

# On the “Beyond” in Transpersonal Psychology: Advance and Discard or Transcend and Include?

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To study Buddhism is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things. To be enlightened by all things is to be free from attachment to the body and mind of one's self and of others. It means wiping out even attachment to Satori. Wiping out attachment to Satori, we must enter actual society.

~ Dogen (1200-1253), *Genjokoan* (translated by Reiho Masunaga)

He who wants to have right without wrong, order without disorder, does not understand the principles of heaven and earth. He does not know how things hang together.

~ Chuang Tzu (c. 369-286 BCE), *Great and Small*

Without Contraries [there] is no progression.

~ William Blake (1757–1827), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

In this essay I address certain temptations that may face theorists and practitioners within transpersonal psychology in their emphasis of the *trans* (beyond) aspect of the name of this field of study and practice. This will involve considerations in areas of growth, development, advancement, progress, and hierarchy. The discussion will be guided by two principal understandings: (a) that progress is useful only if it is in the right direction, and (b) that a ladder is an appropriate image for hierarchy only if it is recognized that one continues to include and honor all of the ladder's rungs—if not externally, at least within oneself—as one moves up and down on the ladder.

## Progress

Enthralled by evolutionary ideas and the latest new thing, many of us have a strong tendency to overvalue the new and undervalue the old. Witness the power of the label “New and Improved!” in advertizing and the extensive belief that “progress” is a necessary and wonderful thing. Of course, there is much truth in this view: In many ways, what is relatively new and recent is superior to the old and earlier. There have been obvious advances in technology, health, information, and knowledge. Modern constructions of structures such as highways, bridges, and skyscrapers are truly amazing.

On the other hand, there have been complementary declines in what we witness today. We are neglecting and endangering our environment, and many present societal conditions (antagonisms between persons and between nations, poverty levels, the ridiculously increased gaps between the wealthy and powerful and the average, poor, and powerless) are troubling. We have allowed the power of what might be called the *military-industrial-corporate-political-media-entertainment-advertizing-insurance-pharmaceutical-medical complex* to increase to an unwise degree. Although modern constructions are impressive in their magnitudes and efficiencies, one

can't help but think that the structures of earlier times, built with more natural materials such as stone and wood, are much more pleasing than our modern structures of steel, glass, and plastic. And although knowledge and scholarship have increased in amount and breadth, they do not appear to have increased in depth, thoroughness, and carefulness. In short, wisdom has not kept up with knowledge. Our present Century seems well described by this stanza of the 1920 poem, "The Second Coming," by Irish poet, playwright, and occultist William Butler Yeats (1865-1939):

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

I mention these things as a reminder that everything in this relative realm of the Ten Thousand Things is Janus-faced, dual-aspected, and that we might think twice before yielding to the temptation to neglect, leave behind, or "go beyond" something in the interest of "progress," simply because it is not the very latest.

Additionally, I mention progress because some considerations that apply to progress also apply to issues of metamorphosis, transmutation, alchemy (especially as this is treated by Coleridge and by Jung), growth, development, and transformation, all of which are very important areas of interest to transpersonal psychology. Aspects of these issues will be treated in various sections of this essay.

### Hierarchy and Holarchy

The topic of *hierarchy* is treated in detail in the "Ladders, Wheels, and Pancakes: Alternative Metaphors for Appreciating Differences" article on the Short Essays page of this website; so, there is no need to address hierarchy further here. In that article, *holons* were mentioned only in passing.

South African and British Commonwealth statesman, military leader, and philosopher Jan Christian Smuts (1870-1950) introduced the concept of *holism* in his 1926 book, *Holism and Evolution*, and applied the concept extensively and ambitiously to areas of space, time, matter, cells, organisms, mechanism, Darwinism, the mind, human personality, and the Universe. Without mentioning Smuts or his extensive treatment of holism, writer Arthur Koestler (1905-1983), coined the term *holon* and elaborated the concept in his 1967 book, *The Ghost in the Machine*. A holon, from the Greek *ὅλος* (*holos* "whole"), is something that is simultaneously a whole and a part. If we represent a set of holons by a set of concentric circles or a set of layered spheres, each circle or sphere is smaller and less inclusive than the one(s) that contains it, but at the same time, larger and more inclusive than the one(s) it contains. A familiar physical example of a set of holons is the set of Russian nested dolls (*matryoshkas*). Here, the one-above-or-below-

the-other aspect of the linear, ladder-like hierarchy is replaced by a one-inside-or-outside-of-the-other aspect. Writer and integral theorist Ken Wilber (born 1949) uses the holon concept extensively in his most recent thinking. His listing of the various properties of holons is identical to that of Koestler, although he does not include or address several of the latter's holonic principles.

There is an important exception to the idea that each part of a holon set—which could be called a *holarchy*, as an alternative to a hierarchy—and that is that this does not apply to the largest and smallest extremes. This would seem to be inconsistent with Koestler's contention that wholes and parts in an absolute sense do not exist anywhere. It is curious that neither Koestler nor Wilber seem to have noticed or addressed this. Of course, this assumes that there really *are* extremes, that the two extremes are not open-ended, and that even more extreme holons will not be discovered and added to the set (holarchy)—all of which assumptions are questionable.

