“THE HEART HAS ITS REASONS”: TRANSPERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS HIGHER DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL-PERSONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND ITS RESPONSE TO THE INNER SOLITUDE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT: There has long been a view of transpersonal states as abstract forms of social or emotional intelligence (Scheler, Mead). While some have posited their post-formal developmental status, the more parsimonious view, expanding on the notion of multiple forms of intelligence, would be that these states show a more basic “formal operations” in feeling (despite Piaget’s own skepticism). Here transpersonal development is understood in terms of a decentering, reversibility, and progressive equilibrium among Ricoeur’s inner forms of personhood as their higher realization. The growing self-awareness of an inner “stream of consciousness” in adolescence (James, Vygotsky), with its resulting sense of existential aloneness, serves both as abstract impetus and egocentric barrier to this formal operations in affect. Thus its often intense psychodynamic conflict and wide variations in developmental timing – from occasional childhood precocity, to the adolescent vision quests of traditional cultures, to the later life delays more common in contemporary secular society.

KEYWORDS: taking the role of the other, generalized other, mirroring, formal operations, representational vs. affective intelligence, egocentrism, metacognition and accommodation, numinous emotion, Schilder on body image, chakras, personal essence, Being experience, nondual mysticism, stream of consciousness.

The idea that spirituality – here understood as transpersonal development – is a kind of intelligence – specifically an abstract or higher form of social-personal or emotional intelligence – has been around since the early 1900’s. The phenomenologist Max Scheler (1874-1928) and the developmentalist James Mark Baldwin (1861-1934) both saw mystical experience as a higher form of “fellow feeling” or “sympathy,” the felt sense of the inner form of society, potentially universalized to include all human beings and the physical cosmos. For Scheler (1926/1970) transpersonal experience goes beyond the egoism of a “bodily centered identity,” extending that into a sense of the “godlike within all created beings.” For Baldwin (1915/1975; Parsons, 1982) these states are an abstract development of the “affective logic” that represents the social and reaches a “new form” in the experiential “hyperlogic” of the nondual mystical traditions. Baldwin saw such traditions as the equivalent within an intelligence of feeling to mathematics in the representational intelligences of science.

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The social-psychologist George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) similarly understood spirituality as the abstract “carry over” of our social attitude to a higher sense of reality. For Mead (1934) our adult self-aware sense of being a person is based on “taking the role of the other,” simultaneously creating a social “me,” and “you,” through the experience of the other’s response to oneself. This turning around on the self, always in process, moment to moment, can never be fully completed, and so leaves the background sense of a spontaneous, continuously emerging “I,” which Mead identified with William James (1890) on the background “fringe” of the “stream of consciousness.”

More recently the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (1971), now well supported by research on neonatal mirroring behaviors (Meltzoff, 2002), located the first beginnings of Mead’s process in the infant’s response to the gaze and demeanor of the “mothering one,” who reflects back or “mirrors” to the infant its own state, simultaneously beginning an echoed sense of “this is me” in response to that resonant gaze and “that is you” for both the identity and difference of the other. For Winnicott, there will also be a similar background sense of ongoing “beingness” or “feeling real,” which later in development can become a nascent sense of the “sacred.”

For Mead (1934), as would appear also for Winnicott (1963), mystical or ecstatic states result from a later potential for an abstract or metacognitive awareness of the greater totality of this “I” of spontaneous beingness, which Mead sees as reaching its maximum fullness in the figures of Jesus and Buddha. In ecstatic states this background “I” of immediately unfolding consciousness mirrors a “generalized other” that has also been extended past our more practical sense of the everyday social values of society to a potential identity with Being, God, or universal cosmos. Mead sees such states as rendered fully conscious through the abstract metaphors of light, energy, and flow derived from physical nature, to be later developed as the “quasi-physical” sensations/metaphors of mystical states by Laski (1961). These for Mead allow a nonverbal sense of “carrying on a conversation” with the universe as a kind of cosmic consciousness.

**Transpersonal Experience, Affective Intelligence, and Piaget**

More recently Robert Emmons (2000a, 2000b) and myself (Hunt, 1995b, 2000, 2011) have independently suggested that spirituality and transpersonal experience could be considered as an abstract level of Gardner’s (1983) “personal” or “emotional” intelligences. Both argued that spirituality meets Gardner’s basic criteria for an independent intelligence – including widespread individual differences, with some genetic component (as reflected in research on imaginative absorption/openness to experience (Hunt, 2000); characteristic stages of childhood and adult development (as reflected in childhood synesthesias, vivid dreaming, and imaginary companions (Novoa & Hunt, 2009) and classical accounts of adult spiritual realization (Wilber, 2000); and some potential for selective childhood precocity–as reflected in more infrequent accounts of childhood mystical experience (Armstrong, 1984; Hunt, Gervais, Shearing-Johns, & Travis, 1992; Hunt, 1995b). Finally, there would need to be specifically defining cognitive/noetic
operations that would mediate such an intelligence, which Hunt (1985, 1995a, 1995b, 2011) has previously identified as the abstract levels of a cross modal synesthetistic capacity that would underlie Gendlin (1978) on “felt meaning” and Langer (1972) on the “presentational” symbolisms of the expressive arts.1

More generally Hunt (1995b, 2000, 2003), as further extended by Dale (2014), has suggested that adult transpersonal realization could be understood in terms of a Piagetian “formal operations in affect,” involving the same processes of decentering from egocentrism, reversibility and cross translation, and movement towards symmetry and “equilibration” that Piaget (1896-1980) located as beginning in adolescence for the representational intelligence of the external world, but here operating directly within feeling as a beginning shift towards the “universalized sympathy” of Scheler. On this approach the views of Wilber (1984, 2000) and Alexander et al. (1990) on spirituality as a “post formal” intelligence would be a step too far, both in terms of parsimony and an unintended but implied elitism inconsistent with a true multiplicity of intelligences.2 Nonetheless Piaget himself would have rejected any view of transpersonal experiences as a formal operations in feeling, and this despite Dale’s (2013, 2014) careful documentation of the young Piaget’s deeply felt Bergsonian mysticism and his initial, still untranslated, empirical studies of childhood spirituality.

