud) in his work regarding the following topics: (a) the stages of contemplative development, (b) the ontological nature of spiritual reality, and (c) neo-Kantian perennialism. Overall, I believe that these tensions emerge from Dale’s admirable struggle to walk the knife-edge in-between universalism and pluralism in his transpersonal vision, as well as perhaps from the ongoing revision of his approach as he completed the book. Although these three tensions are interrelated, for the sake of clarity I discuss each in a separate section.

Are There Universal Stages of Contemplative Development?

While championing a highly pluralistic account of spiritual development, Dale has concurrently proposed three quasi-universal stages of spiritual development, which are based on increasing merger with the object of contemplation and lead to a state “akin to the Eastern notion of meditative samadhi” (p. 177). Dale first stated that these stages “are common but not universal across traditions” (p. 176), but then wrote that they “provide a possible universal aspect of human spirituality” (p. 207). In addition, he added, “The final [contemplative] stage is similar between traditions and delivers many of the same experiential qualities, but does not share complete identity on a neurobiological level” (p. 229). Trying to reconcile these seemingly conflicting views, Dale wrote,
That a single invariant series of stages exists across cultures has been proven to be wrong…But that different lines of spiritual development lead to a summit with at least some shared characteristics is more defensible, and is compatible with traditional perennialism, as well as with Ferrer’s participatory approach. (p. 264)

While Dale’s stages are shared by contemplative traditions enacting a formless or nondual spiritual ultimate, as well as those aimed at achieving unitive absorption with the object of meditation, in my view they are far from being (even possibly) universal for human spiritual development. Indeed, Dale himself often argued in his book that such development follows a multiplicity of trajectories. I suspect that this issue derives from Dale’s arguably limited definition of “contemplative stages [as] stages in the development of unity between subject and object” (p. 177). One counterexample to his definition is found in the Christian mystical tradition (from which the term contemplatio was extrapolated to other traditions), where contemplative practice was typically aimed not at a mystical union with the object of contemplation (i.e., God), but at cultivating a “direct presence of God” (McGinn, 1991, p. xvii) that maintained the experiential and ontological gap between subject and object. Even for Pseudo-Dionysius, the soul’s participation in divine nature should not be mistaken with monistic nondual claims (McGinn & McGinn, 2003). Other alternatives to unitive contemplative endeavors include the Kabbalistic permutation of the letters and names of God (e.g., Idel, 1987), the shamanic journey to subtle worlds to obtain healing or divinatory information (e.g., Halifax, 1979), and Tibetan tantric practices aimed at visualizing those multidimensional embodiments of feminine wisdom known as dakinis (e.g., Simmer-Brown, 2002).

Furthermore, Dale’s experiential perennialism regarding the final contemplative stage rather unfortunately supports Smart’s (1980) widely discredited view that “phenomenologically, mysticism is everywhere the same” (p. 90). For many decades, modern scholars of mysticism have identified strong phenomenological differences among not only contemplative pathways but also contemplative endpoints (e.g., Fenton, 1995; Hollenback, 1996; Katz, 1978). In addition to privileging nondual, formless, and unitive contemplative paths over dual and visionary ones, Dale’s account resuscitates a deceased experiential perennialism that cannot stand the challenges raised by textual and phenomenological evidence.

Although I have argued that a strict adherence to stage models can potentially constrain the organic unfolding of one’s unique spiritual trajectory (Ferrer, 2002; see also Heron, 1998), I should clarify that I do not see any major problem with such models in the context of specific traditions that aim at the gradual attainment of a particular spiritual goal. In these contexts, distinctions between stages of the path can offer valuable signposts for practitioners insofar as they confirm being on the right track, alert the practitioner regarding stage-specific pitfalls, and so forth. Rather, problems emerge when one seeks to make the stages of a particular spiritual tradition (e.g., Advaita Vedanta or Christianity) or spiritual orientation (e.g., theistic, nondual, monist) paradigmatic for all (see Ferrer, 2002). Thus, whereas Dale’s proposed stages of contemplative development may indeed
be shared by traditions seeking unitive, nondual states with the object of contemplation, there are many other contemplative endeavors that do not pursue or achieve anything “akin to the Eastern notion of meditative samadhi” (p. 177). Therefore, I recommend that transpersonal scholars carry forward the important task of identifying commonalities among spiritual traditions while simultaneously honoring the important—and at times crucial—differences among them.

What Is the Ontological Nature of Spiritual Reality?

A second tension concerns Dale’s views about the ontological nature of spiritual reality. In explicit alignment with the participatory approach in transpersonal theory, Dale affirmed that “there is no ‘given’ spiritual reality” (p. 261). However, he also stated, “reality is objective, in the style described in the perennialist literature….All subjects [spiritual practitioners] draw towards the same peak, though none ever completely reach it” (pp. 192–193). Citing Huxley (1945) and Schuon (1953), Dale added, “Spiritual traditions converge as detailed in the various forms of the perennial philosophy” (p. 256). These arguably inconsistent statements give with one hand what they take with the other: If spiritual reality is not given, then it cannot be objective in the way perennialist authors conceive it (see Ferrer, 2000, 2002).

In addition, commenting on the unity versus plurality of spiritual ultimates, Dale wrote, “because spiritual reality is just a more accurate perception of physical reality, then there is only one reality, viewed firstly as secular and physical and then as spiritual with greater development” (p. 245). Although this account may be valid for certain worldly spiritualities (e.g., Zen or Taoism) in which enlightenment is said to reveal the deepest, spiritual dimension or transfiguration of the natural world (e.g., see Cook, 1989; Kohn & Miller, 2001), many traditions posit the existence of a multiplicity of subtle worlds whose identity with the physical world (however transfigured this may become after enlightenment) is far from self-evident (see Ferrer, forthcoming).

The plausible existence of a multiverse consisting of an indefinite number of perhaps-interrelated but independent realms or worlds (of which the physical universe is just one among many) also problematizes Dale’s proposal for a “twenty-first century perennial philosophy” (p. 252) based on the future convergence of all sciences and religions. He wrote, “the scientific and the religious, converge on a similar expression of reality because they express the same reality in different ways” (p. 251). I suspect that this subtle “objectivist” allegiance to a single spiritual reality (ultimately equivalent to physical reality) lurks behind Dale’s view that many religious truths are merely “subjective.” Concerning particular religious truths not shared by all traditions, he pointed out, “they are still truths, but they are truths of a subjective rather than objective nature, open to individual rather than universal confirmation” (p. 263). As I have argued elsewhere (Ferrer, 2002, forthcoming), a participatory approach overcomes the Cartesian subjective/objective dichotomy through an extended enactive paradigm of cognition that holds spiritual truths to be simultaneously subjective and objective, or, in a word, participatory (cf. Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013; Heron, 2006; Irwin, 2008; Kripal, 2010).
Significantly, Dale’s insistence that his proposed single spiritual reality is not pregiven—but rather cocreated in the encounter of individual subjects and object—substantially relaxes this possible, residual objectivism. This subject–object codetermination naturally results in a myriad of spiritual perspectives that, for Dale, will always “remain situated, open to refinement, and ever-incomplete” (p. 261)—a view I find both cogent and consistent with the participatory approach.7

This multi-perspectival account of spirituality is related to Dale’s criteria for “superior and inferior religions” (p. 261). For Dale, “superior” religions are those capable of not only effecting higher degrees of human growth in all developmental lines, but also embracing the highest number of spiritual viewpoints enacted at any point in history. In his words, “The tradition that succeeds in coordinating the maximum number of perspectives will have the most accurate overall view of the nature and variety of spiritual disclosures at a certain time” (p. 297). Although it is increasingly possible to see signs of Dale’s coordination of diverse spiritual truths and practices in the contemporary interreligious dialogue (e.g., Gross & Muck, 2003; Lanzetta, 2007; Sharma, 2005), I wonder whether Dale’s cumulative (and, possibly, somewhat quantitative) view of the “highest” spiritual truth may reveal his pledge to both a subtle objectivism and a promissory perennialism.