In drawing holons, as concentric circles, to represent the Great Chain of Being (or, better, the Great Hierarchy of Being)—in its simplified version of matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit—one notices something interesting: that such a diagram might be labeled and interpreted in two opposite ways. If matter is placed in the innermost circle and spirit in the outermost (as this usually is drawn by Huston Smith, Ken Wilber, and others), this does suggest that spirit is the most inclusive, most commodious of the five holons so represented: It contains all other holons, whereas matter is the least inclusive, least commodious, and contains no other holons. This approach seems well aligned with a *transcendent* view of spirit. However, this presentation also could suggest that because whatever is in a smaller circle *is present within* all of the larger ones, the former (smaller circle) is more fundamental than the latter (which are present in fewer circles). These two methods of circle labeling and interpretation are suggestive of the difference between what is *fundamental, necessary, and useful* (inner circle labeled with what is most important) vs. what is of greatest *significance and worth* (outer circle labeled with what is most important). If the circle labeling is reversed, with spirit at the inner circle and matter at the outer circle, this would reverse the interpretations, and this labeling and interpretation approach could be aligned with an *immanent* view of spirituality, in that spirit, as the innermost circle (holon), would be present in all other circles (holons). The spirit of what is discussed in this present paragraph is closely related to the thoughts that might be suggested by this simple sentence: The fish is in water, and water is in the fish.

A final word about holons: The nature, laws, what is possible or impossible, and what is revealed or concealed may differ, perhaps even drastically, for different holons or for different holonic levels.

### *Three Ways of Treating Earlier or “Lower” Areas*

As one “ascends” a ladder-like hierarchy or experiences more inclusive holons, in the course of one's psychospiritual growth and development, there would seem to be three major ways of treating the phases experienced earlier. Here, we will not be concerned with whether those prior phases are discrete stages or experiences of continuous change.

**Pattern 1.** The lower phases (earlier conditions of knowing, being, and doing) are left behind; they either no longer exist or exist in a very minimal, rudimentary, vestigial, unused form (such as the human vermiform appendix or tail bone). Nonhuman examples of this pattern include the metamorphosis of frogs (from egg to tadpole to adult frog), moths and butterflies (from caterpillar to pupa/chrysalis to adult butterfly), and some fish. Human examples include the process of apoptosis (preprogrammed cell death), the disappearance of certain reflexes (plantar, Babinski) with age, and the earlier ways of functioning treated by theorists of areas of cognitive, psychosocial, ego, moral, and faith development. This could be called an *advance and discard* pattern.

**Pattern 2.** The lower phases continue to exist, just as before, and may be revisited or not. In the ladder-like, linear hierarchy model, the lower ladder rungs remain and remain unchanged; in the holon model, the inner holons (circles or sphere layers) remain and remain unchanged. For our purposes, this will be called the *transcend and include, version 1* pattern. Within transpersonal psychology, examples of this pattern include the process of dealing with the hierarchy of needs proposed by Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), the models of psychospiritual development proposed by Michael Washburn (born 1943) and by Hillevi Ruumet (born 1938; please see, in the description of Pattern 3 below, a possible qualification of the fittingness of her model with this Pattern 2), and many of the processes described in this present essay (growths and developments in areas of methods, knowledge, and understandings).

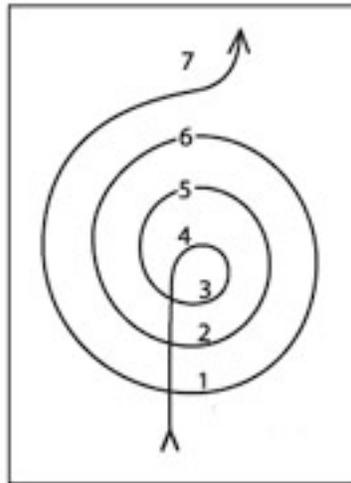
Regarding Maslow's model of human needs, it would be absurd to think that once one reaches a "higher" level, the "lower" levels would not longer be present or necessary. When one climbs a ladder to the top rung, the lower rungs remain.

In Washburn's model, one returns to an earlier phase in the process of "regression in the service of transcendence." In Washburn's words,

Human development follows a spiral course as the ego emerges from, loses touch with, and then reintegrates itself on a higher level with the depth-psychological and interpersonal bases of its being. This interpretation of development gives psychological formulation to the spiritual archetype of life as a path, way, pilgrimage or journey of departure from and return "home"—the home to which we return both is the same as the home from which we departed (because it has the same deep foundations) and is not the same (because it is a multi-leveled mansion built upon those foundations rather than only the foundations themselves).