For the later Piaget (1962, 1963, 1981), at any rate, an abstract intelligence of feeling would be impossible, in contrast to its partial crossing with social representation in moral reasoning. Formal operations in representational thought about the physical world are only possible because of the resistance of an external reality, which forces a progressive and open ended “accommodation” that finally requires the decentering, reversibility, and continual synthesis of thought most fully illustrated in the developments of modern science and mathematics. Feeling, by contrast for Piaget, is a pure “assimilation,” and so lacks any inward pressure towards a synthesizing accommodation. The affective schemata as such remain primitive because an inwardly directed self reference will be limited by a necessarily projective use of concrete dream-like imagery:

...radical egocentrism makes consciousness of the ego impossible, and the only means by which the affective assimilations can then have any consciousness of themselves is by incorporating images as a support. (Piaget, 1962, pp. 211-212)

Not only does this ignore the possibility of an abstract imagery as reflected in Arnheim (1969), Jung’s mandalas (1950), and geometric chakra patterns (Govinda, 1960), but it also misses the likelihood that the seemingly cross-cultural existential crises of meaning in adolescence, midlife, and old age (Erikson, 1963; Erikson, Eriksen, & Rivnick, 1986), as well as the sheer difficulty of spiritual techniques such as meditation, would force precisely the progressive accommodation in feeling that Piaget felt to be impossible.

Along these lines it is especially interesting that the older Piaget’s (1970) understanding of the pressure toward a continuous open-ended accommodation in representational intelligence was based on Gödel’s theorem of the incompleteness/inconsistency of all formal systems, which would result, in Piaget’s view, from the
inherent openness of the metacognitive or epistemological subject, such that no final “form of forms” in scientific or mathematical thought could be possible. Mead (1934) had already posited this same unfillable hole at the center of human self-reference, but as fundamental to social-personal intelligence of the background “I” in the form of mystical experience.

Again, what Piaget would have missed was this same incompletable openness within Rudolf Otto’s (1923/1958) original phenomenology of the numinous core of transpersonal states. This is the sense of awe, wonder, and mystery in the face of a felt contact with an ineffable “wholly other,” metaphorically expressed in Laski’s (1961) non-verbal and abstract images of light and darkness, heights and depths, fiery energy and liquid flow/dissolution. When these states are “said,” or in Otto’s terms “schematized,” they come out as the intuition of the highly abstract and obviously metaphysical concepts of God/Being/Absolute. These states also give rise for Otto to feelings of radical dependency and humility, which certainly sound like a decentering from affective egocentrism, otherwise referred to as “loss of ego.” In their recent phenomenology of awe, Keltner and Haidt (2003) similarly locate a sense of encompassing vastness that creates both the pressure of an open-ended accommodation and a “smallness” and humility of self. In its most extreme form this pattern of awe would lead toward and imply the finally ineffable “negative theologies” of the nondual unitive mysticisms. A form of Gödel’s incompleteness would thus be equally applicable to the affective schemata.

Nonetheless, for Piaget (1981), feeling and emotion remain too intense, fixated, and ultimately concrete to permit the decentering of a formal operations in affect – whether that would be interpreted as classical mystical experience or not. Feffer (1970), elaborating on Piaget, similarly suggested that the “oscillating behaviors” and “uncorrected centrisms” of ordinary role relationships would keep social-personal intelligence on the level of concrete operations. Feffer leaves open whether it would be the sheer intensity of affect, and its resulting tendency to a defensive drive-reducing behavior, that would hold back formal operations in feeling, or whether the lack of role equilibrium and symmetry in actual social relations would trigger intense affect, or both.³

However, as was already apparent to Scheler, Baldwin, and Mead, such considerations would explain the difficulty of a formal operations in affect in the form of spiritual realization, but not necessarily its impossibility. It would certainly explain comparative maturational delays in such development, and especially so in modern secular societies, with Jung (1934/1960) and Maslow (1962) locating a midlife/midlife crisis initiation for a naturalistically understood self actualization based on spontaneous numinous and peak experience. By contrast, traditional hunter-gatherer or shamanic societies, where directly experiential transpersonal development was a central cultural value, initiated the first stages of such development in the vision quests of adolescence (Walsh, 2007; Winkelman, 2000), where induced ecstatic states were the basis of subsequent adult identity. Meanwhile Starbuck (1899), in his early statistical study of adolescent religious confirmation experience in traditional New England, found transformative or “born again” states, with attendant effects of “unselfing” and heightened altruism, similarly clustering around the ages of fifteen and sixteen.
Accordingly, the most parsimonious developmental view of the varieties and stages of spontaneous and induced transpersonal states would be that they reflect multiple aspects of a formal operations in affect, as with Piaget’s representational intelligence normatively potential in adolescence, and culminating in the radical synthesis and decentering of the nondual mysticisms. Yet it remained unclear to this author how to develop such a model with the further specificity it would require. This situation changed through the stimulus of Dale’s (2014) recent treatment of Piaget, and my recent encountering of the phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur’s (1913-2005) *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur (1992), while not at all interested in transpersonal experience, provides an analysis of the separate dimensions of the basic concept of human personhood, such that their potential synthesis and completed symmetry would seem to offer the more precise template for transpersonal development as a formal operations in affect – as Scheler’s “higher form” of “universal sympathy.”