Do not misunderstand—I deeply value contemporary interreligious exchanges and hybridizations (e.g., doctrinal, practical, visionary; see Arévalo, 2012; Ferrer, 2010), and have previously argued that historical religions have cultivated different human potentials (or developmental lines) and can therefore enrich one another (Ferrer, 2010, 2012). Whereas I feel enthusiastic about the implications of Dale’s coordination approach for interreligious relations, I worry that holding the “superior” tradition as the one able to include all others brings back a problematic perennialist inclusivism, in which a single tradition (with its favored spiritual ultimate) claims to encompass all others, but not vice versa (for discussions, see Duckworth, 2014; Ferrer, 2002, 2010; Halbfass, 1991). Perhaps an emerging, plural, global spirituality might be in the future capable of coordinating all spiritual viewpoints without falling into such ideological traps, but I take this ideal to be more regulative than practically reachable.

As he was completing his book, Dale and I had several collegial exchanges about central aspects of his work. Regarding the criteria for qualitative distinctions in spirituality, I have opted to defend that (a) all traditions can become equally holistic and emancipatory on their own terms—that is, without the need to include other traditions or account for the existence of all posited subtle worlds (I call this potential the equiplurality principle; see Ferrer, 2011a, forthcoming); and (b) the “superior” traditions are those capable of more fully liberating individuals from egoism in integrated ways that are sensitive to the eco-socio-political challenges of modern times (Ferrer, 2002, 2011a, forthcoming). I think Dale would agree with (b) although perhaps not with (a); for example, he may press further than I do regarding the import of some form of overall spiritual ontology in the articulation of these criteria and associated assessments—surely a fertile ground for future dialogue.
Is Neo-Kantian Perennialism Suitable for Transpersonal Philosophy?

A third, related issue is Dale's apparent commitment to neo-Kantian perennialism. In this regard, he wrote, "the structure-of-the-whole [the highest form of organismic and cognitive organization] grows ever-closer to reality, but it can never reach reality as reality is unknowable except through the subject, and the perceptual constructions of the subject are constantly changing" (p. 192). Similarly, he stated, "What reality is, independent of the subject, cannot be known" (p. 193). In addition to imposing a dualistic Western epistemology/ontology upon the world's religions—many of which do claim that reality can be directly known (Ferrer, 2014, forthcoming; King, 1999)—this formulation perpetuates the neo-Kantian alienation from reality that participatory, embodied, and enactive accounts of spiritual cognition arguably overcome (Ferrer, 2014; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Tarnas, 1991; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991).

Building on both the enactive paradigm and its rejection of representational theories of knowledge (Frisina, 2002), I maintain that in the same way a person is her own actions, the mystery is its enactions. Not positing a supra-ultimate spiritual referent beyond its specific enactions has two very important consequences. First, this approach preserves the ontological ultimacy of those enactions (e.g., God, emptiness, Tao, Brahman) in their respective spiritual universes, avoiding the neo-Kantian demotion of those ultimates to penultimate stations (e.g., Nah, 2013). Second, it short-circuits the feasibility of promoting one tradition as objectively superior (i.e., holding the most accurate picture of the mystery), excising ontological competitiveness at its root and settling one of the main challenges of religious pluralism (see Ferrer, 2008, forthcoming).

To summarize this discussion so far, while I believe that Dale's transpersonal psychological paradigm represents a genuine advance in transpersonal thinking, his transpersonal philosophy may not have fully exorcised the modern Cartesian-Kantian spell from which participatory thinking claims to break free (Ferrer, 2002, 2014, forthcoming; Tarnas, 1991). In my view, a complete transcendence of the Cartesian-Kantian paradigm (see Tarnas, 1991) would make Dale's project more genuinely pluralistic, emancipatory, and, perhaps, even more coherent.

Implications and Continuing Conversation

Despite the potential tensions discussed above, I believe that Dale successfully achieved his main goal of accounting "for a pluralistic transpersonal developmental framework in line with evolutionary developmental biology and neo-Piagetian psychology" (p. 272). The implications of Dale's nonlinear paradigm for transpersonal understanding and research are vast; for example, his work resolves lasting debates on transpersonal development and illuminates recent discussions on the role of quantitative science in transpersonal psychology (e.g., Ferrer, 2014; Friedman, 2002, 2013; MacDonald, 2013). In addition, Dale's approach to religious pluralism honors both the multiplicity (and increasing diversification) of spiritual truths and realities,
and the possibility of their convergence—not as a result of their synthesis, but of the coordination of multiple spiritual viewpoints. His call to collaboration among religious traditions also deserves to be taken seriously: “Through a cooperative inquiry, spiritual traditions can between them coordinate the fullest possible knowledge of the spiritual universe” (p. 298; see Heron, 1996, 1998). In sum, Dale’s Completing Piaget’s Project is a groundbreaking book that deserves to be not only widely read and discussed, but also used as textbook in courses on transpersonal psychology, developmental theories, and the philosophy of religious pluralism. I look forward to learning from Dale’s work as he further develops it in light of the appreciative reception and constructive criticism it is likely to receive from transpersonal scholars—this essay is hopefully just the beginning of the conversation.

NOTES

1 Although I do not think it is an oversight that damages the main theses of the book, Dale could have addressed the well-known cross-cultural criticisms of the universality of Piaget’s developmental model. Whereas Piaget’s (1923/1926, 1926/1960) first three cognitive stages have been documented cross-culturally (even though they often emerge at different rates across cultures; see Dassen, 1994), such is not the case regarding Piaget’s fourth-and-final stage of abstract, hypothetical thought linked to Western scientific reasoning—a skill not valued or pursued by many non-Western cultures (see Matsumoto & Juang, 2008). This important anomaly brings into question Dale’s statement that “Piagetian lines emerge and progress in all global societies” (p. 185)—unless by global he meant “modern” and “Western.” See also Flanagan (1991) for a classical critique of Piaget’s stage model of cognitive development.

2 Despite Wilber’s (2000) assertion that his approach is nonlinear due to affirming the common asynchrony among developmental lines, Dale argued that Wilber’s (2000, 2006) works are “the epitome of the [linear] statistical averaging approach” (p. 135). Indeed, Wilber’s (2006) defense of an invariant sequence of universal, deep spiritual structures (psychic/subtle/causal/nondual) renders his model fundamentally linear (Ferrer, 2011b, forthcoming). A major problem with Wilber’s (2000, 2006) approach, Dale wrote, is that “whenever attempts are made to fit nonlinear patterns into linear frameworks, the resulting picture becomes overcomplicated and fragmented” (p. 135).


5 Dale suggested that the cladogenetic view is consistent with my own (Ferrer, 2011b) use of the image of the rhizome (after Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to convey the dynamics of spiritual evolution. He added, “The transpersonal field...took a cladogenetic approach in Ferrer [2002], even if he did not use a biological framework” (p. 224).

6 Note that many traditions reject the idea of a gradual approach to liberation—and thus the very existence of stages in the path. For valuable discussions of gradual versus sudden approaches to enlightenment, see Gregory (1987), Rawlinson (1997), and Schlamm (2001).

7 I am assuming that Dale wrote “ever-incomplete” (p. 261) in the sense that most spiritual perspectives can be complemented and enriched by other spiritual enactions. In the context of the enactions of spiritual ultimates, however, I maintain that they all can be (potentially) equally complete on their own (Ferrer, 2008, 2011a, forthcoming). Furthermore, if Dale’s “ever-incomplete” insinuated Cartesian-Kantian connotations (e.g., as incomplete parts of an existing whole or incomplete phenomenal versions of a noumenal reality), his view would not be consistent with the participatory approach (for further discussion, see Is Neo-Kantian Perennialism Suitable for Transpersonal Philosophy?).

