

## *Paths Beyond Ego in the Coming Decade*

There are several exciting developments in transpersonal theory that I believe will be particularly important in the coming decade, and I would like briefly to outline them. They involve research into: states of consciousness and structures of consciousness; crosscultural investigations of contemplative paths and patterns; situating the transpersonal movement in the larger currents of the postmodern world; a rereading of world philosophies, religions, and psychologies from the vantage point of the transpersonal orientation; a continued study of the relation of the various "breaks from normality" (i.e., the relation of psychoses and mysticism); the excruciatingly difficult problem (still) of the relation of mind and body (brain); more precise mappings of the developmental spectrum of consciousness (in its conventional, contemplative, and pathological dimensions); the relation of Jungian and general transpersonal psychology; a finer theoretical understanding of the relation of "marginal groups" (such as the transpersonal) to the "larger forces" of world development and technological advance; the relation of the transpersonal domain to the three great "Others" or neglected domains of the World Traditions (namely, body, nature, woman); the relation of nature and Spirit; the relation of theory and practice; and, most importantly, continued work in the "grand theories" aiming at a coherent representation of the transpersonal in all the various "conventional" disciplines (anthropology, medicine, ecology, economics, the humanities, etc.).

To take them in that order:

1. States and structures. There are two dominant paradigms now governing transpersonal studies: altered states of consciousness and developmental structures of consciousness. Both of these two paradigms have their archetypal representation in Vedanta, where a distinction (and correlation) is made between the five major sheaths or structures (koshas) of consciousness (matter, body, mind, higher mind, universal mind) and the three major states or bodies of consciousness (gross, subtle, causal, experienced in waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states). Vedanta maintains that a given state of consciousness can support several different structures; Aurobindo added the insight that structures, but not states, develop (thus, the infant has access to all three major states of waking, dreaming, and sleeping, but it has access to only the lowest structures of the gross realm; the higher structures have not yet developed).

The research agenda is: what is the relation of states (which can be prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal) to structures (which are also prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal)?

As it is now, there has been little work done on how to integrate these two paradigms, and in many ways they appear incompatible: structures are cumulative and integrative, states are discrete and exclusionary. I suggest that the answer will involve the notion that developmental structures are the permanent unfolding or actualization, or coming into stable manifestation, of that which is only temporarily experienced in an altered state. To the extent that temporary and discrete states become actualized (and not just passing), they must enter the stream of development and "obey" its patterns. Mapping and explaining these transformations will be one of the major breakthrough areas in transpersonal studies.

2. Crosscultural studies of contemplative development: Much pioneering work has been done in this area, but much more awaits the future researcher. Of particular importance is the careful phenomenological descriptions of contemplative states/structures (with all the difficulty involved in describing often trans-verbal realities). An extremely important question in this area is: can the same developmental-logic governing the unfolding of conventional stages of cognition, conation, affect, and so forth, be shown to apply to the higher states/structures as well? Is there a unity to evolution and development? I believe there is, but if not, then what does that say about the unity of Spirit and its unfolding (or lack thereof)?

3. Situating transpersonal studies in the larger currents of postmodernism: There are now four main intellectual currents in the humanities of the "postmodern world," all struggling for supremacy: the classical Enlightenment-humanists, the deconstructionist "anti-thinkers" (Derrida), the "critical interpretives" (Foucault), and "communicative ethics" (Habermas).

Enlightenment humanism is marked by a belief in the power of instrumental rationality to discover any and all "truths" capable (and worthy) of being known, and a belief in the power of such rational truth to set men and women free, both personally and politically. However noble these aspirations, they have historically tended to degenerate into a "disenchanted" and fragmented worldview, with the domains of art, morality, and science radically divorced from each other and from individuals' lives, and with a rather blind faith that technological rationality can solve the resultant dilemmas.

In response to this fractured and rather limited rational worldview (traditional "modernism" and "humanism"), there have arisen three broad "postmodern" movements, as I mentioned: the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida, the "neo-structuralism" of Michel Foucault, and the "universal pragmatics" of Jurgen Habermas. All of them are united by a critique of instrumental rationality and a critique of the isolated and autonomous ego (the foundation of humanism); they believe that truth is historically and linguistically situated (and not simply eternally given); and they show a great concern with ethical action in a world that can no longer ground its truth-claims in mechanistic rationality and positivism.

Deconstruction attempts to demonstrate that linguistic rationality ("logocentrism"), which has marked much of Western philosophy (and civilization), is internally self-contradictory: it undermines its own position whenever it is applied to itself (e.g., the criterion for empirical truth is not itself empirical). This deconstruction of logocentrism is said to open up new pathways of moving beyond a rigidly dualistic rationality. Foucault's analysis of knowledge as structures of power, and his demonstration that various worldviews or "epistemes" have abruptly emerged throughout history--these both have an effect similar to deconstruction: they undermine thoroughly the traditional humanistic/rational assumptions about the world, about truth, about ethics. And Jurgen Habermas (whom many consider the world's greatest living philosopher) has attempted to move beyond instrumental rationality--and beyond the isolated and autonomous ego--by emphasizing "communicative ethics," or the ways in which human beings attempt to understand each other in a community of mutual exchange and mutual respect.