**Ricoeur’s Components of Personhood and Their Synthesis as Transpersonal Realization**

Ricoeur’s (1992) phenomenology of being an adult person, partly resting on Strawson’s (1964) earlier ordinary language analysis of the concept of person, identifies four inter-dependent aspects which are always implied and partially overlapping in our experience of personhood: these are “self,” “other,” “mind” – in the sense of immediately present consciousness, and “body” – in the phenomenological sense of “lived body” or more traditionally “body image.” Being a self-aware human person depends on the interaction and co-presence of these four aspects. No one of these aspects can be fully explicated without making more explicit its co-dependence on the other three – so that each must be understood as its own partial integration of the others. Thus, for Ricoeur our sense of self (Mead’s “me”) entails an awareness of others with their own sense of self, and for whom we are “the other.” To be able to attribute a “mental” emotion or thought to oneself means that it can also be applied to others, and whomever we ascribe it to will also have their own bodily presence that both mirrors and is distinct from our own immediately given embodiment. Feelings, as forms of immediate consciousness of a mind (Mead’s spontaneous “I”), are always of a someone who can be me, you, or him/her, and each with that stance of a particular bodily identity. Ricoeur is also struck by the way languages have their own built-in “reversibility” of pronouns, so that the subject who feels – whether as me, you, him/her, we/they – can be replaced by any other pronoun. This for Ricoeur already implies an implicit human solicitude and empathy which made fully explicit becomes the “golden rule” of “do unto others…”

We have already seen in Winnicott’s (1971) account how each of these four aspects begins its interactive co-creation in early mirroring behaviors – with the infant’s expressions of emotion in spontaneous bodily gestures reflected back, but only in part, by an “other” who thereby shows the baby its own “me,” as well as its bodily location, and an augmented background sense of its spontaneous beingness (see Figure 1).
Yet it is also clear that not only can these aspects – self, other, mind, embodiment – have its own partially separate development, but on the level of explanatory theory each has been made the more or less exclusive source of the other three – however misleadingly for Ricoeur and Strawson. Figure 2 shows how our common experience of these four aspects as opposites – self vs. other, mind vs. body – has generated its own exclusive explanatory metaphysics – and to cast ahead, how different forms of initial transpersonal realization would be based on the further developmental abstraction or amplification of each aspect.

Thus, where Husserl (1964b) derives personhood from a “transcendental ego,” Levinas (2000) and Buber (1957) begin from the mirroring other as “thou.” Where Freud (1923/1962), Schilder (1935/1964), and more recently Merleau-Ponty (1962) ground the sense of self in a lived embodiment, James (1890) locates the primary self (Mead’s “I”) in the self-aware streaming of a background immediately given consciousness.

The suggestion here, since these four aspects actually develop together as co-dependent and partial integrations of each other, is that their more complete experiential synthesis, reversibility, and cross-translation becomes precisely the Piagetian formal operations in affect that will be directly reflected in the forms and progressively integrating stages of transpersonal experience. If so, these can now be

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*Figure 1. Winnicott’s mother-infant mirroring.*
mapped more precisely as the successive amplifications and increasing cross translations of Ricoeur’s aspects of personhood.

We can begin to see how this might work with the sense of person as “lived embodiment” or “body image.” For Ricoeur this is the “anchor” of personal identity – the nonsubstitutable core of our normative emotional egocentrism. Accordingly, for the present analysis, it would become a major barrier to the decentering required for a formal operations in affect. That would entail precisely the dissolution of ordinary body image along the lines of its inner felt energies and emotional expressiveness that we do see in accounts of chakra activation, kundalini, and the synesthetic dissolution of body image into color, light, and open spaciousness – as in this account of inner light experience from Vihangan Yoga:

It’s like you can feel the light as a soft touch. You can hear the light as a soft music. . .As I keep staring at the light, slowly I start losing my identity and merging with the light itself. There ultimately remains no body, no thoughts or sense of “I”. Everything merges with the light and becomes part of . . .the joy of God in the form of light. (Prakash, Prakash, Sarkhel, & Kumar, 2009, pp. 130-132)

Such experience is often resisted as a feared disappearance of self associated with dying (Grof, 1980), and this may partly explain, on the one hand, how traditional religion might defensively displace such a decentering of the body image onto a body-less heaven or after-life, and, on the other, the hatred and physical mortification of “the body” in some spiritual practices. Both responses would reflect a misplaced concreteness that misses the more abstract process of decentered

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**Figure 2.** Competing theories of personhood/related transpersonal realizations.
feeling that is trying to complete itself through the opening of a contained and constrained bodily self-identity into a shared open spaciousness.

These transformations of body image in deep transpersonal states, and their resistances, are exactly what should follow—a major strength of the present model—if transpersonal realization entails the decentering from Ricoeur’s aspect of embodied identity as part of the formal intelligence of Piaget’s “affective schemata.” That decentering will be comparatively delayed and potentially terrifying in its challenge to the more fixated and concrete egocentrisms of everyday social experience.

**Varieties and Stages of Transpersonal Experience as Formal Operations in Affect**

**Access Ecstasy: Awe and Peak Experience**

If the varieties and stages of transpersonal realization are to be understood as formal operations in affect, progressively abstracting and synthesizing the already partial integrations of Ricoeur’s (1992) fourfold structure of personhood, it should be possible to see these transformations of consciousness as simultaneously entailing the increased amplifications of self, other, immediate sense of mind, and lived embodiment—as a more direct manifestation of the inner form of each—and an increased cross-translation and symmetry among them. This does seem to become manifest in a potential developmental sequence that proceeds from an initial level of what could be termed, with Laski (1961), “access ecstasy” or peak experience (Figure 3), to more differentiated transpersonal patterns further abstracting the basic form of each component, along with a continuum of implied

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*Figure 3. Spontaneous/access ecstasy (Maslow, Laski, Bataille).*

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and increasingly explicit symmetries with other forms (Figure 4), finally leading into their completed equilibration and synthesis as the various nondual mysticisms.

Figure 3 begins with these access levels of spontaneous ecstasy, numinous awe, and peak experience, following here the basic phenomenologies developed by Laski (1961), Maslow (1962), and the existential philosopher Bataille (1967/1991, 1976/1993), and also broadly consistent with the recent analysis of awe by Bonner and Friedman (2011). On the side of the enhancement of the form of “self,” Bataille describes the sense of a spontaneously enhanced sense of existential “sovereignty” in ecstatic states, while Maslow identified an increased felt authenticity of self in peak experience, and Laski spoke more generally of the sensed expansiveness of a “primal” self – all such descriptions fully consistent with accounts of shamanic “empowerments” emerging from encounters with spiritual beings in dreams or trance (Walsh, 2007).

