

Preface

A Personal Journey

Whenever I read a book on the transpersonal, I also try to discover something about the author. This is not simply nosiness, but rather reflects sensitivity to the fact that writing about the transpersonal cannot be divorced from a personal involvement or personal experience. All writers in this area are inevitably both enriched, but also limited, by the particular experiences they have had, and all of them, *without exception*, have their own personal equations, or personal agendas. In some cases this may be obvious to the reader from, perhaps, a heavy-handed or polemical style, or because the author is explicitly promoting a particular belief or ideology. In other cases, however, it is more subtle or disguised — especially the case, I think, with academic writers. It is important, therefore, that the reader should know a little about where I am coming from if only so that I may, perhaps, be unmasked from any disguise or guile that I may be tempted to perpetrate.

My own study of the transpersonal has its origins way back in early childhood (the 1950s), with an interest that was encouraged by some rare, wonderful, but essentially ordinary experiences of perfect days, perfect walks, perfect moments of lying in the grass and staring up at the clouds. Such experiences taught me, as no formal lesson or book could do, the reality of the human spirit and its mysterious relationship to the All. For me, these experiences contrasted heavily with those that I had when smartened up and dragged reluctantly off to Church (my uncle

was a Church of England minister in another part of the country, and I presume there must have been something of a sense of family honour involved in keeping up Church attendance, even though my own family never appeared otherwise to be 'religious'). No doubt it was partly for this reason that during Church services I would often feel a distinct sense of hypocrisy among the congregation — accompanied also by a powerful intuition that there was, in fact, a great Truth or Mystery that lay concealed behind the veil of dead words and religious trappings. I must have been about four or five years old. Eventually, aged six, I was baptized by my uncle, but this did not seem to me a profound spiritual event.

In my later childhood I found myself interested in other mysteries — especially ghosts, psychism, spiritualism and flying saucers — and I read avidly in these areas. Although at first these phenomena did not particularly strike me as having any *spiritual* significance, they did clearly relate to some of the big questions: 'Where do I come from?' 'Who am I?' 'Where am I going?' 'Is death the end?'

The connection between spiritualism and spirituality came when I discovered Theosophy (at about the age of 12) and, from there, I was introduced to Vedanta and Yoga. A book that left a lasting impression on my developing thinking was Paramhansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* (originally published 1946) which excited me not only with its exotic tales of paranormal events and Yogic *siddhis*, but with the humility, sincerity, compassion and spiritual depth of the writing. It also reinforced my concerned intention to find a *guru*. Eventually I did find an Indian Yoga teacher (who was also a psychiatrist at a local hospital) and I studied Hatha and Raja Yoga intensively with him for two years (this was at a time when Yoga was relatively unknown and undeveloped in Britain). This relationship ended when I went to University, which also coincided with my increasing interest in the Western esoteric and magical traditions. At Leeds University I founded an 'Occult Society' and, as a result, came into contact with all sorts of charming and colourful, although sometimes very unsavoury, characters who variously styled themselves as psychics, ghost-hunters, spiritualists, mediums, witches, Wiccans, occultists, magicians, shamans and Satanists. This was a very interesting period in my life! At this time, I also studied closely for seven years with a teacher of magic (also a

psychologist and educator) in a tradition that emphasized self-realization, including a one year period living in a small community he had established.

Studying psychology at University was something of a mixed experience at this time (the early 1970s). The research paradigm was essentially positivistic but the discipline was in something of a hiatus between a dying radical behaviourism and the gradually emerging cognitivism that now dominates academic psychology. Freud was discussed only in the context of the history of psychology, and Jung was hardly mentioned – and then with a barely disguised guffaw. There were, however, some chinks of light for someone, like myself, interested in inner experience, psychological development, and spiritual matters. One of these was George Kelly's Personal Construct Psychology, another was Jean Piaget's theory of intellectual development and Lawrence Kohlberg's related approach to moral development. For me, however, the most exciting of all was *humanistic psychology*, as represented in the work of Carl Rogers and, especially, Abraham Maslow (transpersonal psychology as a separate discipline had not yet become widely known in Britain). Maslow, in particular, dared to talk about spirituality, about transcendence and the transpersonal at a time when the prevailing culture in academic psychology was completely antithetical to such ideas.

Fortunately I was very lucky to have one or two tutors who were sympathetic to the humanistic perspective in psychology and, as a result, I undertook an independent undergraduate project on this which eventually led to my PhD (finally completed 1981) which examined Maslow's concept of self-actualization and its relationship with moral development and personality. From there, I stepped, relatively seamlessly, into a career in higher education which has continued in Liverpool since 1979.