All of these postmodern movements are indeed post-ego movements. In fact, they often explicitly refer to their projects as the "death of the ego-philosophies" or "the death of

the subject-philosophies." And while all of this is very encouraging from a transpersonal perspective, the "death of the ego" that they are referring to does not mean an opening to a genuine transpersonal dimension, but rather the transformation from a narrow, instrumental, rational egoic worldview to a multiperspective, organic, relational, and socially-situated bodymind (what I have called the "centaur," which is still a separate-self sense, but "better" than the previous "ego"--postmodernism is "moving in the right direction").

But all of these postmodern movements contain explicit criticisms of any sort of mystical transcendentalism, of pure presence, of trans-historical realities. So a crucial topic for the coming decade will be: Where are transpersonal studies situated in these postmodern currents, and how can transpersonal studies answer their sharp criticisms? I would suggest that all of these postmodern theories already display hidden transcendentalism, and this needs only to be pointed out so that they themselves can then be situated in the spectrum of transpersonal development. In other words, deconstruction can be deconstructed (a la Nagarjuna), Foucault can be situated in his own episteme, and even Habermas has held open the possibility that there are still higher stages of development yet to unfold (which is the precise province of transpersonal developmental studies). For conventional academic concerns in the humanities, this will be the hot-bed of theoretical action.

4. Reconceptualizing world philosophies from a transpersonal perspective. The virtually uncontested assumption of modern Western intellectuals is that anything "transcendental" is simply a "theory" or a mere "ideology," and thus history is read as a chronicle of shifting ideologies whose only grounding is the relative cultural legitimation given to them by particular (and equally shifting and relative) cultures. But what if some

transcendentals are in fact direct experiences and direct disclosures that, although mediated by language, are in some important ways extra-linguistic or cross-cultural? A diamond will cut a piece of glass, no matter what words we use for "diamond," "cut," and "glass"--and a soul can experience God, no matter what words we use for "soul," "experience," and "God."

History, then, would have to be entirely re-read as a chronicle of the growth and accumulation of true transcendental experiences filtered through various ideologies, and not merely reduced to one ideology among others. This would completely revolutionize our concepts of human potentials and divine possibilities, and place the growth of spiritual knowledge correctly alongside any other scientific advances.

5. The relation of psychosis and mysticism. This always fascinating topic is significant not just in itself, but for several vitally important and related topics: creativity and madness, normalization and marginalization, ordinary and extra-ordinary potentials, personal breakdown and personal breakthrough. The important field of spiritual emergency network is also intimately connected with this topic. Too many people diagnosed with psychotic breaks are clearly undergoing a spiritual emergency, and the details of these crises desperately need further investigation (not to mention the relation of spirituality to addictions, depressions, anxieties, and so forth). This whole topic is also related directly to how we conceptualize "the" unconscious (demons, gods, infrarational, superrational, all of the above?). The continued mapping and conceptualization of the unconscious will be one of the most important and fruitful areas of transpersonal research in the coming decade.

6. The relation of brain states and mind states. This perennial question affects (and infects) transpersonal studies much more than most fields, simply because the "separation" or

"gap" between the two (exterior matter and interior awareness) is "greater" in the transpersonal field. After all, some transpersonal experiences carry the overwhelmingly convincing apprehension that consciousness is prior to any manifestation (that it is eternal and timeless). How does this "eternal consciousness" relate to a purely finite and temporal brain?

My feeling is that this issue cannot be sidestepped by materialist concessions, and that a thoroughgoing Idealism of a very postmodern variety will have to be carefully elaborated and defended. But this task is today made easier by the common acceptance of the Big Bang, which has made Idealists out of virtually everybody who thinks about it--after all, what was there before the Big Bang? Since the first micro-atomic particles seem to have been following mathematical laws, and since those laws did not develop, weren't they somehow present prior to the Big Bang? Aren't there some sort of Platonic archetypes prior to evolution (in addition to any "archetypes" that might themselves have simply evolved)? And couldn't some transpersonal experiences be experiences of those objectively real entities, Whitehead's "eternal objects"? Isn't Zen's "Original Face"--your own True Self--the Face you had before the Big Bang?

Whatever we decide, this issue cannot be avoided. For the transpersonalist, the seemingly innocuous question of the relation of mind (consciousness) and body (matter) is in fact the ultimate question of the relation of Emptiness and Form, the unmanifest and the manifest.