These expansions in sense of self also turn out to be inseparable, on the side of “other,” from an enhanced sense of intimate connection and communality with others, a phenomenon especially emphasized by Bataille. More recently the experimental psychologist Keltner (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, & Keltner, 2015; Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007) has shown that in contrast to other positive emotions, feelings of awe (most commonly in response to nature) are statistically associated with an increasing sense of shared social identity and altruism. Not only does this cross-translation between a felt existential sovereignty and increased social intimacy fly in the face of more traditional psychoanalytic approaches that would see numinous experience (as in Freud’s (1930) “oceanic feeling”) as narcissistic, but it is also fully consistent with Durkheim (1912/1995) and Weber (1922/1963) on the sociology of religion as based ultimately on a “collective consciousness” and charismatic impact of ecstatic states. The transpersonal is intrinsically communal and societal (Hunt, 2003, 2010, 2012a).

On the side of personhood that Ricoeur terms “mind,” numinous ecstasy is associated with an augmented receptivity or “introspective sensitization” to moment by moment awareness – also related to Maslow (1962) on the “choiceless awareness” of peak experience. Phenomenologically, this is James’ (1912) immediate sense of “thatness” in a “primary experience” that undercuts the ordinary distinction between inside and outside, and so actually feels as though it is not done by oneself but by something “other.” James (1890) says in this regard that it would be more phenomenologically accurate to say of such immediate consciousness “it thinks” or “it feels” in the same sense as “it is raining,” rather than with the ordinary agency of “I feel.” For James, as for Maslow later, such enhanced immediacy of consciousness is inseparable from a sense of being-as-such, also reminiscent of Gurdjieff (1975) on the experience of spontaneous presence in “self remembering.” Here again this “presence” is as much “self” as it is “other,” cross translating as well mind and felt embodiment. It is open to being experienced as primarily centered in each of Ricoeur’s forms, and so begins to reflect the enhanced continuum and cross-translation among them.

Spontaneous ecstatic states are also associated with initial transformations of body image that Laski (1961) describes as pure “energy” related to Otto’s tremendum.
aspect of the numinous, and often with an urgency and intensity of bliss that for Bataille (1967/1991) can overlap into a fear of madness. Such states are often inseparable from a felt expansion and even dissolution of ordinary bodily boundaries, as discussed above. Schilder (1935/1964), and later Merleau-Ponty (1962), understood the ordinary adult body image as a fusion of a felt tactile density and a more visually based identification with the demarked spatial form that we see in others—a notion also developed by the psychoanalyst Lacan (1981) as the “mirror stage” by which we come to identify a more fluidly kinesthetic self as having the same definiteness as how others look to us. Yet Schilder (1942), and early introspectionists such as Nafe (1924), found that immediate introspective sensitization to the actual tactile-kinesthetic sense of embodiment, while deliberately “bracketing” how we know we look “from outside,” elicited feelings of inner “hollowness,” channels and patterns of “flow,” and “expansion” extending out into surrounding space. These begin to overlap with the chakra and body image transformations of deep mediation (Chang, 1963; Govinda, 1960), as well as with Reich’s accounts of inner “streaming sensations” associated with “release” from ordinary “body armor” (Reich, 1949). The potential fear of such experiences of dissolution is also reflected in their negative inversion in the body image hallucinations of psychosis (Angyal, 1936; Stanghellini et al., 2014). Yet, the capacity for such heightened awareness of the open spaciousness of immediate bodily consciousness would be a necessary step in any “decentering” from the egocentric “anchor” of normative bodily self identity—as seen in the loss of body boundaries in the meditative states described by Blackstone (2012) and Atari, Dori-Ziderman, and Berkovich-Chana (2015).

**Differentiated Forms of Transpersonal Realization**

Figure 4 goes into the more differentiated forms of transpersonal realization, considered here primarily in terms of experiential attributes that further amplify the inner form of self, other, mind, and lived body, while also explicitly or implicitly increasing their cross-translation (reversibility) with one or more of the other components of personhood. These more differentiated forms of realization would have their own further hierarchic integration and completed equilibration in the multiple nondual unitive mysticisms. While the more conflicted aspects of such development are not the primary focus here (see instead Hunt 2003, 2007, 2014), it would also follow that each of these more specific forms will have its own “metapathological” spiritual imbalance and potential suffering stemming from its own partial incompleteness—and this also in the still broader context (below) of the more extreme decompensations of psychosis, understood as the destructive inversion of this inherently conflicted and challenged step toward a formal intelligence of feeling.

To begin again from the expansion of self in access ecstasy and moving toward progressively more unitive realization, we can locate Otto’s (1932/1962) inward “soul mysticisms,” initially in the felt synthesis of personal autonomy/strength and empathy/contactfulness with others that Almaas (2004) termed “personal essence” or the “pearl.” This is very similar to Maslow’s (1962) initial discussions of “self actualization” as its own spontaneous unity of autonomy and deeply felt nurturance.
In keeping with the potential continuum already present within all these forms, personal essence also seems implicitly linked to chakra/lataif activations in the body image related to strength/will and compassion, as well as to theistic and Confucianist traditions of moral benevolence and kindness. On a still more abstract level of the form of self, we could also locate spiritual traditions of the uniqueness or *haecceity* of the soul, related to what Maslow discussed as the sense of one’s unique personal identity as the direct expression of Being-as-such, and Almaas termed “essential identity” or the “point.” It is often symbolized, as in Jung’s *Red Book* (2009), as a star, and its further potential cross-translation and inner symmetry with the sense of God as “other” is well exemplified by Meister Eckhart (1260-1327):

> The eye by which I see God is the same eye by which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye are the same….you haven’t got to borrow from God, for he is your own and therefore whatever you get, you get from yourself. …God and I: we are one. (Eckhart, 1941, pp. 182, 206, 244)

Jung (1921/1971), also reminiscent here of the Sufi Ibn Arabi (1165-1240), saw this as the creation of God out of the individual soul, while Eckhart’s pure detachment and openness of Godhood also evokes the originary emptiness and thatness of immediate consciousness, as well as the voidness of self in meditative Buddhism.