8 Although, in general, Dale may have expressed ideas in Cartesian and Kantian terms, there are some interesting ideas, potentially easy to miss with quick read of the book, that describe an alternative approach. Before submitting this article for printing, I was privileged to have discussions with Dale in which he drew my attention to his account of a “non-Cartesian teleonomy” (pp. 290-293) that provides a mathematical basis for a model of the evolution of religions, which can be either convergent or divergent. The convergent model states that religions need not converge because they draw close to anything pregiven; instead, they converge due to the inherent properties of mathematical systems. Dale stressed that this approach is neither Kantian nor Cartesian, as there is
nothing “out there” that is reflected upon by the individual or shapes her development. He thought that these ideas could be a fruitful area for transpersonal and religious studies scholars to explore and did not want them to be overlooked. Dale also stated that he believes there is value to both Cartesian/Kantian and non-Cartesian/non-Kantian approaches to spirituality, and that he had tried to include ideas that would be useful for both perspectives.

In this regard, Dale distinguished between empirical-positivist and participatory-non-Cartesian research approaches in transpersonal psychology. According to Dale, empirical positivism derives from analytical philosophy and is linked to the empirical work of Transcendental Meditation (TM) researchers (e.g., Alexander, Heaton, & Chandler, 1994) and Wilber’s (2000, 2006) transpersonal approach, while participatory non-Cartesianism stems from continental philosophy and is associated with the work of Heron (1992, 2006), Tarnas (1991), Ferrer (2002), and Hartelius (Hartelius, 2006; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013), among others. For a paper elaborating further on this theme, see Cunningham (2015).

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The Author

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The Reviewer


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This unique book, The Creative Artist, Mental Disturbance and Mental Health, by Elliot Benjamin, Ph.D., should perhaps be classified as autoethnography and is a very readable gift of personal sharing and artistic promise. Here one finds theory, personal contemplation over a few decades, sections of a novel, and vivid in the moment notes from his creative and adventurous son, also leading the creative artistic life in a society that doesn’t always encourage it. Both are clearly persons of exceptional creative talent and complexity—and of persistence and strength. As Dr. Benjamin (with Ph.D.’s in both math and psychology, who taught math for over 20 years at the college level) said years before, in a letter to his yet unborn son, he wished him the “joys of being

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‘yourself, i.e., to know what it means to life an authentic life where you are true to your own dreams and ambitions” (p. 61).

As Dr. Benjamin, this creative artist/mathematician/musician/philosopher/psychologist/author, also found, this authenticity can be vital to one’s connection with others (in his own life and his son’s), and can lead to exceptional moments whether with family, friends, or one’s life partner. Surely there is health here. Yet making it a mainstay of one’s life, in our consensual reality and our current culture, may not always be that easy. Out of this conviction came Dr. Benjamin’s own skill learning and educational, psychoeducational, and supportive program, the Natural Dimension; we see alternative trajectories along a humanistic and transpersonal path. Among other things, his overarching model became a viable aftercare path for some patients leaving more traditional mental health programs.

Yet finding and sharing our self and path is hard enough for anyone whose felt creative task is to reveal an inner world that even minimally challenges the status quo; there are many forces arrayed against such a change in the larger world, as this reviewer, for one, has expressed. Dr. Benjamin expresses this powerfully in terms of his “reality argument,” where we are called to do the practical, the lucrative, and very much the expected. He, himself, could teach mathematics—dealing with the practical world—although, there too, he did find colorful ways to inject creative methods into the programme. Not to mention, in his larger life, philosophy and music. He found it quite natural to inject another world, one of elegance and beauty, into the picture. He was drawn to a wish to “taste of ‘higher’ worlds.” Yet the role, and the task, isn’t always one of beauty, nor of escape. Nor is everyone at a higher level of psycho-social-spiritual development.

Further, not every creator is called to take this particular path. Sometimes the creative artist, committed to a path of vision, takes a role of truth teller more than visionary, poignant teller of bitter truths that others prefer to skip, or deny (along with most of society). He or she, as an artist friend of mine put it, is often “the canary in the coal mine.” Not only more sensitive to what’s going on, but also at times more readily injured by it as well Some real dangers and challenges here. It surely can help to have support, and role models and encouragement, as we indeed see here in what father is offering son. But one must not think all is euphoria. There may be such moments, as the son delightfully remembers from his youth. But it is not the whole picture.

All the more, then, strength and overriding purpose are needed if there are mental health challenges to address, particularly in a world that can pathologize difference, of whatever sort, healthy or not. Some of us have in fact asked for a different definition of “normal,” including this author in the steps of the legendary Frank Barron, since what is most common (one type of norm) may not in fact be the healthiest -- at all. This is very much what we are hearing here, in terms of conformity to social norms. At one extreme we have a mindless automaton, following conventional rules, by contrast with a very present, aware, insightful, and risk-taking artist, a higher ideal if not a statistical

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“norm.” Dr. Benjamin has called society, at times, crazy. I have done so as well!

Fortunately, the author does not fall into the trap of romanticizing illness (or saying it is de facto creative in itself) or that all who create are ill or vice versa. It is definitely not “the sicker the better.” He acknowledges there are many roads to creativity. One must still keep in mind that there are many types of creative artists and motives for creating. Of particular importance, health is the overriding message. How tragic the consequences for some who have idealized illness. Yet on the upward path, some may indeed reach heights of Maslow’s (1968) “self-actualizing” creativity, as suggested here, it is not all. Dr. Benjamin mentions that, at times, “a fine line” may divide the creative artist and the mentally disturbed person. Yet, let us look more carefully here.

Some truth can be found, but it seems vital to clarify that this is in comparing specific pieces of a complex human picture, and not necessarily the totality, or the delicate balance and conditions that produced them. Dr. Benjamin was once fortunate to converse at great length with philosopher Ken Wilber (1995), who was intrigued by Dr. Benjamin’s thinking and also influenced it considerably, including the Natural Dimension. This contact led to many of Dr. Benjamin’s later publications. However, Wilber has also made this same point in a spiritual context: Advanced spiritual development may at times resemble more primitive patterns (pre/trans fallacy), yet the context and significance can be totally different. They may all look like oranges but in fact they are apples and oranges.

Despite findings of above average rates of psychopathology (and particularly mood disorders, with evidence as well for schizophrenia spectrum disorders) among artists—often among the eminent (thus we cannot automatically say the same for everyday people) —the literature does suggest high creativity is much more about health than illness. (Plus there are other paths, not at all about illness.) Here, creativity tends to peak—where mental disturbance is present at all, in individuals or in families, especially in research on people in the bipolar and schizophrenia spectra. Creativity peaks during during better functioning periods. And, as a corollary, getting treatment can—not only be lifesaving in some cases but also can— enhance creativity.

One may speak of creativity as a compensatory advantage, and there is good everyday creativity data we (e.g., colleagues Dennis Kinney and others at Harvard) and others have to support this. Indeed it can be a major strength in situations of risk, allowing perspective, alternatives, transformations of a situation; one finds a delicate balance of the forces that open one to inspiration, balanced by the control factors or executive functions that can shape this to adaptive ends. This is what the neo-Freudians earlier called “regression in the service of the ego.” This is the Freudian “ego” used in the sense of “adaptation to reality.” Dr. Benjamin mentions “ego strength” (p. 57) as well. This is the ego-strength we wish some teenagers would show more strongly, or show more often. In high level creators, the overarching control
may fluctuate, allowing certain flights of fancy, and even, and by deliberate choice, the taking of psychological residence (think of the novelist) in alternative worlds. Yet ultimately, and when needed, that loose overriding control is always there.

What we see in these rich personal journeys and reflections are, first, Dr. Benjamin’s own thoughtful conclusions on relations between arts, mental health, mental disturbance, spirituality and other factors. A positive trajectory of overcoming is seen to include the author’s brother, who is viewed as manifesting “self-actualization” despite obstacles. This includes the interesting issue, later overcome in a more transpersonal context, of what he calls egoism. Let us put our pointer again on “ego-strength.” It is not or need not be “all about me,” but we do need to strengthen qualities of the self. Beyond this, mental health is here defined, in higher developmental terms, ethically and psychologically. For this purpose of intentions, we are not necessarily speaking of all artists, either, but of a more prodigious subset—and could it perhaps even be a trajectory for some artists who persist? Some of us have thought so. See Maslow’s (1968) “deficiency” and “being” needs as applied to creativity.