7. How do any "consciousness states" relate to material-physiological "brain states"?

On a more specific level, how do actual states and structures of consciousness relate to

specific brain-wave patterns? Initial studies in this field have centered on major states of consciousness and their correlation with gross brain wave patterns, PET scans, and so forth, usually showing that some meditative states show an increase in alpha/theta activity or deep delta patterns, and so on.

I believe that major breakthroughs will occur in electronically inducing brain-wave patterns that appear to mimic meditation (such as deep theta/delta), and that the machines to do this will become widely available commercially--and I believe nobody will become "enlightened" from this, precisely because brain and mind are not merely identical, and enlightenment occurs in the mind (consciousness), not in the brain (although changes occur there also). What this research will show us, I believe, is that brain states more easily "allow" certain mind-states, but do not determine them. Exactly what this relationship is will be a major field of research, and will join the psychedelic research as a profound tool for exploring the mind/body problem.

8. Continued mappings of the developmental spectrum, in conventional, contemplative, and pathological dimensions. This is a crucial endeavor, made all the more pressing by the urgent need to clarify the relation between structures and states. If the transpersonal or contemplative stages and structures of consciousness also have specifiable pathologies (which I believe is the case), continuing to map these pathologies will be extremely important. Also, an enormously rich field awaits in the mapping and the clarification of the transpersonal stages of moral development, cognition, motivation, worldviews, affect, and so forth.

Transpersonal developmental studies are still one of the most promising and important areas of research. Unlike states of consciousness, which are temporary and noninclusive, stages or structures of consciousness can be studied using a reconstructive science (precisely as used by Piaget, Gilligan, Kohlberg, Habermas, Chomsky, even Freud). A reconstructive science does not postulate the existence of structures in an apriori or merely theoretical fashion, but rather studies those individuals who have already demonstrated a competence in the particular task (whether linguistic, cognitive, moral, contemplative, etc.). It then reconstructs, after the fact, the components and stages of development that lead up to the competence (Buddha, in a sense, simply reconstructed the steps he went through to gain his enlightenment, and presented them as a reconstructive science that could be tried and verified--or rejected--by a community of experimenters). Since reconstructive sciences reconstruct after the fact, they are not open to charges of apriori metaphysics, and, further, their claims can be subjected to nonverification (the so-called "fallibist criterion").

That transpersonal developmental psychology is a reconstructive science (which it is) means also that it is open to the fallibist criterion of any true science. This is by far the single strongest argument the transpersonalist can present to the conventional community.

9. The relation of Jungian theory to transpersonal theory. This is an enormously complicated and delicate topic. For almost half a century, the Jungian paradigm has been the major--and only--viable theory of transpersonal psychology. I personally believe that the Jungian model has many strong points--and even more weak points--and that this debate will in fact be the most heated area of discussion in the coming decade, simply because so many people are involved in its outcome. But in any event the dialogue between the Jungian model and the general transpersonal field will continue to be a source of rich mutual stimulation and

challenge, and will go hand in hand with the extremely important and even larger dialogue of transpersonal psychology with the other three major forces of psychology.

10. The relation of "marginal" to "normal" groups in social evolution. A large number of transpersonalists believe that many of the world's critically pressing problems, from social fragmentation to environmental crisis, can only be "solved" by a transpersonal transformation. I personally do not believe that this is so, but in either case, a cogent theory of how marginal knowledge (such as the transpersonal) becomes normalized or conventionally accepted needs to be worked out and thoroughly checked by then re-reading history using that model. Work in this area is virtually nonexistent, and yet without it any claim to "world transformation" (or even the claim that transpersonal theory can have a world influence) is simply more ideology.

My own feeling is that a theory of world transformation will in effect be a "mystical Marxism"--that is, it will cover the intricate relations between the "material-technological-economic" base of any society and its worldviews, legitimation strategies, and consciousness states/structures. This field is virtually wide open.

11. The relation of the three "Others" (body, nature, woman) to the Great Traditions. The fully-developed World Traditions (such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, even aspects of Taoism) all arose in a climate of discourse that devalued the body, nature, and women. All three of these "Others" were, in fact, equated with evil, temptation, or illusion. How can women today develop any faith in the Great Traditions when every single aspect of those Traditions were developed exclusively by men?

And is not the alienation of women precisely parallel to the alienation of the body (asceticism) and nature (samsara)? And is not this global alienation now showing up in the environmental crisis? Far from "saving" us, are not the Great Traditions the root of a crisis that very well might kill us all?

These are absolutely crucial questions for any contemplative/transpersonal discipline, and they need to be faced squarely.