Again proceeding inward in Figure 4 from the increased sense of an ecstatic communality with both real and spiritual/archetypal “others,” the more abstract
sense of a numinous “wholly other” appears as monotheistic Deity and Creator God, for Almaas (2004) the Supreme, also entailing both a unity of individual souls in varying extensions of “universal sympathy” and often some degree of separation from the “body” of a created cosmos. At the same time, God, as transcendent Other, is, in the words of Simone Weil (1957, p. 167) “...essentially subject. ...His name is ‘I am’. On a still more abstract level, Deity, now explicitly as much first person as third, becomes the sense of an emanating Absolute or One, as for instance in NeoPlatonic and some Sufi mysticism. There, this emanating of a loving light of expressive creation entails an actual or implied pantheism – with the entirety of the natural world thus imbued with a “cosmic consciousness” (Chittick, 1994; Plotinus, 1991).

From the side of the dissolution of body image boundaries in ecstatic states, Battaille’s “excess” of energy/bliss can lead to the more fully energized patterns of chakra activation and the inner forces of Kundalini and Tibetan Dumo Heat (Chang, 1963; Eliade, 1958). Their spontaneous echo in Reichian bio-energetics (Hunt, 1995a) suggests that what is released here are the deep inner dynamics of emotionally expressive, synesthetic gesture, best conveyed by Laski’s quasi-physical metaphors of light, heights and depths, energy, and flow. These are also reflected in the external dynamics of water, wind, fire, and earth in the empathic experience of nature, and so become still more abstract and synthesized with the “other” of physical world in the shamanic traditions and various forms of nature mysticism. Here the more abstract levels of body image transformation become inseparable from the “cosmic consciousness” of a nurturing and light-giving Absolute, as in the Taoist-Confucian “one body of heaven, earth, and humanity” (Chan, 1963). This dynamic synthesis of body image and cosmos becomes central to Jung (1944/1953) and Hillman (1975) on the transformational spiritual meanings in alchemical imagery, as itself an abstract nature mysticism. Jung and Hillman in fact anticipate the more recent cognitive psychology of metaphor by Lakoff and Johnson (1999) on the necessity of physical metaphor not only for representing emotion but to fully feel it as such – as in one’s anger as “boiling” not “steeped,” or a “flash” not “explosion” of sudden insight. The difference with transpersonal experience, for Laski and Jung, would be the greater totality of its mediating natural metaphors – their all pervasive luminosity and darkness and flow. These, when partially put into words, become the highly abstract noetic or metaphysical insights of the conceptually schematized mystical traditions – further underlining their move into a formal level of a social-personal intelligence.6

Finally, to begin again in Figure 4 from the heightened receptive “thatness” or “givenness” of immediate consciousness in spontaneous ecstatic experience, its more formal development appears as the “pure consciousness” of meditative witnessing (Forman, 1990), variously conceptualized as the “universal mind” or Nous of Neo-Platonism, the more impersonal Spirit of some Judeo-Christian mysticism, and Yogic Purusha (Dodds, 1965; Eliade, 1958). In terms of its crossing with other forms, it can also be located by empathic extension in the omniscience of consciousness in the God of Medieval Scholasticism. Although certainly open to debate, the more abstract development of such a “consciousness without an object” would be to follow Heidegger in his development of Husserl’s phenomenology of consciousness, and suggest that the implied and so deeper intentional object of
“pure consciousness” would be the experience of Being-as-such – the open emptiness of Heidegger’s (1972) “it gives,” which, inspired by Eckhart’s void of Godhead, Heidegger saw as the felt core and implied object of Otto’s numinous (Heidegger, 1919/2004, 1938/1994; Hunt, 2012b). Here also, Being becomes a central attribute of God as divine “other” in medieval Christian and Sufi mysticism, as also for Brahman in the more pantheistic Vedic traditions.

The Nondual Mystical Traditions

The nondual unitive mysticisms, typified by Plotinus, Vajrayana Buddhism, Sufism, and Taoism, and the “negative theologies” of Christian mysticism, including Eckhart, would reflect the completion of a reversibility and synthesis among the most abstract forms of self (experienced as void), other (as Absolute), consciousness (as Being), and body (as dissolved into the “one body” of a living cosmos). Indeed, their full reversibility is also reflected in that each has also been used in various traditions as synonyms for the others, while at this level one could as easily switch which terms would fit better with Ricoeur’s forms. These nondual traditions can also differ, for instance on the primacy or illusion of self (as in Almaas, 2016), depending on which of Ricoeur’s four-some becomes the main point of entry into their more complete equilibration.7

It might seem, however, from some personal accounts of nondual realization (Almaas, 1995; Martin, 2015), and its potential confusion with more transitional “dark night” experiences (Hunt, 2007; Roberts, 1993), that such experiences might have left behind Scheler’s “universal sympathy” for a new level more radically impersonal and detached. Indeed, some individuals do pull back from nondual states since they are at least initially felt to entail an upsetting indifference to previously significant interpersonal relationships, loss of feeling for others, and a radical sense of aloneness. This sense of detachment is well conveyed by the Sufi Ibn Arabi’s dramatization of a form of nondual realization (Chittick, 1989, 1994). Here the Absolute, as incomparable, unique, and utterly alone in a preliminary non existence, emanates creation out of itself in a “sigh” of sadness, in order to become aware of itself through the multiple attributes of existence. The sage, whose meditation enables a self awareness deep enough to become “capable of God,” gathers these attributes as the mirror for God to see himself – thereby allowing God’s own Being-as-such to become manifest through us (Corbin, 1998). In becoming aware of this “primal solitude” and “suffering” of God, the sage becomes “alone with the alone.”

In fact, one can still see in such accounts an abstract inner realization of the form of society itself—in Ibn Arabi a reflection of the reciprocal mirroring of Mead’s universalized “generalized other” and openness of the background “I” thereby brought into full self awareness. We can see more of how nondual realization can be understood as the mirroring form of society itself, and so within a formal operations in affect, by re-considering in this light a recent discussion of Almaas (2014) on the nondual in Plotinus and Hwa Yen Buddhism. Almaas describes nondual realization as the experience of an all-inclusive oneness fully expressing
itself within each unique person and event, with each specific situation in turn containing/reflecting its own image of that whole, while at the same time:

Each particular manifestation is contained within all other manifestations as particular forms because I actually am every other thing in a direct and immediate way. (p. 148)

What is striking here is how this account also echoes Mead (1934) on the very structure of society itself, in which each person is a unique manifestation and expression of a collective whole, with each in turn also containing his/her own image of that “generalized other,” and finally each adult member of a society also containing within themselves a readiness or pre-understanding for all possible mirroring relations they might encounter with any specific other – good, bad, and indifferent.