Dr. Benjamin’s essays of personal reflection elaborate on certain themes, and very much his semi-autobiographical novel (excerpted here). How marvelous, too, to have a mathematician-author who is also an artist and a musician and...can speak to us in so many languages and ways of knowing. Then, in son Jeremy’s story, one hears in his own words (and lived in his own way), the brave persistence in a tough and demanding first year as creator and actor in Los Angeles, and the eccentricity that both helps him to cope and may be misunderstood. Let one not automatically pathologize anxieties, late nights, excess energy— but celebrate it, particularly when enacted in the service of those overriding goals. Here, indeed, is that balance of creative talent with the strength, grit, gumption, and resilience, to succeed. And, happily, some initial success, after the first year. May this prodigious young man go on to do very well indeed.

Ultimately, Dr. Benjamin wisely recommends education, counseling, and supportive and insightful resources (such as he himself started) to provide skills, perspective, encouragement and understanding of a different artistic world and worldview, perspectives which a creative artist may need and not find as readily in the conventional world—a world which must still be maneuvered successfully. For Dr. Benjamin, as well, being a “philosopher in life” has helped him see a larger picture and keep his own perspective. He hopes that this heartfelt, authentic, and very personal series of accounts, contextualized with his own exploration of the field, its literature, and its voices, has also helped in “loosening the bonds between the creative artist and mental disturbance, and of honoring my family heritage” (p. 399). I would say it has surely done so. May its insights further help open the doors to creativity for all of us.
REFERENCES


The Author

Elliot Benjamin, Ph.D., is a philosopher, mathematician, psychologist, musician, writer, teacher and counselor, with Ph.D.’s in both psychology and mathematics, with numerous publications in humanistic and transpersonal psychology, and over 20 years of college teaching experience in mathematics. He is currently Director of online education in transpersonal psychology at Akamai University.

The Reviewer

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“And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.”

— Genesis 11:1

For those who have yet to discover the work of Leo Schaya (1916–1986),¹ he is no outsider to Judaism; in fact, he was born into a family with Hasidic roots and with
rabbis in their ancestry, received a traditional Jewish upbringing, and remained attuned with the quintessence of the Jewish tradition until his death. Some readers may recall that he is the author of the much-acclaimed book The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah (1958), and was for a time editor of the French journal Études Traditionnelles (“Traditional Studies”) and founding editor of Connaissance des Religions (“Knowledge of Religions”). This new volume, which is only his second book to be published in English, Universal Aspects of the Kabbalah and Judaism, is a collection of Schaya’s writings on the central theme of the “universal aspects” revealed in Judaism, yet present in all the great religious traditions. This book also includes an informative Preface by the Editor Roger Gaetani, and a Forward by Patrick Laude, a distinguished perennialist writer; both of these pieces contribute important analyses of Schaya’s work.

According to Jewish mystical exegesis, the one “language” of the above passage from the Torah may be understood as a direct reference to the unanimous tradition found not only within the Abrahamic monotheisms of—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—but all sapiential traditions of the East and West. It is from this departure that one is able to comprehend certain contentions that exist between the religions in their outer forms. Each religion in its orthodoxy confirms its own validity, and logically so, because it is addressing its own community, and until recently did not need to validate the truth of other religions.

It is in the modern and postmodern world that an unprecedented phenomenon has emerged where diverse beliefs now find themselves living beside one another, unlike any other era before, indicative of the urgent need for a deeper religious pluralism with better delineated bridges between faiths. To understand the relationship between human diversity and religious pluralism, one can greatly benefit from the integral framework informed by the perennial philosophy in order to make the forms of religion intelligible to one’s own faith tradition. It is not enough to know that people have different faiths; one must know why they differ and simultaneously what unifies them at their metaphysical roots. Through this framework human diversity is reflected in religious pluralism, and it is in this dissociation from the sacred that we become estranged from our own natures as beings created “in God’s image,” and from our common spiritual heritage as Schaya illustrates:

[H]uman unity, initially traditional, by raising such a revolt against the divine Unity, compelled the latter to break it into ethnic fragments, dispersed over the entire earth and henceforth opposed one to another; and this through a lack of understanding caused by the confusion, or more precisely by the differentiation of their ‘language’ or single tradition into several ‘languages’ or divergent traditions, but with a foundation that remains unanimous thanks to its divine essence. (p. 10)

A considerable obstacle in understanding religion today is the rise of secularism, religious fundamentalism and New Age pseudo-religions that concurrently obscure and disfigure what religion means in its fullness. This is precisely why religion whose inner dimensions are neglected cannot reveal its
corresponding transcendent and universal dimension. A unique and paramount feature of this work under review is its exploration of the Jewish tradition by way of its mystical roots, which simultaneously elucidates its common ground with other religions. Although the mainstream media mistakenly confounds the distinction between the Jewish tradition with the identity and activities of the secular State of Israel, this is erroneous, for Judaism is not Zionism. This false premise has had and continues to have horrific consequences, not only for the plight of the Palestinians but for Jews, Christians and Muslims everywhere. In realizing that each religion has its temporal manifestation, and has been disclosed to different human communities in accordance to their needs and capacities, we are better able to discern the pre-temporal source of the unanimous tradition from which they derive: “What is fundamentally true of Judaism is also true of all genuine religions and traditions: there is but one Absolute, one Real, one God, the basis of all the revelations and their formal antinomies, the basis of all apparent dualism” (p. 26). Schaya once responded to a seeker by way of alluding to the Unity found at the heart of all authentic religions: “We are unconditional devotees of the Absolute!” (Nous sommes des inconditionnels de l’Absolu!) (p. xiii). For, according to Schaya, each revelation aspires “to spiritualize man and finally reintegrate him with the Divine Absolute” (p. 1).

At the cornerstone of Schaya’s work, two distinct and yet complementary facets of religion are at the foreground of the entire work, namely the outer and inner dimensions, for both are essential in understanding each revelation in its own and shared context. It is through the exoteric (or the outer) dimension that the wayfarer can prepare for the esoteric (or the inner) dimension. Although all paths ultimately lead to the Divine, we cannot circumvent the religious forms to access their interior, as we must travel one of those paths that have been readied and time-honored through the saints and sages of a particular tradition. It is in this context that we can better understand the esoteric dimension within the Jewish tradition, specifically as it applies to the Kabbalah:

The word qibbel, ‘he received’—as in the term qabbalah—is derived from qabbel, which means ‘to receive,’ but also ‘to welcome’ and ‘to accept,’ and implies also the ideas of being ‘face to face with’ or ‘in the presence of’ (haqbel, qabbal); here, it indicates direct reception of divine revelation by the man who is ready to accept it, to welcome it, standing before the Revelation’s very source, in His very Presence, which brings enlightenment and redemption. (p. 48)

Although the mistaken belief is rampant that religion is man-made, there is in fact nothing within religion that can be deemed to be a product of the human mind, for this would disavow transcendence and its essential importance to spiritual realization. Even though religion has been negatively labeled “organized religion,” and not without some cause due to the antagonism it has faced and continues to face in the contemporary world, we must turn our minds once again to the original function of religion itself. In order to understand what religion signifies in lieu of present-day biases, we must return to the etymological root of the English word “religion” from the Latin religare,
meaning to “to re-bind,” or “to bind back,” by implication to the Divine or the Supreme Identity. For this reason the popular thesis asserting “Spiritual but not religious,” which now has its own acronym “SBNR,” is not only a sign of the times, but an impossible feat since the human individual cannot transcend him or herself without access to what is beyond the human state.