In her 2006 book, *Pathways Of The Soul: Exploring The Human Journey*, transpersonal psychologist Hillevi Ruumet presented a model of psychospiritual growth and development based on a helical journey through seven centers, somewhat related to the seven main *chakras* described in the Hindu tradition and in other wisdom traditions. Each center might be considered a holon, and the set of seven of these a holarchy. She named the seven centers as follows: Center 1-Physical Survival, Center 2-Emotional/Kinship, Center 3-Egoic/Power, Center 4-Aloha, Center 5-Star, Center 6-Sophia, Center 7-Transpersonal. The drawing below illustrates a typical path through the seven centers. Note that the path has both linear and clockwise spiraling aspects. The spiraling indicates the tendency to revisit *still existing* earlier centers, phases, or holons—either to work out unfinished business at those levels, to learn more from them, or simply for the joy of reexperiencing them. Ruumet has observed that these revisitations are not random, but occur in particular patterns, involving movements from Center 4 to Center 3 (the Aloha Waltz), from

Center 5 to Center 2 (the Descent Tango), and from Center 6 to Center 1 (the Sophia Task), each of these occurring before authentic movements “upward” to the next “higher” center become possible. It can be appreciated that the two centers involved in each of these three revisitation “dances” are in some way complementary (or *contraries*, as William Blake would call them: “Without Contraries [there] is no progression”).



**Pattern 3.** The lower phases continue to exist, but in altered forms, and may continue to serve useful purposes in appropriate situations. Examples of this *transcend and include, version 2* pattern include the vermiform appendix in humans, an alternative view of Hillevi Ruumet’s model, the functions and representations of the human ego or self (according to views of the Dalai Lama and of Mark Epstein), and a treatment of different theories in physics.

The human vermiform appendix was mentioned in Pattern 1 above. This is because it typically is considered a vestigial organ--one that once served a function but no longer does. However, some recent evidence suggests that currently the appendix may harbor and protect bacteria that are beneficial in the functioning of the human colon, and some have suggested that the appendix may play a role in immune functioning and hormonal functioning, in fetuses and in adults. If the appendix is indeed vestigial and currently is functionless, then it would fit Pattern 1. If it is vestigial but now has assumed new functions, then it would fit Pattern 3. If it is not vestigial, but always has existed with its present form and functioning, then it would fit Pattern 2.

Ruumet’s helical model already was treated as an example of Pattern 2. This is because the model involves revisitations to earlier centers, phases, or holons that are still existing. If we consider the general nature of the earlier centers themselves, they do continue to exist as they did previously. However, if we consider the ways they are revisited and how they might be perceived, interpreted, and understood, as a result of having advanced beyond them, having learned more and changed, and then having returned, then the earlier centers could be considered not quite the same. Therefore, in this view, the model could also be viewed as an example of Pattern 3.

A third example of Pattern 3, involves a particular view of the nature of “ego” or “self”: how this exists (or, as some maintain, does not exist) and how one might treat it in the course of psychospiritual development. I recognize that in several psychological and spiritual traditions, there are important differences between “ego” and “self” and, more important, between “ego” and “Self.” However, for present purposes I am treating “ego” and “self” together and similarly. According to the understanding presented here, ego/self exists in a certain way, has a certain nature, and has several important functions. In the course of psychospiritual development, the ego/self continues to exist, as do its original functions. However, some functions might change, additional functions may be added, and one’s interpretation and understanding of the nature of the ego/self changes. Because of these two-fold changes, in functions and representations, this view can serve as a fitting example of Pattern 3. This view will be elaborated more fully in the *Treatments of “The Ordinary”* section below.

Outside of transpersonal psychology, the two *transcend and include* patterns (*versions 1 and 2*) apply to adequate models and theories within the natural sciences. I use the term “adequate” to distinguish these from theories that are found to be erroneous. In physics, for example, we often hear that Newtonian laws, theories, models, and conceptualizations have been superseded by Einsteinian and Quantum laws, theories, models, and conceptualizations, and that the former no longer are valid. This is not so. Newtonian laws continue to operate in their appropriate realm—the familiar macrophysical realm in which humans continue to function. It may be true that Newtonian principles and predictions are merely subsets or special cases of the more general relativistic and quantum laws, but that is exactly the point, The Newtonian laws did not suddenly become invalid and disappear with the discoveries of relativistic and quantum physics. They remain just as valid as before, but we now interpret them differently, recognizing that they apply only under certain conditions (which conditions account for virtually 100% of what humans encounter here on earth). As in *transcend and include, version 1*, the nature of the Newtonian laws remain the same as they were before their limitations were discovered. As in *transcend and include, version 2*, our interpretations and understandings of those laws have changed.

### Abandonment Temptations in Attempts to “Go Beyond”

#### *Research Methods and Approaches*

Many years ago, several Institute of Transpersonal Psychology students presented their research projects at an American Psychological Association convention. Some of the humanistic/transpersonal investigators who were present challenged the students about their use of research designs that included both qualitative *and quantitative* components, asking whether, in doing the latter, they were “going over to the other side”—i.e., using a method favored by the more established (behavioral/cognitive) psychologists whose approaches they felt were inappropriate for humanistic and transpersonal studies. The students rightly replied that a both-and approach was a wise one and one that could more fully illuminate whatever was being studied, in contradistinction to a narrower either-or approach. Even today, it is not unusual to find some transpersonal psychologists who argue that using research methods that originated within the behaviorist/cognitive tradition—such as standardized assessments, experimental designs, and quantitative analyses—never are appropriate for studying transpersonal topics, and that to do so would be engaging in regressive behavior. Obviously, I do not agree with such a

position. Rather, it seems much more appropriate to have as many different tools as possible in one's methodological toolkit and to use whichever methods are most fitting for the kinds of research questions one is asking at the moment. Such a pluralistic methodological approach seems much more likely to yield richer information than would a narrower approach relying on only one method or few methods. Here, one continues to use formerly used methods, rather than discarding them.