How is it then that the meditative realization of the “mind moments” of immediate consciousness, arising from and receding into the radical openness of “pure consciousness,” would come to reflect that same inner form or structure of society – as the experience of nondual realization? Here it would be the open receptivity of the meditative attitude, exemplified by the predominance of a background theta EEG (Travis & Pearson, 2000), that signals the suspension of all more specific functions and capacities – cognitive and affective. This suspension would allow the very form of society, implicit in those functions and which in fact has played us like a musical instrument from infancy on, to be mirrored as such within immediate consciousness as the abstract social-personal intelligence of nondual realization. Where the more differentiated levels of the world religions most immediately mirror and “hold” the specifics of social-economic organization, the fuller mirroring of deep meditation, having suspended these more particular social realities, now reflects the most basic structure of all human society and the form of the social bond itself as Scheler’s “universalized sympathy” (see also Hunt, 2012a).

Although some might see this as a sociological reductionism of spirituality and the transpersonal in the manner of Durkheim’s sociologism, thereby echoing the false psychologism of Freud’s “oceanic” narcissism, it is important to realize that for the later Piaget (1970), as well as for the anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1966), there is no way to locate any causal priority between the metacognitive “logical structure” of individual mind and that of collective society – if for no other reason than that the human central nervous system and its socio-cultural context have developed together in a continuously interacting evolutionary dialogue. Instead it would seem that the metacognitive openness that Piaget (1970) locates as the source of accommodation in representational thought, based on Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, and the analogous openness to the unknown at the center of Otto’s numinous, both reflect the epistemological structure of a continuously self-referential mind. The truth value or ontology of what emerges within and accommodates to that openness as the “creative beyond” or encompassing context for both our representational and affective intelligences must have its own independent/participatory criteria for evaluation and development – and so will not be reducible in any obvious way to the social and cognitive structures that allow it.
Transpersonal Realization and the Inner Solitude of Individual Consciousness

On the more specific level of individual development, what would begin to push feeling toward the level of formal operations and so initiate transpersonal development—in traditional vision quests receiving its social support in the same adolescent years in which Piaget dated formal operations in representational thought? It seems significant that very young children do not have a self-aware access to any inner “stream of consciousness,” although they outwardly show in their behavior constantly shifting states of such sensitivity (Flavell, Green, & Flavell, 1993, 1997). The developmental psychologist Vygotsky (1965) suggested that the internalization of silent “inner speech” from the ages of seven or eight, and its gradual crossing with non-verbal imagery, would by early adolescence generate a “new type of perception” based on a metacognitive or introspective “consciousness of consciousness.” It is this metacognitive capacity that will allow the deliberate reversibility and cross-translation of cognitive operations necessary for the “higher order thinking” of Piaget’s formal operations of representational thought. Its more presentational side would be the newly emergent felt sense of James’ continuous “fringe” of a “stream of consciousness,” also closely related to Gendlin’s (1962) ongoing “felt meaning,” now often sensed as frustratingly separate from what we actually end up articulating (Hunt, 2014). It is in these years of early and pre-adolescence that it first becomes possible to teach techniques of mindfulness meditation (Alexander et al., 1990), and it would not seem coincidental that the ages of fourteen and fifteen turn out to be the period of maximum hypnotizability over the entire lifespan (Morgan & Hilgard, 1979; see also Hunt, 2011). There is now a separate level of an ongoing personal consciousness in which it is possible to be absorbed.

However, this new level of self-awareness will bring forward the characteristic existential crises of adolescence that will also create a pressure toward their own affective accommodation. There emerges a new level or intensity of felt aloneness/loneliness based on this metacognitive awareness of an “inner” or “private” consciousness now directly felt as egocentric and separate from others, who will have their own separate, potentially isolated inwardness. In addition, the inseparability of a sensed “stream of consciousness” from a new level of the experience of time, basic to both James (1890) and Husserl (1905/1964a) on the inner sense of temporality, brings forward an “existential anxiety” of the unknown of time ahead, now seen as ending in one’s own death and that of all others, and central to Heidegger’s (1927/1962) analysis of adult human existence (see also Langfur, 2014).

On the more socially extraverted side of living, to follow here the discussion of the psychiatrist H. S. Sullivan (1953), if one is fortunate in terms of earlier development, the impetus of this new level of loneliness will be more powerful than the social anxieties that will to some degree have fixated an earlier, more or less defensive self-identity, such that the adolescent is pushed forward into the effort needed for a genuine intimacy and objective empathy with real others, increasingly understood as separate persons in their own right. On the more introverted side, and especially for those higher on imaginative absorption/openness to experience and its more typical childhood precursors (Novoa & Hunt, 2009), and where sensitivity to earlier anxiety is not too distorting, these same pressures for accommodation can lead to a
heightened receptive absorption in the structure of an immediate consciousness already structured socially in the form of “universal sympathy.”

The resulting openness to peak experiences and numinous awe can then become self transformative – their inner social form answering and reconciling the sense of loneliness and isolation, while their sense of a timeless nowness and ongoing beingness transcends the existential anxiety of unknown time ahead. For those most prescient in the direction of a formal affective intelligence, these transformations can be the beginning of a life-long deepening of transpersonal realization. While initiated in adolescence under the stress of vision quests in traditional societies, in more secular societies it may be delayed until the later accommodation pressures of midlife (Jung, 1934; Levinson, 1978) or the spiritual crises of meaning in old age (Erikson et al., 1986). It should not be surprising then that in his research on immediate triggers of transpersonal awakening experience, Taylor (2013) found situations of emotional crisis and turmoil slightly ahead of contemplative experiences in nature and meditation – all of these entailing varying degrees of social isolation as part of their accommodating pressures.