We cannot enact the Psalmist’s injunction to “take off the veil from mine eyes…” (119:18) without first adhering to an authentic religious form. The veil exists for the protection of the seeker and cannot be lifted prematurely without grave consequences, and this is articulated in various ways through the traditional exegeses. In the same way that we give common courtesy to a friend by entering the house through the front and not the back door, we must likewise embark on the spiritual path through one of the revealed traditions and not attempt to access its precinct without the consent and blessing of the religion. The relevance of the Kabbalah for the Jewish tradition is of utmost importance in this context, inasmuch as the exoteric and esoteric domains are inseparable from the revelation of the Torah which Moses received on Mount Sinai:

Moses, [and with him the whole of Israel,] received (qibbel = qabbalah) the written [and spoken] Torah on the summit of Mount Sinai; he transmitted it [with all its basic interpretations, rules, and levels of sacred exegesis, both esoteric and exoteric] to Joshua; Joshua transmitted it to the Elders, the leaders to the Prophets, and the Prophets transmitted it to the men of the Great Synagogue. (Pirkei Avot 1:1) (p. 63)

Through the spiritual hermeneutics of the perennial philosophy, the exoteric and esoteric domains meet one another in the Jewish tradition, in what Schaya terms the “inward Sinai.” In participating in these two domains the traveler may acquire the direct perception that “God is hidden in everything He creates” and also, “The entire creation is an illusory projection of the transcendental aspects of God into the ‘mirror’ of His immanence” (p. 94). Through this framework the Divine forms become transparent and the Semitic monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam converge with the revelations of the East in the affirmation of the “One without second.” The connection between the Torah and the Kabbalah is made in the following analogy contained in the Zohar and it more broadly in principle is analogous to the underlying realities found in the various traditions:

The foolish see only the clothing of a man; if it is beautiful, the wearer is also beautiful. But the clothing covers something even more precious, and that is the soul. The Torah also has a body, which is the commandments [objects of the Halakhah]…it also has raiment, and those are the narrations corresponding to the Haggadah which, from one point of view, is inferior to the Halakhah, and, from another, superior….. Finally the Torah has a soul which has penetrated by those who were present near Mount Sinai, that is the fundamental root of all things, the real Torah [the real, revealing, and redeeming Presence of God, which is realized directly by the Kabbalah]. (3:152a) (pp. 64–65)
In fact this symbolism could be extended to the meaning of the human body according to the Kabbalah: “God created the human body ‘in His image,’ the image of the infinite ‘Body’ of the ten Sefirot, so that man, realizing his ‘deiformity’ can return from his ‘fall-point’ to his supreme starting point” (p. 71).

Schaya demonstrates that the Jewish tradition may be viewed symbolically as, “man—personified in Moses—ascending towards God while raising the fallen world with him so as to unite everything with the One at the summit of the Mountain of Illumination” (p. 8). In contradistinction, the Christian tradition may be viewed as “God descend[ing] into the world, incarnate as man, to bear his sins, to atone for him, to be assimilated by him, until ‘man becomes God’” (p. 8). For this reason Christianity was contrasted with Judaism, in an astute statement made in the Middle Ages: “The teaching [or doctrine] of Moses conceals what the teaching of Christ reveals.” (Moydis doctrina velat quod Christi doctrina revelat.) In the final disclosure of the Abrahamic monotheisms, the Islamic tradition has been articulated as “man is obedient to the One until his extinction in Him who is ‘God in Heaven and God on Earth’” (p. 8). Islam, Schaya informs readers, facilitates a unique role as its last revelation in the current temporal cycle, “Islam…actualizes…the religio perennis” and moreover:

Islam is the ‘last point’ of the present circle or cycle of revelations—sealed by the ‘Seal of the Prophets,’ Muhammad—the final point which rejoins the primordial Point, the One revealing Himself to the whole of Humanity. This is why the religion of Muhammad confirms all earlier true beliefs, which it represents as both the everlasting quintessence and the final synthesis. (p. 155)

From this point of view one can better contextualize Islam’s criticism of Jews and Christians as it relates to their deviations from the pure monotheism of Abraham; however, Islam does not dispute the validity of these traditions as they are both revealed expressions of the One.

It is at the culmination of the temporal cycle known in Hinduism as the Kali-Yuga, a principle not uncommon throughout the religions of the world, that we observe the human collectivity situated furthest away from the Divine radiance: “The traditions declare that we are now in the last age” (p. 42).

Another universal facet found not only in Judaism but in all of the sapiential traditions is the spiritual method of invocation of the Divine Name as prescribed at the end of the temporal cycle: “The Divine Name must be kept holy continuously and, in principle, it unites man with God at all times. Every day of his life, man must invoke the Name which saves and delivers him, and which so fills him with the Divine Presence that It abides, remains, and acts within him as a living temple” (p. 56). It may possibly be the loss of the invocation of the Name YHVH that brought about the many punishments and deprivations, not to mention the loss of immanent union with the Divine that befell the Israelites.
Schaya poses question of utmost relevance in these desacralized times which confronts the modern mind to step back away from itself so that it can envision a resacralized world, a world that would recover its center: “If all men were immersed in contemplation of the only Truth and only Reality, where would the problems of humanity be? And if all those who have become incapable of such contemplation were to pray, if they were to serve the contemplatives and follow their advice, where would their difficulties be?” (p. 178). Schaya, in accord with the religious and spiritual traditions, goes on to state, unequivocally, that “the true destiny of man is contemplation” (p. 178). In commencing all activity through the contemplation of these integral metaphysical principles, we can ourselves return to the source of all that is.

It is clear that we can no longer turn our backs on the urgent need for thoughtful rather than superficial religious pluralism. It is easy to see that the consequences of doing so are far too great and that the human collectivity is already bearing witness to horrific events done in the name of religion.

From the myriad writings to appear on the subject of the Kabbalah, Leo Schaya’s are some of the most referenced. This is for a good reason, as they continuously plumb the rich well of the Torah, and particularly its mystical dimension, in order to illuminate the fullness of the Jewish tradition. It is through works such as these that we can comprehend what we all share in common, but also how best to view our differences—namely, through the principle of unity in diversity. Schaya has provided contemporaries with an unerring compass, one which, if heeded, may, through the application of universal metaphysical principles, guide us through many of the pressing dilemmas confronting the modern and postmodern world. It is in times like these that we are especially reminded of the adage of the Kabbalists, which is also true for the perennial philosophy, “it is better to divulge Wisdom than to forget it.” It is our hope that this new collection of Schaya’s work will allow readers who are within the fold of Judaism, as well as those from other faiths, to perceive the reality of our common heritage in the One, and then to think and act accordingly as a consequence. “Lift up your eyes on high and behold who has created these [things]” (Isaiah 40:26).

**NOTE**


**The Author and Editor**

*Leo Schaya* (1916–1986) was born in Switzerland, where he received a traditional Jewish upbringing. From his early youth he devoted himself to the study of the great metaphysical doctrines of East and West, particularly the works of neo-Platonism, Sufism and Advaita Vedanta. Along with some other writers in the Traditionalist/Perennialist school, Schaya is noted for his grasp of sometimes difficult metaphysical concepts and his ability to summarize and interpret the writings of ancient and medieval sages for current readers. He was
for a time editor of the French journal Études Traditionnelles and founding editor of Connaissance des Religions. He published several articles on the metaphysical and esoteric wisdom of the Jewish Kabbalah, as well as a perspicacious book on the subject entitled The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah (1958), which remains one of the most often quoted books on the subject. He also wrote a book on the Sufi doctrine of unity, La doctrine soufi de l’unite (1962).

Roger Gaetani is an editor, educator, and student of world religions who lives in Bloomington, Indiana. He has co-edited, with Jean-Louis Michon, the World Wisdom anthology on Sufism, Sufism: Love and Wisdom. He directed and produced the DVD compilation of highlights of the 2006 conference on Traditionalism, Tradition in the Modern World: Sacred Web 2006 Conference, and has edited the book A Spirit of Tolerance: The Inspiring Life of Tierno Bokar by Amadou Hampâté Bâ. He also translated (from the original French) and edited the book Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam, by Eric Geoffroy. He seeks to publish materials that edify, inspire, and lead to very real individual growth.