### *Treatment of Psychological Principles Originating in Other Schools or Forces*

Many consider transpersonal psychology to be a fourth school or "force" within psychology, following and "going beyond" the three previous forces of behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and humanistic psychology. One may rightly criticize aspects of the first three forces, perhaps even for their respective central tenets. Such tenets include behaviorism's rejection of consciousness, its modeling itself after 19<sup>th</sup> or even 18<sup>th</sup> century physics, which physics itself has long surpassed, and its subject matter and methods; psychoanalysis's (nearly exclusive) emphasis on pathology, on very early childhood experiences, and on a seething cauldron of (mostly sexual) excitations as the source of our motives, goals, and aspirations; and humanistic psychology's overemphasis of strictly human concerns and its underemphasis of spiritual matters. However, there are those to go too far in their condemnations. An example of this is the writer Arthur Koestler, whose works I generally greatly admire, who devoted much of his 1967 book *The Ghost in the Machine* to attacking behaviorism, calling it, simply, "rat psychology." (One would commit a similar error if one were to call transpersonal psychology "spook psychology" or "a psychology that takes fairy tales seriously.")

Many useful methods, theories, models, and findings have arisen within behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and humanistic psychology, and to reject these would be, I think, narrow-minded and unwise. Researchers in areas of social psychology, learning, memory, and motivation, within behaviorism, have identified various principles that certainly are active in all of us and which, if we learned more about them, we could use to our advantage, even in our psychospiritual development. A few of these, from learning theory, include

- the important role that classical (Pavlovian) conditioning plays in physiological and emotional areas, which are especially susceptible to this form of conditioning;
- the finding that gradients of approach and avoidance tendencies toward or away from some ambivalent (better, bivalent) goal have different steepnesses (the avoidance gradient is steeper) can be useful in considering conflict situations and how they may or may not be resolved;
- the finding, from operant (Skinnerian) conditioning studies, that different reinforcement schedules have very different effects and time courses (especially different resistances to extinction) can be useful in understanding the persistence of some of our eventually maladaptive behaviors;
- the findings, from human verbal learning studies, regarding proactive and retroactive interference processes in memory can help us understand why recall becomes more difficult with aging (I find it strange that this never seems to be mentioned in connection with age-related memory declines);

- Even sensations and images can be classically conditioned. A simple observation of this is to note what happens to one's auditory images when one listens repeatedly to certain musical CDs: One can actually hear the beginning of the next selection before it begins to play—an instance of auditory conditioning;
- Although despised by many in the humanistic and transpersonal psychology fields, therapeutic interventions (behavior therapy, applied behavioral analysis) based on classical (Pavlovian) and instrumental/operant (Skinnerian) learning principles have been successfully used and have helped many adults and children over the decades.

I am convinced that many, if not most, of the findings in the learning, memory, and motivation areas, even those based on studies of rats and pigeons, are quite real and important, and can influence even complex human behaviors. These are truly generalizable principles, not crude analogies. Similar points can be made regarding findings and theories within the psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology areas.

### *Time Frame of Scholarship*

Some scholars within transpersonal psychology, and indeed within all areas of modern scholarship, have succumbed to the temptation of limiting themselves to only the most recent studies and writings in their scholarly reviews and published reports. This seems to be but another aspect of a pervasive syndrome of overvaluing the latest new thing. Such limited time frame literature reviews and other treatments carry with them the questionable implication that all knowledge has an expiration date—that findings and thoughts older than 5 years or so can be discounted as no longer valid or applicable. Although progress undoubtedly has been made in many areas, chiefly in terms of technology, there are many instances in which early thinking and work rival and sometimes even surpass more recent efforts. It seems unwise to ignore or disdain important findings merely because they were published some time ago. In some cases, modern workers may not even be aware of the existence of relevant early work. Such ignorance is an insult to the practice of good scholarship.

We could delve more deeply into older works. In the grocery business, it is common practice to “rotate one's stock”—making older materials more accessible so that they have a chance of being purchased and used, rather than languishing out of reach. We tend to reverse this practice in our scholarly and empirical work—emphasizing the very latest reports, methods, and data, and ignoring older thoughts and findings as though they have passed their expiration dates. One consequence of a lack of awareness or valuing of earlier thoughts, findings, and writings is a continuing inadvertent reinvention of the wheel—and with, perhaps, less enduring and less effective materials—by current researchers. How wise is this practice?

It is generally assumed that the growth curve for the accumulation of knowledge is *exponential*—i.e., early increments in knowledge are relatively small but later become larger and larger (see the Figure below). This is undoubtedly true in cases involving technology and in knowledge involving phenomena that depend upon recent technology for their detection and study (e.g., studies of the very small, very large, and very fast, in physics, astrophysics, biology, and medicine). However, there are two other kinds of growth curves that may characterize knowledge accumulation in other areas. One of these is a *linear* curve, in which the increasing

growth of knowledge over time is fairly consistent, neither speeding up nor slowing down in later periods, compared with earlier periods. Another is a *logarithmic* curve, in which knowledge growth is very rapid in its early phases, quickly reaching a high point, and then growing only very slowly thereafter.