Multiple personal accounts of transpersonal realization show that spontaneous numinous experience seems to require, at whatever stage of adulthood, an awareness and full acceptance of a distinct existential aloneness (Almaas, 1995; Krishnamurti, 1971). It is discussed by Chuang-Tzu on the sage:

After he had managed to see his own aloneness, he could do away with past and present, and...was able to enter where there is no life or death... Singular in comparison to other men, but a companion of Heaven. (1968, pp. 83, 87)

This aloneness is also mentioned spontaneously by modern subjects in experimental settings of meditation and heightened introspection as preceding and initiating numinous “altered state” experiences (Hunt & Chefurka, 1976). Krishnamurti (1971) on the necessity of accepting this felt inner aloneness, against which we normally defend, observes:

Mind is totally involved in chattering... because it has to be occupied. If not... what would happen? It would face emptiness... and this emptiness is the fear of your own loneliness... So go deep into the very depth of this loneliness just to observe it... then you will find that your mind facing this emptiness becomes completely alone... Out of this loneliness comes a quality of silence... without cause and therefore it has no beginning or end... What happens in that silence, there are no words to describe that blessedness... Then you are a light, and that is the beginning and the ending of all meditation. (pp. 92-93)

Along these lines, Almaas (1995) has described this same cycle of aloneness and unitive reconciliation at each stage of transpersonal development, based on a necessary letting go and mourning of one’s previous sense of self identity in relation to others that must re-establish itself anew, however transformed, at each stage of such realization, and then given up again for further realization. This cycle of aloneness and unitive realization offers its own evidence that this is a higher or abstract form of social-personal intelligence.
Conclusions

This view of transpersonal/spiritual development as a form of intelligence – as the abstract development of a formal operations in feeling – will have its controversial aspects.

On the one hand, it would be resisted by the varieties of contemporary “scientism” that see spirituality in cognitive terms as a projective and anthropomorphic “category mistake” (Boyer & Ramble, 2001), or in evolutionary terms as an anachronistic holdover from earlier cultural eras where religion provided an illusory social bond now maintained more “rationally” (Bering, 2006). Instead, if transpersonal realization, individually and collectively, is based on the same formal operations in immediate feeling states that make possible the abstract representational processes that lead into science and mathematics,¹⁰ then spirituality will have its own “truth value” (Hunt, 2006), based not only on that very level of formal operations, but also on its pragmatic effect on the sense of an encompassing meaning and purpose in human life – what Ferrer (2002) refers to as its “participatory” aspects. Once considered as its own abstract social-personal intelligence, these dismissals of spirituality as irrelevant to a modern secular/rational “reason” assume more the status of the “tin ear” that some have for other intelligences – such as music, art, or mathematics.

On the other hand, some transpersonalists, as well as many traditional spiritual teachers, who see transpersonal experience as a literal transcendence to a higher supramundane reality – which certainly is its numinous “wholly other” phenomenology – would see its consideration as an immanent human intelligence – in that sense like any other – as detracting from and falsifying that very phenomenology. Rather, what is being suggested here is that regardless of whether we understand transpersonal realization as the progressive equilibration with a Platonic reality of higher truth or as an immanent human construction – with this same debate similarly unsettled within higher mathematics (Penrose, 1997) – we will still need the present attempt at an epistemology of how it is, in Ibn Arabi’s terms, that we can become “capable of God.” That has been the primary task of the present paper. Meanwhile, if the immanent formal operations of mathematics selectively equilibrate with an objective scientific reality, a capacity still not fully understood, it can remain an open question for the similar “beyond” of a formal intelligence of affect.

Finally, the relative simplicity in principle of considering spirituality as the formal intelligence of affect, to match that of representation, combined with its sheer difficulty of personal realization, comparative developmental delay, and its potential distortion by the suffering involved in decentering from earlier anxiety based fixations in self image, actually seems to support a naturalistic version of more traditional religious notions of humanity as “fallen” or “incomplete” – a naturalistic version of the humility and “mystical poverty” of the traditional sage. It can appear that Socrates, Chuang Tzu, or Rumi are just being playfully “ironic” in telling us how simple their spiritual realization really is, when perhaps they are expressing a deeply humbling and somewhat unwelcome truth about the rest of us.

¹⁰Heart has its Reasons
References


Notes

1Gardner (2000), it should be noted, rejects this notion of spirituality as its own intelligence, preferring to posit an overlapping “existential intelligence” of purpose and meaning, since, contrary to the phenomenologies of transpersonal states dating back to James (1902) and Otto (1923/1958), he does not see any intrinsic noetic aspect to the “oceanic” feelings of a “physical” state of trance. It will be part of the specific task of what follows to show that formal operations in feeling are inherent within such experiences.

2There has long been controversy in broader developmental circles (Pascual-Leone, 1990; Richards & Commons, 1990) over the necessity of positing any post-formal level for cognition, since various of its attributes, such as dialectical synthesis, relativity of multiple perspectives, and dynamic system fluctuation, are actually already implied, if not stated, in Piaget on formal operations. This is also reflected in Piaget’s later (1970) interest in Gödel on the intrinsic incompleteness/inconsistency of all formal systems. Arguments for the post-formal (Commons & Bresette, 2006) often confuse the formal-cognitive epistemology that was Piaget’s exclusive focus with recent ontologies of system openness, non linearity, and chaotic self-organizing systems, as newer versions of the systems theories Piaget (1970) had already discussed as included within formal operations. Meanwhile, the equation of post-formality with a later life “spiritual wisdom” (Bassett, 2006; Kohlberg & Ryncarz, 1990) or a societal altruism (Sinnott & Berlanstein, 2006) can be more parsimoniously seen, with Fowler (1981), as successive steps within the formal.

3The older Piaget’s (1981) tendency to limit the “affective schemata” to the energetic, motivational, and evaluative charge within and separate from the “representational” structures of both person and thing knowing, and so obscuring the potentially foundational differences of personal meaning and physical causation (see Hunt, 2009), is probably consistent with Vidal (1994) on Piaget’s later disinterest in the earlier hopes of James, Jung, and Flournoy for the empirical study of the mystical experiences that had initially been so central to his younger self (Dale, 2014; Launer, 2014). Since for Piaget these states become “autistic displacements” (Vidal, 1994, p. 201) of the motivational energy of moral content onto concretely egocentric symbols, the states themselves are private, nonrepresentational, and so without “cognitive” significance. A more general equating, basic to the present approach, of “affective” with the sphere of persons in society and “representation” with physical and mathematical knowledge bypasses this cul de sac.