The Reviewer

Samuel Bendek Sotillos, M.A., CPRP, MHRS, is a Board Affiliate of the Association for Humanistic Psychology (AHP), an Advisor to the Institute of Traditional Psychology and has worked for several years in the field of mental health, covering a broad spectrum of disorders in various psychiatric settings. He has published in numerous journals, including Sacred Web, Sophia, Parabola, Resurgence, Temenos Academy Review, Studies in Comparative Religion and is the editor of Psychology and the Perennial Philosophy. He lives on the Central Coast of California.

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Sleuthing Hagiography, The Poignant Self, and A Charismatic Future for Modern Postural Yoga . . .

Three Riffs Upon

The “Yoga Sutra of Patanjali”: A Biography Homage to Author David Gordon White Yoga Historian, Avandhana Yogi, Mortal Being
Avandhana is citta’s (mind-stuff’s) innate capacities of concentration, cognition and learning, logical reasoning, detailed memory, intellectual and aesthetic creativity, scholarly-dazzle, and good humor, taken to extraordinary levels. Think of avandhana as the “good thinking powers” within citta that are typically marginalized as being merely diversionary siddhis (psychic powers) in favor of the au courant pop, “sheer emptiness-fullness-enlightenment” meme.1

The greatest living avandhana master is Dr. R. Ganesh who can engage with over one-hundred simultaneous questioners on diverse topics (biology, chemistry, physics, computer science, extemporaneous poetics, technicalities of grammar, Vedic scriptures, current affairs and many more) in eight languages with sporadic, intentionally off-throwing interruptions, returning to the exact point of his answer prior to each sudden, zig-zagging question-switch (with characteristic humor and wit) and sustained for days, including for twenty-four continuous hours at a stretch. According to Dr. Ganesh, each avandhana event is also understood as “a sacred worship where the onlookers are the Gods themselves...” As wavy hip-hop culture would say, Respect, Dr. Ganesh, Respect (http://tinyurl.com/oayh7nw).

As a multi-lingual, myriad-details-ferreting yoga historian, David Gordon White possesses a variety of these avandhana skills, perhaps even as a “sacred worshiper” who reverentially considers his readers and colleagues as truth-loving “Gods themselves.”

In this case, however, The “Yoga Sutra of Patanjali”: A Biography reveals this so-modernly worshiped, “foundational-status” text of asana-yoga, The Yoga Sutra (YS) itself, to be a falsely canonized prophet--a minor acolyte-text, perhaps, and more of a Buddhist-hybrid than asana-yogic, at that, and puffed up with modern postural yoga (MPY) lore—appropriately deflated to size by the exacting and erudite efforts-toward-scholarly-truth of the historian of religion.

White’s three years of sifting through Sanskrit texts and text-catalogs, Indo-Tibet maps and travel routings, historical-political concurrences and a seven-hundred year evidentiary gap with his sustained academic objectivity (an avandhana meditative skill, for sure) deserves to be reckoned with by any reader—as much as the literary-biography he has produced. Perhaps moreso than the book he has produced—surely “lives” are pre-eminent over mere livres, as Maugham’s “Larry” also shows us in his “razor’s edge” yogic discernment that it is better to burn (nirodha is, likewise, a “discerning-burning up” process) scriptural-worded parchments to activate their stored-up, solar-energetic warmth than to freeze to death, gripping them tightly.

Yes, the fleeting subjective-actuality of Dr. David White (and thus, each of us) is the ever-elusive, “citta-crux of it all.” As wavy, difference-bridging, hip-hop culture declares: Respect, Dr. White, Respect. Indeed, Respect to All!

Consider the painstaking, cross-referencing work involved in this tiny glimpse into a few months of Professor White’s three-year research. Then multiply by five hundred or so (as his book-length-exceeding online—“invisible,” White
calls them—Notes impressively persuade us). Then add in the decades of academic training required for any specialist to even get to this point (similar to the myriad thousands of hours involved in pursuing yogic attainments, in these impermanent, fleeting lives) to sense the Respect trope I offer him for this scholarly tour de force of avandhana service for us all.

I had this idea that maybe I should quantify the importance of this text by counting manuscripts. And that was a light bulb moment. I spent much of that summer ordering manuscript catalogues from everywhere, and tabulating the number of manuscripts on the different philosophical schools. It was by doing that [avandhanic, yet, tedious-sounding, concentration task] that I came to clearly see that at the time that Colebrooke wrote his 1823 essay there were virtually no Yoga Sutra manuscripts around. There were oodles of manuscripts from the five other “standard” Hindu schools, with the exception of Samkhya. Yoga and Samkhya were the two neglected orphans of Indian philosophy. So once I realized that it wasn’t an important part of the Indian philosophical landscape at the turn of the nineteenth century, I had kind of a pivot to work off of. I have never started a book with the intention of debunking what everyone else had written before me, but it seems like that’s what I always end up doing.

(David Gordon White, interview with Yoga Teacher Magazine, Retrieved from http://www.yoga teachermagazinecom/content/david-gordon-white)

I

Historical-Truth Reductions of Overblown Hagiography and Nimble Narrative Tells

For the historian, every significant published evidentiary claim, text, commentary, historical circumstance, letter, visa-arrangement and travel plan must be re-examined. And, yes, where a “received history of what everyone else has written” once stood, hagiography (followers’ aggrandized stories) can be what the religion historian ends up revealing as the case.

For example, the Desikachar revered-story of his guru, Krishnamacharya’s rediscovery and secretive study of the YS involving seven years of arduous, acolytic mountainous trekking turns out to be logistically impossible and more likely occurred in the lowlands of Chennai, from White’s avandhanic—and becoming ever more skeptical—glance into the Krishnamacharya history becoming hagiography.

For, when you really look at it, the zig-zagging, Desikachar-claimed itinerary “makes no sense” (White concludes), and even less so as he continues to consider the broader-historical fact that these were years of political upheaval, (thus—implied or stated—the trusty linguistic tool in any sifting-and-weighing, dot-connecting historian’s toolbox of narrative conclusion-pivots) “. . . any sort of official visa or letter of transit such as Krishnamacharya may have been provided. . . would have been worthless”—except (may I suggest) if shrewdly,
undisclosed *baksheesh*-bribes were, possibly, likely, as is common (take your pick), involved. ...

Yes, there are as many alternative histories as can be “reasonably argued” from available historical traces, as White goes on to consider a later Krishnamacharyya biography wherein the to-be Master Yogi’s legendary spiritual trekking to Tibet did not commence until 1917. If this date be true, then such a journey *might* have been “politically” possible, but “still highly improbable,” especially when factoring in the (dramatically, as hagiographies often require) arduous return trips to Simla “over some of the most rugged terrain in the world [the Himalayan region]” every three months (pp. 220-222). What passion, what yogic superhuman capacities, what impossible balderdash...Especially when compared with the early-to-mid 20th century credible wanderings and documented austerities of *sannyasin*-yogi, Hariharananda Aranya, lauded by White as “an authentic scholar-practitioner” who left us the beautiful “‘Dawning Sun’ commentary on the YS.

White then (*suavely*, to the dramaturgically-tuned ear, or *astutely*, to the “just the facts” ear) introduces the Fernando Pages Ruiz reference of Krishnamacharyya being a “shrewd card player” (though, third-listed by Ruiz after T. K.’s renown as a gourmet cook and horticulturist, and not till I looked up this reference did I see that Ruiz referred to literal card-playing and not a “slick character”). White then name-drops for (clarifying, or is it more suavity and that shaded my initial misunderstanding of the “shrewd card player” reference?) emphasis to the Ruiz depiction-description via a sidebar mention of another shrewd card player, the fictive and *virtuoso* of slick, Agent 007, James Bond (that may or may not be more of an author’s playful tell than it is truly “necessary” to illuminating Krishnamacharyya’s role in The “‘Yoga Sutra of Patanjali:’ A Biography” into his narrative at page 222, serving as a segue-pivot to introduce the contemporaneous, (1900-1901) Rudyard Kipling’s McClure’s Magazine serial-alluring publication of *Kim*, with its historical-fictional account of secret-carrying spies cloaked as holy men, traveling between India and Tibet.