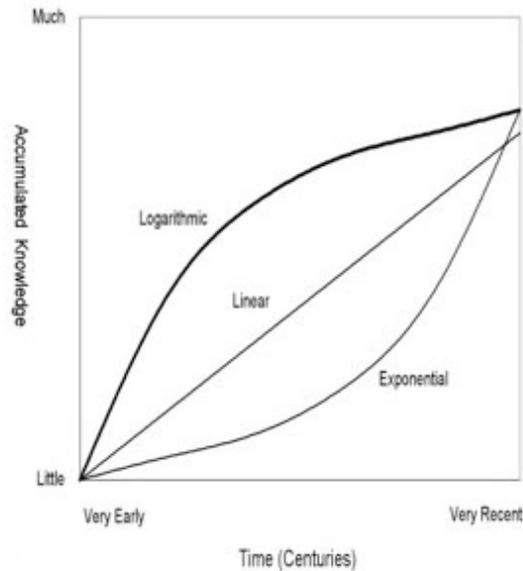


Figure: Three possible time courses for the accumulation of knowledge.

It may well be that the growth curve for the most important and meaningful knowledge within psychology, philosophy, and transpersonal psychology is logarithmic in nature—largely acquired very early and incremented only slightly thereafter. This is because the subject matter in these disciplines—our own behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and images—were readily available for our observation and conceptualization at very early stages of our development. These processes and observations were parts of everyday life, even during our very earliest days as a species and as individuals. (The same conclusion may also be true for knowledge gains involving naked-eye astronomy and for observations of the natural world of plants and animals—in these cases, the subject matter was generally available and accessible to all at very early dates.) This perspective on knowledge accumulation is consistent with the well-known comment of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1929) that “the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (p. 63), as well as with a statement made by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in an 1896 letter to the German otolaryngologist and, at least initially, his close friend and confidant Wilhelm Fliess (1858-1928): “It is the oldest ideas which are the most useful, as I am belatedly finding out” (Freud, 1954, p. 157). These considerations may help us resist the temptation to neglect, devalue, or discard early knowledge claims simply because they are old or even ancient.

Here follow just a few specific examples of earlier treatments that anticipated and sometimes rivaled similar, but much later, treatments:

The writings of the Greek atomists Leucippus and Democritus (about 450 BCE) about the atomic underpinnings and foundations of matter are well known. Not as well known are the similar but even earlier thoughts of the Hindu philosopher Kanada (500 BCE), who wrote:

The mote which is seen in the sunbeam is the smallest perceptible quantity. This again must be composed of what is smaller, and that smaller thing is an atom. It is simple and uncomposed, else the series would be endless, and were it pursued indefinitely there would be no difference in magnitude between a mustard seed and a mountain, a gnat and an elephant, each alike containing an infinite number of particles. The ultimate atom is therefore simple. (cited in LeShan & Margenau, 1982, p. 93)

Frederic William Henry Myers (1843–1901) was a classical scholar, poet, philosopher who in 1892 and even as early as 1884-1885 developed and published his ideas about *the unconscious* and *the subliminal self*, which anticipated and in some cases, especially in the case of the subliminal self and its great range of content, surpassed later treatments of “the unconscious” by Sigmund Freud and others. In describing a *spectrum of consciousness*, Myers also anticipated the later work of Ken Wilber, along these lines, by about 85 years.

In his art and writings, poet and painter William Blake (1757–1827) anticipated the later work of both Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (1875-1961). Early in the 1930s, poet W. H. Auden declared that “the whole of Freud's teaching may be found in [Blake's] *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.” Blake also anticipated the four psychological functions later elaborated by Carl Jung. In the “fourfold vision” of his own poetic mythology, Blake invented four Zoas—titanic, mythic Eternals, Giant Forms, living archetypes. Blake named these Urizen (intellect, reason), Tharmas (sensation, body), Luvah (love, passion, feeling, heart), and Urthona-Los (imagination, intuition, poetic genius).

The English Romantic poet, literary critic, and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), who wrote that metaphysics and psychology were his “hobbyhorse” (an old term for a favorite topic that one frequently refers to or dwells on; a fixation; later shortened to *hobby*) apparently was the first person to use the term *the unconscious* in the English language (in his *On Poesy and Art*, 1818), and he wrote extensively (especially in his *Biographia Literaria*, 1818) about the nature and functions of *consciousness* and *unconsciousness*. He also anticipated many of the later thoughts of Carl Jung, in using many terms suggestive of alchemy and, more particularly, in his writings about *individuation* (in his *Hints Towards the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life*, unfinished, posthumously published in 1848). Here are two representative quotes—the first from his 1818 *On Poesy and Art* essay, the second from his unfinished 1848 *Hints Towards the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life* book:

To make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought and thought nature—this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts. Dare I add that the genius must act on the feeling, that body is but a striving to become mind—that it is mind in its essence! [WB: Is this not reminiscent of Jung's *psychoid level* wherein matter and mind are one?]