4Meanwhile Hunt (1995b, 2011) has suggested that the relatively rare classical mystical experiences in very young children (Armstrong, 1984) are best understood as a developmental precocity in affective intelligence, in the same way that childhood “savants” in chess and mathematics show a selective precocity of formal operations in representational cognition. Selective precocity is one of Gardner’s (1983) criteria for his multiple intelligences.

5It is interesting to note how well this cartography of transpersonal realizations, based on Ricoeur’s (1992) conceptual structure of personhood, maps onto more traditional distinctions among the world mysticisms from Otto (1932/1962), Stace (1960), and Zaehner (1961) – in terms of introvertive (Otto’s “soul mysticisms”) vs. extravertive/outward (nature mysticism, pantheism), and theism (Deity) vs. monism (Absolute, One). It is central to the present analysis in terms of an intelligence of formal operations that each more specified position in Figure 4, while already an
integration of two or more of Ricoeur’s aspects, can be further cross-translated with essentially any other form, implying continuous dimensions of empirical variation among the fourfold structure of socially patterned personhood. Of course any position within this potential experiential convergence on a fully nondual realization can also be shifted “outward” again as its own completed point of ethical resolution for ongoing social dilemma and conduct.

6“The body” is the shared “anchor” for both a gestural/metaphoric intelligence of social-personal meaning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) and, in its causal manipulative or motoric aspect, for the sensori-motor core of the representational intelligence of physical reality that was Piaget’s predominant focus. See Hunt (2006, 2009) for how these two intelligences both partially cross in childhood in the forms of childhood animism (as precursor to spirituality) and a “participatory” teleology of nature (as precursor to technological usage), while ultimately pulling in the separate directions of transpersonal development (as abstract person intelligence) and physical science (as abstract thing intelligence) – very differently re-using metaphoric patterns afforded by the gestalt and flow dynamics of a primary perception.

7The present approach to the nondual mysticisms could be termed a “modified” perennialism, allowing for a differential cultural and cognitive shaping of what would most parsimoniously be regarded as a common, if still more rarely completed level of formal operations in affect. Hunt (2012b) has argued that Katz (1978), in his original critique of Otto’s (1932/1962) version of perennialism in the various mystical traditions, went too far in simplifying Otto’s multidimensional phenomenology of the numinous, reducing it to “trance” and making its felt meaning entirely relative to culture. Otto (1923/1958) himself understood specific transpersonal experience as invariably an emergent synthesis of the felt qualities of the numinous with its conceptual/valuative schematizations, such that the earlier critiques of Scheler (1923/1960) and Buber (1957) stand out as issues of relative emphasis, in contrast to Katz’s (1978) ideologically based insistence on a complete social constructivism.

8There may well be an important difference between Vygotsky (1965) and Winnicott (1971) on a formal process of developmental “internalization,” leading cross culturally to an existential crisis of aloneness, isolation, and separation in the adolescent self awareness of a personal “stream of consciousness,” and a more specifically Western sense of that consciousness as “inside,” “hidden, and so inherently “private” – as the further effect of our extreme cultural emphasis on the mature individual as “autonomous” and “independent.” For Kristeva (1987) this leans into an incipient narcissism, as “an internality proper to each individual solitude” (p. 119), and so insulated from the more primary communality of other cultures. This exaggeratedly Western “privacy” of self and soul, adding its own further sense of “unreality” and disconnection from others (Langfur, 2014; Sass, 1992), will make the developmental transition to a formal operations in affect still more difficult and conflicted.

9Although the emphasis here is on the positive transition to transpersonal realization as a formal operations in affect, it is necessary to consider how it would be that such a “higher” development can be so conflicted that it can overlap into the psychotic-like states of spiritual emergency (Grof, 1980) and the mystical features of clinical psychosis (Lukoff, 1985); Boisen, 1936/1952). Both Almaas (2004) and the psychoanalyst Bion (1970) have shown how the diffuseness of early childhood trauma can be re-evoked by, and potentially block or distort, the later sense of totality in an adult experience of the “formless infinite.” Hunt (2000, 2003, 2007, 2014) discusses some of the specific ways in which transpersonal realization must bring forward these similarly encompassing early instabilities in sense of self. In addition, in the vulnerabilities to psychosis that also characteristically begin to manifest in adolescence, it is striking how their early symptoms (Sass, 1998) precisely invert the more positively integrated aspects of access ecstasy. Instead of an enhanced sovereignty of self there is a diminished or depleted sense of presence; instead of the social communality of awe there is the malevolent isolation of uncanny emotion; instead of an expanded spontaneity and “thatness” of immediate consciousness there appear the intrusive “made thoughts” and “made feelings” of a helpless “hyper-reflexivity” (Sass, 1998); while the opening of body image boundaries in states of energy/bliss become bizarrely intrusive “body hallucinations,” with their delusional/paranoiac interpretations. Here a potential, if difficult, expression of a social-personal intelligence suffers its make or break collapse, illustrating both the
difficulty involved and why those not called forth to it by an imaginative sensitivity would tend to buffer and avoid both its higher potential and vulnerabilities.

The present discussion of a formal operations in affect, initiated in the adolescent vision quests of traditional shamanic cultures, might seem less certain if we question whether such peoples would actually attain a formal operations in representational cognition. While on the one hand this might entail a conclusion that the average member of a traditional culture is more advanced in terms of feeling, and less in abstract cognition, than the average secular Westerner, it is also the case that Piaget himself (in Bringuier, 1980) questioned whether the representational testing of native peoples suffered from a Western bias in its testing assumptions. Meanwhile, Levi-Strauss (1966) has demonstrated that the complex preparations of medicinal and hallucinogenic substances in mythologically centered cultures actually presupposes, at key points, the same systematic experimentation, reversibilities, and re-combinatory operations, characteristic of modern science.

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