The implication, or is it just a “compelling symmetry” (White’s predicate) of narratives, one purporting to be historical and the other explicitly “fictive history”: Desikachar’s biography surreptitiously (or merely coincidentally) fashioned the scamp’s apparel of a fictive Kim and Kipling’s Just So yarns into these “Emperor’s New Clothes” of Krishnamacharyya hagiographic embroidery (not to say, “falsehoods”).

“Truth is stranger than fiction,” David next writes, “but where is the [final] truth in all this? The mind boggles” –an infinitive verb of stunning awe echoed indefinitely forward in his final words of The *Alchemical Body*, “Our research continues...” (White’s ellipsis). And, let us not fail to mention, *samdyabhosa*, the controversial “twilight language” of wisely hidden and intentionally-secretive (and, heard as a gambler’s “tell,” these twilight-glimmers become unintentionally *alluring*, rather than “merely” concealing) yogic teachings as Woodroffe reports:
Copies of the complete tantra are rare enough. . . . I came across a complete manuscript some two years ago in the possession of a Nepalese Pandit. He would, however, only permit me to make a copy of his manuscript on the condition that the Shatkarma Mantras were not published. . . . I was unable to persuade him [otherwise]. (Woodroffe, 1978, p. xiii)

Yes, a detail-ferreting, avandhana-level scholar’s work is never done. Nor do the effects of this decades, MPY-taught, Krishnamacharya-hagiography wither retroactively, but instead, “. . . in some way extends to nearly every one of the tens of millions of contemporary practitioners who [faithfully] take to their yoga mats [as if practicing on bedrock, historically significant truths] on a daily basis” (p. 223).2

After this brief, but laborious, zig-zagging exegesis through just a few pages of The “Yoga Sutra of Patanjali:” A Biography, I can see how the one or many Patanjali(s) would have found a welcomed refuge in a post-narrative realm of wordless awareness and sheer, vibratory ananda-ecstasies in yoga citta vritti nirodha.3

Similarly, I will now leave-go of all such narrative zig-zagging sleuth-work, enjoyable as it is, to take up a different and more existential-humanistic tack into the subjective realm of “born, desiring, suffering, aging, and dying selves,” like you and me and David and all others. Respect, vulnerable humanity! Respect. . . . Thus,

KA – The “Who” of All

. . . what if ten or a thousand of those modern millions and (innumerable others in India who pondered the YS over the centuries) were guided in dissolving (nirodha) myriad suicidally-depressing thoughts, thus uplifting the courses of their “very lives?” Would we still deem it a “minor” text, especially since spiritual succor, not numerically-traceable, Amazon.com-ish prominence, is its raison d’etre? Certainly they, nor their sympathetic friends and families would not be so dismissive of this existential (and so-different genre of) “significance.”

Indeed, if the Krishnamacharya hagiography somehow inspired some thousands to do a few heroic actions in their own lives, how might the historian White weigh it differently? By including contemporary subject research interviews, the book might have taken another year to write, but the YS biography would perhaps have been more of a living biography, “. . . where is the [final: conclusive or temporal] truth in all this?” The mind boggles -- indeed!

So, it is the “vulnerable human being,” who is subject to all manner of suffering, hopes, involvements, illnesses and inevitable aging and (possible, likely, inevitable? finality of) death, as Buddha famously and compassionately noted of each of us to ourselves and to each other, that now concerns me, as it also, foremost, concerns the Patanjalic, meditative introspection and perhaps—
at one point in time or another—some, or all, of the Dramatis Personae of The "Yoga Sutra of Patanjali:" A Biography.  

The too-commonly backgrounded or (ironically) lost Ka, “Who-Subject” of you—the living, breathing prana-vayus, in-and-out, family-embedded or estranged or sannyasin-renounced you in need of food or money or understanding or a bath, the genius or the dependently mentally-afflicted, the real yogi or beggar-pretender, the in-grouped and respected town-folk or the marginalized-ones, disrespected as if “sinister”—now spending some moments of your own precious life reading this (at home, in a prison yoga class or well-appointed studio), and of me spending mine writing this as if, “to you,” as if we “mattered to one another” as “friends,” perhaps even as long-lost, now reunited “blood-family” (Vasudaiva kutumbakam, even) if not also in some strange and flickering way, as R. Ganeshian, “gods-goddesses ourselves.”

...But these leaves [sutras] conning, you con at peril,
For these leaves [sutras], and me [The Feeling Being], you will not understand,
They will elude you at first, and still more afterward—I will certainly elude you,
Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught me, behold!
Already you see I have escaped from you.
For it is not for what I have put into it that I have written this [YS] book,
Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it,
Nor do those know me best who admire me, and vauntingly praise me,
Nor will the candidates for my love, (unless at most a very few,) prove victorious,
Nor will my poems [sutras] do good only—they will do just as much evil, perhaps more;
For all is useless without that which you may guess at many times and not hit—that which I hinted at [the Awe of it all, the vulnerability];
Therefore release me, and depart on your way.
(Walt Whitman, “WHOEVER you are, holding me now in hand,” Leaves of Grass, (2007, p.122))

For (Even More!) Future Research:
The “Other Forms of Yoga”
Mother Kundalini’s Sahaja Charismatic Asanas

This reinvention of the Yoga Sutra as the foundational scripture of “classical yoga” runs counter to the pre-twentieth century history of India’s yoga traditions ...and [when, for centuries.] other forms [my emphasis] of yoga (Pasupata Yoga,* Tantric Yoga, and Hatha Yoga) dominated [were foundational for] the Indian yoga scene.

The “Yoga Sutra”; A Biography, pp. xvi-xvii

According to the Pasupata Sutra and the Ganakarika Sutra, the Lakulisha Pasupata* yoga sect [150 - A. D.] practiced an ecstatic ritual including “...dancing [charismatic, shaktipat-awakened proto- asanas] consisting of [all
possible] motions of the hands and feet: upward, downward, inward, outward and shaking motion... a sacred sound produced by the contact of the tongue-tip with the palate \[nabho and khecari mudras\, the summit of hatha-yogic maturation\]... [and] after the dance \[sic\] when the devotee has again sat down and is still meditating on Siva,” an “inner worship” and “prayer.”


That is called [yogic] action of the body in which reason takes no part and which does not originate as an idea springing in the mind. To speak simply, yogis perform actions [called asanas, kriyas, bandhas, and mudras] with their bodies, like the [innocent, natural, sahaja\[ movements of children.