In every work of art there is a reconciliation of the external with the internal; the conscious is so impressed on *the unconscious* [italics added] as to appear in it; as compare mere letters inscribed on a tomb with figures themselves constituting the tomb. He who combines the two is the man of genius; and for that reason he must partake of both. Hence there is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius. (Coleridge, 1965, p. 204)

I define life as the *principle of individuation*, or the power which unites a given *all* into a *whole* that is presupposed by all its parts. The link that combines the two, and acts through both, will of course, be defined by the *tendency* to individuation. (Coleridge, 1951, p. 573)

Psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910), of course, treated many of the topics with which contemporary transpersonal psychology concerns itself—spirituality, mysticism, psychical functioning, pluralism, radical empiricism, and others. The nature of these particular contributions, described in writings published between 1897 and 1912, some posthumously, are quite familiar to transpersonal psychologists and need not be further described here.

### *Psychic Functioning and “Extrapersonal” States*

Another area that some strongly encourage us to move beyond and leave behind is the area of psychical functioning. This area includes experiences and phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, remote healing, and various phenomena suggestive of survival of bodily death that are treated in the disciplines of psychical research and parapsychology. Some—e.g., Elmer and Alyce Green (1986) and John Rowan (1993)—consider such functions to be *extrapersonal* rather than transpersonal, and suggest that the extrapersonal should be treated quite secondarily, if at all, within transpersonal psychology. Others—including William Braud (2003, 2008), Michael Daniels (1998), David Fontana (2003), Stanislav Grof (1987, 2006), Arthur Hastings (1983), Genie Palmer (2002), and Charles Tart (2009)—disagree, maintaining that psychical experiences can have transpersonal and spiritual relevance and therefore are appropriate areas for study within transpersonal psychology.

Within the wisdom/spiritual traditions, opinions about psychical experiences vary, with those within the more transcendence-orientated traditions generally considering these to be either irrelevant or dangerous, whereas those within the more immanence-orientated and Earth-based traditions being more accepting and encouraging of such experiences.

From the standpoint of a spiritual tradition, it may be argued that psychical experiences may hinder a person’s psychospiritual development by serving as distractions and by tempting the person in an egoistic sense, thereby delaying or sidetracking advancement along the spiritual path. The experiences may become sources of false pride and may become powerful attractants for others, but for the wrong reason (a wish to gain “powers”). On the other hand, psychical experiences would not be dangerous or distracting if they were approached with moderation, balance, and discernment. Such experiences even could serve as indications that one’s spiritual practice is indeed developing and is effective. For example, in the Yogic tradition, a common understanding is that such experiences, the so-called *siddhis*, will occur automatically at a certain stage of one’s development, so their presence could serve as a signpost that one’s development is on course. A dramatic psychical experience also could provide an entry point for a subsequent spiritual journey, for someone who might otherwise not be spiritually inclined at all.

A notable example of someone whose early psychical experiences may have played a role in her later development is Mirra Alfassa, also known as The Mother, the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo who founded and became the leader of Aurobindo’s ashram. Alfassa had numerous psychical experiences as a child, and these continued throughout her life. She went through

various occultist phases before eventually meeting Aurobindo and focusing her energies on expanding the ashram and promoting Aurobindo's and her own spiritual teachings.

From the standpoint of transpersonal psychology, there is the concern that having psychical experiences may inflate the ego, rather than help in reconceptualizing it or disidentifying with it. This objection can be countered by pointing out that psychical experiences could have transformative accompaniments or aftereffects. Such experiences, if attended to sufficiently diligently and deeply, could prompt questioning of one's current self-schema and worldview and could lead to changes in the understanding of one's identity and of the nature of the world. The experiences could provide transpersonally-relevant lessons: that there is Something More, and that there is a deep and profound interconnectedness between persons and between persons and all of the Ten Thousand Things of this world.

Also, for transpersonal psychologists, there is the academic and political issue of how to treat psychical experiences and whether to associate itself with parapsychology. Some hold that such an association would be unwise because psychical research and parapsychology are not well regarded by the dominant academic and scientific communities. Others hold that the risk of increased marginalization may be outweighed by the gain of having some of transpersonal psychology's concepts, constructs, and theories empirically tested and either supported or not supported by the findings of psychical research and parapsychology.

A related issue of "going beyond and leaving behind" involves a view frequently voiced by counteradvocates and debunkers of parapsychology and psychical research: that accepting the validity of psychical experiences and phenomena would "destroy the laws of physics" because such findings are "incompatible with the laws of physics." Typical of such a view are comments that Douglas Hofstadter, a professor of cognitive science at Indiana University, Bloomington, wrote in response to a New York Times article describing a set of precognition experiments conducted by respected social psychologist Daryl Bem. Hofstadter suggested that publishing Bem's studies on precognition goes "against the laws of physics as we know them [and]... our entire scientific worldview would be toppled... and we would have to rethink everything about the nature of the universe." This is simply untrue. It also is of interest that persons making such statements never bother to indicate which specific physical laws would be violated by psychic experiences and parapsychological findings, or with which particular laws such experiences or findings are "incompatible." This issue is relevant to this essay because the laws of physics (and of the other sciences) would continue to exist and function, just as they presently are, if psychic experiences and phenomena, and their own laws, were accepted; the familiar laws of the natural sciences simply would be supplemented by the processes and laws discovered and validated by parapsychology.