The Great Traditions do indeed emphasize an Ascending and Transcendental current; but many of them also contain an equal emphasis on the Descending and Immanent nature of Spirit. The Tantric traditions, for example, emphasize a union of the Transcendental and Ascending God (Shiva) with the Immanent and Descending Goddess (Shakti), a union that is found in the nondual Heart and a union that emphasizes equally the masculine and feminine faces of Spirit.

Nonetheless, I believe that the entire pantheon of the Great Traditions will, in the coming years, have to be scrutinized thoroughly and "scrubbed clean" of the universal alienation of the three "Others"--nature, body, woman--but in a way that does not throw out the baby with the bathwater. To simply reject everything the Traditions have to tell us would be catastrophic; might as well refuse to use the wheel just because a man invented it. But this field, too, is virtually wide open, and will yield an enormous number of insights in the coming decade.

Related to this is:

12. The "Other" of nature in relation to Spirit. I mention this as a separate issue simply because of the pressing nature of the global environmental crisis. There is no doubt

in my mind that the purely Ascending (or Gnostic) Traditions, which see the manifest world merely and only as illusion, have indeed contributed to a set of cultural prejudices that have allowed a despoliation of the Earth.

And once again I believe that we will have to turn to the Tantric traditions (East and West, North and South). These Traditions universally see the finite realm (Earth and all) as a perfect manifestation of Spirit, not as a detraction from Spirit, and thus they celebrate and honor embodiment, descent, immanence, the feminine, the Earthbody values.

The "secret" relation of the Ascending (transcendent) and Descending (immanent) aspects of Spirit was given by Sri Ramana Maharshi (among many others):

The world is illusory

Brahman alone is real

Brahman is the world.

A comprehensive Spirituality thus includes both of these two great currents (Ascending and Descending, "masculine" and "feminine"). Seeing that the world is illusory is the Transcendental or Ascending current (the current over-emphasized by the Gnostic/Theravadin traditions wherever they appeared). Seeing that Brahman is the world is the Immanent or Descending current which embraces all manifestation as a Perfect Gesture of the Divine.

Either one of those currents taken in and by itself is catastrophic. We have seen the disasters of over-emphasizing the masculine Ascending current. We are now privileged to watch the disasters of those movements trying to equate the finite world with the Infinite.

We are now in a furry of Descending theories, from deep ecology to ecofeminism to Earth-bound and geocentric revivals, all of which happily confuse shadows with Source. These Descending endeavors, as crucially important as they are, are nonetheless in their own ways just as lopsided and dualistic and fragmented as their merely Ascending counterparts.

The work for the coming decade is to find a way to unite and honor both of these currents--the Finite and the Infinite, the Manifest and the Unmanifest--without reducing one to the other or privileging one over the other.

13. The relation of theory and practice. Transpersonal studies in themselves are not necessarily a spiritual practice, although, of course, the two are intimately connected. The nature of this connection will be a crucial topic in the coming decade.

There are any number of practices that induce or open one to the transpersonal dimension--meditation, shamanic techniques, Goddess rituals, kundalini exercises, holonomic breathwork, psychedelics, deep psychotherapy, biofeedback and electronic induction, the various yogas (from devotion to work), life itself. It is from the community of those who have displayed a competence in any of these fields that the reconstructive science of transpersonal psychology draws its subjects. The theory of transpersonal psychology depends upon those who have practiced and achieved competence in a transpersonal/spiritual discipline.

Ideally, then, a transpersonal researcher will also have some sort of personal spiritual practice (a "participant observer"). How to separate--and relate--the theory and the practice will thus remain a pressing issue. This is complicated by the fact that transpersonal theory attempts to abstract from the various disciplines those universal factors that seem to be the

common or key ingredients in each, but one still has to practice a particular discipline to attain competence.

Further, the various disciplines are themselves evolving in today's global village and postmodern world, as Buddhism meets science and Yoga meets the computer. This has rendered problematic many aspects of the traditional disciplines, such as the role of the Guru, many aspects of the disciplines that seem to be merely cultural artifacts, the sexism in many of the traditions, and so forth.

I believe it is crucial for a transpersonal researcher to have a personal spiritual discipline. But the exact relation of theory and practice will remain an extremely important topic for discussion and shared insights, as the transpersonal field finds its way into the twenty-first century.

14. The grand theories. The transpersonal field is uniquely situated to synthesize and integrate various fields in humanity's knowledge-quest, simply because it is the one field that is uniquely dedicated to exploring, honoring, and acknowledging all the dimensions of men and women's experience--sensory, emotional, mental, social, spiritual.

Transpersonal studies are the only truly global studies now in existence, studies that span the entire spectrum of human growth and aspiration. The coming decade, I have no doubt, will witness the emergence of transpersonal studies as the only comprehensive field of human endeavor. And although I do not think that the world is entering anything resembling a "new age" or "transpersonal transformation," I do believe that transpersonal studies will always be that one beacon to men and women who see Spirit in the world and the world in Spirit.