\textit{Jnaneshvar-gita} (1210/1987)

\textit{Iśvara-pranidhāna}

Surrender to [be completely moved by] The Primordial Revered Mover \textit{Iśvara} [\textit{Prana}, permeating energy of sentience and movement, deified as \textit{Iśvara}]

\textit{YS, Sādhana Pāda}

Clearly, the woman dressed in black yoga garb* is willfully recreating the scorpion pose \textit{(vrischika asana)} in textbook precision, dressed for the camera shoot, holding, holding, stretching, concentrating and breathing steadily. This could be called, Apollonian, form-perfecting \textit{yoga} known in these times as MPY. (SEE IMAGE GALLERY ONLINE AT http://tinyurl.com/khnnkbs for all images that accompany text at *)

The standing yogi image* is a snapshot moment of a fluidly moving yogi (Kripalvananda of Kayavarohan, Gujarat, India) during advanced stages of pranically-inspired \textit{asanas}. In contrast to the left, Apollonian, posed (in both senses of the word) photo of this healthy-flexibility \textit{yoga}, this one could be called Dionysian, or inwardly-compelled, ecstatic or charismatic \textit{sahaja yoga} that Kripalvananda claims is the same \textit{shaktipat}-entranced yoga of the ancient \textit{Pasupata \textit{dance}} rituals. See how this pose could only emerge idiosyncratically from within, in its perfect moment, in just \textit{this} way, arms turned, fingers extended and curled, legs lyrically bent, facial expression absorbed in ever-shifting moods of inwardly spellbound transfixations. (See \textit{Gurus of Modern}
Thus the yogi’s body “dances” and moves (even as a fetus, then Jnanesvaric child, incarnates itself in utero and in infancy, by fits and starts), generating siddhis, “powers” or charisms, “gifts” of the Spirit and as discernable in spiritual traditions for thousands of years, from the shaman’s self-empowering trance-dance,* the Grecian Dionysian Revel,* Christian Holy Ghost shivering* and shaking Shakras* to spontaneous tai-chi guided by chi, the spontaneous, spinal rocking davening of orthodox Judaism* and the spontaneous spinal rocking zikr of Islam and the transfixedly straight and still spine (uju kaya) of Buddhism.* The Pasupata Yivic Nataraja-“moving-every-which-way” dance asanas of Mother Kundalini* would seem merely to be the most complex and fully articulated of these species-wide, spiritually-moving charisms.

I hope historians of comparative religion will investigate this “other yoga history” and its charismatic cognates, as “our research continues. . .”

NOTES

1Indeed, the “emptiness-fullness” meme may be a gross and misleading generalization. Shaka traditions claim that sustained meditative inspection perpetually reveals fractally-nested, subtler and subtler vibratory realms of citta-as-Shiva-Shakti’s “Eternal Dance” that gives rise to consciousness, the body—from quivering chromosomal zygote (from the Sanskrit, zhog or union-yogi, the Shiva-Shakti, ovum-sperm, union-being) to the tandava dancer’s death-rattling last breath—and the entire quantum universe, including many of the proto-asanas, bandhas, mudras (considered as sahaja kriyas, naturally-maturing-incarnating movements) that have been pedagogically formalized into repeatable “practices” of yoga. Oh, and overwhelming ecstatic sensations and moods of awe, often described as a “surrender to God-the Mover (Isvara).” See Sovatsky (2014) on charismatic yoga as a Foucaultian ars erotica.

2More problematic was New York Times science journalist, Bill Broad’s The Science of Yoga (Simon & Shuster, 2012) expose that MPY is riddled with pseudo-scientific health claims and a shadow-stratum of hyperextension, joint, cartilage, and other “yoga injuries.” This was not easy news for the fourteen million yoga folks within the MPY community to quite suddenly learn about and, by extension, its reactive ripples of injury prevention and liability concerns at all levels of Big Yoga.

These ripples of “the becoming more-known problematic of spiritual pursuits” can be traced even further: Before he had discovered this unknown stratum of MPY injuries, Broad’s original book project (that he interviewed me for) focused on my area of clinical concern for forty years, kundalini charismatic-energetic “awakening” of sahaja asanas and “spiritual emergence”—the auspicious, subjective inner-problems for any “actual, vulnerable person,” associated with believing oneself to be having “religious” or “spiritual” or dramatic “energetic, yogic” experiences, or “niradic%beyond egg% thoughts-identifications” within a medical-model psychiatric culture permeated with short-cut hopes for instant-enlightenment. See Endnote 1 for even more.

3As the American Psychiatric Association learned of scientific research on nirodhic meditation and cross-cultural or “transpersonal” studies of “the mind” (citta) such as published by Lee Sannella, M.D., in 1976 (whose private practice I inherited in 1983), it chose in 2000 to modify that year’s edition of previous DSM’s, the DSM IV TR by specifying that intentionally-sought meditative states are, henceforth, to be understood in their cultural or religion contexts and no longer as Depersonalization Disorders. Sannella opened his study of twenty modern “cases” of kundalini “awakening” (yoga citta vritti nirodha, from the pristine aspect of consciousness and the anna-maya-kosha flesh-body) in his book, Kundalini, Transcendence or Psychology? with this paragraph:

“. . .the heart races and blood pressure soars. There is moaning, crying and screaming. A severe head injury? only a relatively normal human birth. The description sounds pathological because the symptoms were not understood in relation to the outcome: the birth of a new human being. In a darkened room, a man sits alone. His body is swept by muscular spasms. Indescribable sensations and sharp pains [sic] run up his legs and over his back and neck. His skull feels as if it will burst. Inside his head he hears roaring sounds… Then suddenly a sunburst floods his inner being. . . .He laughs and is overcome with bliss. A psychotic episode? No, this is a psycho physical transformation, a rebirth process as natural as physical birth. It seems pathological only because the symptoms are not understood in relation to the outcome: an enlightened human being.” (Sannella, 1976, p. 1)

And, then consider the “mind boggling” experiential report of the author of the Western-audience classic on this topic, Kundalini, The Evolutionary Energy of Man, (Boston: Shambhala, 1970), Gopi Krishna:
Suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord. . . . The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder, I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light. . . . It grew wider and wider, spreading outward while the body, normally the immediate object of its perception, appeared to have receded into the distance until I became entirely unconscious of it. I was now all consciousness without any outline, without any idea of corporeal appendage, without any feeling or sensation coming from the senses, immersed in a sea of light simultaneously conscious and aware at every point, spread out, as it were, in all directions without any barrier or material obstruction. I was no longer myself, or to be more accurate, no longer as I knew myself to be . . . but instead was a vast circle of consciousness in which the body was but a point, bathed in light and in a state of exultation and happiness impossible to describe. (Krishna, 1992, pp. 6-7)

And, from St. Thomas Aquinas of the Catholic tradition upon his “where is the truth in all this” mystical experience, just months before his death:

“I cannot go on. . .. All that I have written [including the Summa Theologica “foundational text” of the Catholic Church] seems to me like so much straw [a self-debunking, de-realization of this saint, unknown to perhaps billions of Church-bowing, Summa Theologica-revering, Catholics, for centuries] compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me.” (Aquinas’s thought-ending (nirodha?) declaration. (http://tinyurl.com/eh358ub) 3Indeed, legend has it that grasping mortal impermanence while viewing a funeral procession catalyzed Prince Siddhartha’s path to enlightenment as Lord Buddha and facts verify that vulnerable and fresh-eyed grandchild photos catalyzed the ending of a polarizing, religion-based war at Camp David in 1978: “I handed [M. Begin] the photographs . . . [He] looked at each photograph individually, repeating the name of the grandchild I had written on it. His lips trembled, and tears welled up in his eyes. He told me a little about each child. . . We were both emotional as we talked quietly for a few minutes about grandchildren and about war. . . He said, ‘I will accept the letter you have drafted on Jerusalem.’” —Jimmy Carter from Keeping Faith. University of Arkansas Press (1995). Retrieved 1/12/15 Entry “September 17” at http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/campdavid25/campdavid25_thirteen_days.phtml

REFERENCES


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The Reviewer

Stuart Sovatsky, Ph.D., degreed in Religion from Princeton and East-West Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies, a psychotherapist for forty-two years and co-president of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology, was first to bring yoga to incarcerated youth and the homeless mentally-ill in the 1970s. He is the author of Words from the Soul, Advanced Spiritual Intimacy, and “The History of Euro-Hinduism in America” in the (tabled) Columbia Desk Companion on Eastern Religions.

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This is a refreshingly down-to-earth yet deeply reflective account of a type of non-ordinary knowing the author calls “seeing.” According to the author, “seeing” comes through ordinary perception (typically visual pictures) while simultaneously engaging “the non-ordinary stream of information.” The author brings his scientifically trained and philosophically astute mind to describing and reflecting upon his experiences with “seeing” and with becoming a “seer.” The book not only provides a fascinating account of a personal journey but an analysis of the phenomenon of seeing as well as of the attentional capabilities of a seer and how to train these.


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