### *Treatments of "The Ordinary"*

Among transpersonal psychologists, there are several, and sometimes contradictory, views about the nature of "self," "ego," "selflessness," and "egolessness" and what might happen to these during psychospiritual growth, during meditation, and even after "enlightenment" or "full Self-realization." According to one view, "ego" is a bad thing, and our aim should be to advance beyond it, leave it behind, diminish, dissolve, and even "annihilate" it in order to achieve

“egolessness” and “selflessness.” Those with this view often support these aims by citing corresponding aims in wisdom/spiritual traditions such as Buddhism. There are, of course, important exceptions. For example, transpersonal psychologist, meditation teacher, and author Jack Engler has offered the pithy statement that “you have to be somebody before you can be nobody” (1984, p. 31) along with reasons for supporting a strong ego.

According to another view, it is true that underlying and supporting the ego or self is a Greater Self or Ground of Being that is shared by all of us and, likely, shared by all of the Ten Thousand Things of Nature—animate and inanimate; but the ego itself continues to be important. The “Self” (akin to the Hindu idea of *Atman*, which is also *Brahman*) is like unto a tree’s common trunk and invisible roots, which support the tree’s many separate, individual leaves. The leaves are analogous to our many individual selves and egos. The latter are dependent upon the roots and trunk. However, the leaves also are crucial to the life of the entire tree—converting the Sun’s energies through the magic of photosynthesis and providing nourishment to the entire tree. The leaves add abundance, individuality, diversity to the visible landscape, supply oxygen for the many animate creatures, and remind us of the transient nature of earthly things as they grow, wither, die, and are replaced by other leaves.

The leaves they were crisped and sere;  
The leaves they were withering and sere.

~ From Edgar Allan Poe’s (1809-1849) poem, “Ulalume,” written in 1847

According to this second stance toward ego and self, one recognizes them as real and substantial (albeit only in a certain sense and only transiently so) and serving important (albeit mundane and adaptational) functions, yet also recognizes that ultimately they are not substantial, permanent, independently-existing entities but, instead, they are changing, impermanent, and interdependent on all other things (as in the Buddhist principle of dependent origination or mutual co-arising, *pratītyasamutpāda*). In such a stance, one would treat ego and self as “not mine” and appropriately disidentify with them.

There have been many interpretations of the meaning of *anatta*, usually translated as *no self* or *no soul*. One interpretation is aligned with what is presented immediately above. Regardless of how *anatta* or any other term is translated, an interpretation based solely in its literal meaning (in this case, that one has no self) can miss many more subtle aspects of the term’s referent.

When using a word in one’s own tradition, and especially when importing words and concepts from another tradition, it is important to keep in mind four major ways in which words and passages can be interpreted: literally/historically, allegorically, morally, and anagogically. The most complete understanding would emerge if all four types of interpretation are considered and included. An anagogical interpretation—one that “leads above” by providing a spiritual meaning—can be of great use in transpersonal and spiritual studies and practices.

In two short articles (Epstein, 1988, 1992), psychotherapist, author, and educator Mark Epstein (born 1953) has provided a clear treatment of the meanings of ego, self, egolessness, and selflessness. He reviewed various misconceptions of the concept of selflessness and suggested that ego has both *functional* and *representational* aspects. The functions include testing and

dealing with reality, defending and inhibiting, mediating, and coordinating and integrating. The representations are multiple mental images and constructs of objects, others, and self. In brief, with increasing psychospiritual development and during the development of mindfulness (e.g., by means of insight/*vipassana* meditation), the functions of the ego remain, but the representations change in certain ways. The integrating function of the ego allows these new insights and understandings to be suitably incorporated by the individual, without destabilization. The process is one that suggests a fitting with the *transcend and include, version 2* pattern (Pattern 3) described above. To what Epstein has written, I would add that regarding the functions of the ego, perhaps new functions are added as a result of movements along one's spiritual path: new ways of knowing (of understanding self, others, and the world at large), being, and doing—i.e., new *processes* that involve not only new *content*.

The kinds of representational changes that Epstein discussed are related to certain teachings of Tenzin Gyatso, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (born Lhamo Dondrub in 1935), regarding the nature of self, ego, selflessness, and egolessness, according to his *Gelugpa* tradition within Tibetan Buddhism.

This seemingly solid, concrete, independent, self-instituting I under its own power that *appears* actually does not exist at all. (Gyatso, 1984, p. 70)

Selflessness is not a case of something that existed in the past becoming nonexistent; rather, this sort of “self” is something that never did exist. What is needed is to identify as non-existent something always was non-existent. (Gyatso, 1984, p. 40)

Here, “identify” suggests a new way of interpreting, understanding, representing the self or ego.

What has been said, above, about the ego and self—that they are important, that they need to be strengthened, that they continue to exist and be useful during and after phases of psychospiritual development—can be applied also to many other “ordinary” processes. These applications include continuing to recognize, honor, and address the body and its many types of needs and activities, as well as our many intrapsychic, relational, and social interactions. We have been reminded of the great importance of not neglecting or “going beyond” these kinds of “ordinary” activities by those within and without the transpersonal field who emphasize feminist, embodied, indigenous, and “participatory” approaches.

The importance of not only not neglecting and going beyond but, indeed, even increasing our helpful relational and societal concerns and activities always has been emphasized within the various wisdom/spiritual traditions. A major instance of this is one of the understandings of the *bodhisattva* concept in some forms of Buddhism—i.e., an enlightened being who, out of compassion, forgoes or postpones *nirvana* in order to alleviate the sufferings of others. Another instance is depicted in the tenth of the Ten Bulls or Ten Oxherding Pictures, much appreciated within the Zen Buddhist tradition. This tenth picture is called Return to Society (or In the Marketplace or In the World) in which one returns to the crowded marketplace, spreading enlightenment and helping others by mingling with humankind (sometimes rendered as “entering the marketplace with help-bestowing or bliss-bestowing hands”).

The original Ten Oxherding Pictures are attributed to a 12<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese Zen master Kuo-an Shih-yuan. It is said that he added two more pictures to the original Taoist eight, and also added poetic verses and commentaries to each picture. Here follows one of the many renditions of the

tenth picture, with the associated poem and commentary:



#### 10. In the World

Barefooted and naked of breast,  
I mingle with the people of the world.  
My clothes are ragged and dust-laden, and I am ever blissful.  
I use no magic to extend my life;  
Now, before me, the dead trees become alive.

#### Comment

Inside my gate, a thousand sages do not know me. The beauty of my garden is invisible. Why should one search for the footprints of the patriarchs? I go to the market place with my wine bottle and return home with my staff. I visit the wine shop and the market, and everyone I look upon becomes enlightened.

#### *Dualistic Views of “Nondualists”*

Still another arena in which we can decide whether to favor an advance and discard or a transcend and include strategy is that of nondualism and dualism, about which I have only a few remarks. First, is not the making of a nondualist versus dualist distinction itself dualistic? Indicating that one favors nondualism over dualism in one’s writings and presentations, while at the same time making the distinction would seem to be engaging in what philosophers call a “performative contradiction”—one’s actions belie one’s words.

To urge that we move beyond and leave behind distinctions, dualities, and dualisms and subscribe to a solely nondual position would seem to be advocating an *advance and discard* strategy. Honoring a *transcend and include* strategy would involve having no such preferences, applying a middle way approach, and treating the two possibilities (William Blake’s contraries again) in a both-and rather than an either-or fashion.

#### *Regarding Advancement of the Field Itself*

There are at least three ways of helping the field of transpersonal psychology advance and grow. One is by an increased number of *professional* publications and presentations. These could help

familiarize other professionals with this work and help draw them into the field so that they might support it through their own writings and professional contacts. A second way is to increasingly address the *general public*. This could be done by writing semi-popular and popular books and articles, by public lectures, workshop presentations, media presentations, exhibits, and so on. This is a fine approach because there are far more persons in the general public than in the professions! Also, the general public already has a great interest in and curiosity about transpersonal experiences and concepts, and this interest and curiosity can be met by communicating transpersonal findings and concepts in appealing and understandable ways. A third way is to encourage a transpersonal way of being *in oneself*, as advocated in the well-known quotation attributed to Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948): “We need to be the change we wish to see in the world.” One might then become a model and a beacon of transpersonal light for others. Also, in some strange and not completely understood manner, by living in a transpersonal manner and holding intentions of a transpersonal nature, the density of transpersonal knowing, being, and doing in the world at large might actually increase.

I mention these three approaches here in order to point out that those who favor only the first would be advocating an *advance and discard* approach by neglecting or minimizing the value of the second and third. A *transcend and include* approach would include, honor, and encourage all three ways.

### General Comments About the Field

As an academic discipline, transpersonal psychology can be framed in either of two ways: (a) as a subarea of psychology-in-general, with a particular and limited interest in spirituality and “the farther reaches” of development, identity, knowing, being, and doing; or (b) as a much broader form of psychology—a “full spectrum” psychology or psychology of the whole person—which would involve treatments of the full range of human functioning. In its full spectrum version, transpersonal psychology would address all major aspects of human affect, behavior, cognition, and spirituality. This would require that it would include and honor the important findings, methods, theories, knowledge, wisdom, and practices of all three of the other psychological schools or forces (behavioral-cognitive-neuropsychological, psychoanalytical, humanistic). This would be appropriate and necessary in achieving a full spectrum status. This would be an extremely ambitious undertaking.

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?

~ From Robert Browning's (1812-1889) poem, “Andrea del Sarto,” lines 97-98, written in 1855

Even if transpersonal psychology were to adopt the more limited subarea option, it would be most appropriate for it to move beyond its present, nearly exclusive emphasis on the *beyond* meaning and adequately treat the other two meanings of the term *trans* in its name. Treating those additional meanings—*through* and *across* the personal—would allow it to address many more relevant aspects of human functioning, and in doing so include the most meaningful methods, findings, theories, and practices of the other three schools or forces as well as relevant thoughts and findings from the natural and human sciences, the humanities, and the arts. This would help the discipline achieve the same goal as would the much more general and perhaps too

ambitious option of its becoming a *super-*, *meta-*, or *holo-*psychology: that is, leaving behind an *advance and discard* approach in favor of one that *transcends and includes*.

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