I count myself very fortunate to have been able to develop my interest in the transpersonal in the context of an academic career in which I have been encouraged and supported by my host institutions (perhaps Liverpool really is the 'pool of life' referred to by Jung, 1983, pp. 223–224, in the interpretation of one of his dreams). Although, when I first proposed teaching an undergraduate module on 'humanistic psychology' (in 1980 I believe) I was made to run the gauntlet by certain members of the validating Board who feared that I would indoctrinate students with some kind of subversive new-age ideology, I am glad to say that

reason won the day and I was allowed to proceed. Since that time, I have been able to devote more and more of my time to teaching and researching in the areas that most concern me – transpersonal psychology and parapsychology. Perhaps the most significant development in this respect has been the establishment of the MSc in Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology at LJMU, as well as the enrolment of research students to PhDs in this area. These developments themselves only became possible due to the energies and efforts of colleagues at LJMU who, serendipitously, shared interests in the transpersonal and related fields.

The development of my thinking in the area of transpersonal psychology is shown in the articles I have had published that form the basis for this book. As well as being grounded in my reading of the transpersonal literature, my understanding has been informed by experience of various transpersonal practices which, in addition to Yoga and magic, have also included various forms of meditation (most notably *vipassana* and *zazen*), guided fantasy, and dreamwork. However, I now rarely practise any of these in a formal sense, but prefer to adopt a more ‘casual,’ unstructured and relational approach to transpersonal knowing. This change in approach began, I suspect, in the period leading up to the time of my second marriage and the birth of my two daughters (b. 1991, 1993). My interest in a more relational approach also expressed itself in my developing interest in Jungian psychology, counselling and psychotherapy which led to my undertaking six years’ training and practice in psychodynamic (object relations) psychotherapy within the National Health Service. However, I discontinued psychotherapeutic practice in 1998 and have not returned to this. Most of my professional energies are now expended in teaching, research and writing.

The Purpose and Structure of this Book

In a literal sense, this book has been more than 20 years in the making. It has given me the opportunity to collate, revise and update a series of articles that I have had published during this time in the general area of transpersonal psychology. These articles themselves arose out of and supported my teaching of transpersonal psychology to undergraduate and postgraduate students. Such teaching, I should add, has been a most reward-

ing and enlightening learning experience for me and, I hope and believe, for many of the students I have had the privilege to work with during this period. I am truly indebted to the contributions they have made to my own thinking in these areas, and for the time, stimulation and support they have freely and generously given throughout my time in higher education. I should particularly single out the students who have undertaken the MSc in Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology, which first began in 1994 under the perhaps more appealing but somewhat misleading title of 'The Psychology of Human Potential', and which now runs in both attendance and distance-learning modes. I have, without exception, enjoyed and learned from their committed and gracious presence on the programmes.

Because of the origins of this book in teaching and discussions with students, it will, I hope, be of particular value to those approaching transpersonal psychology for the first time as well as to those who wish to develop their understanding of the discipline to a level which broadly corresponds to that required for Masters' study. Because it also addresses important issues that are currently at the heart of theoretical debates in transpersonal psychology I also hope that it will be of interest to other academics in the field as well as to the wider general readership in these areas.

I should make clear at the outset, however, that this book almost exclusively addresses *theoretical* issues in transpersonal psychology. It is *not* a manual of transpersonal practice, and only indirectly addresses issues of concern to transpersonal therapists and counsellors (although I hope that both spiritual practitioners and therapists will find something of value in the pages that follow). My focus on theoretical matters does not mean that I dismiss the importance of experience, of practice, or of therapy, and I very much hope that it does not lead to my characterization as an 'ivory tower academic'. It does mean, however, that I consider theoretical issues (ontology, epistemology, methodology, conceptual understanding, etc.) to be of major importance to the field of transpersonal psychology at the present time and, in some sense, to be *primary*. In focussing on theoretical issues I also do not wish to give the impression that I devalue *empirical* research in transpersonal psychology. Indeed empirical research is sorely needed in this area (only a minority of articles published in transpersonal journals report empirical data). In our MSc in

Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology, for example, students are required to undertake an empirical thesis. Many of these studies have been of outstanding quality and several have been published.

It has been an interesting and rewarding experience for me to develop what were essentially independent articles on different aspects of transpersonal theory into the format of a book. Particularly gratifying has been the realization that these various articles do tell a coherent story, although there are different emphases and sometimes varying perspectives presented in the different chapters that I hope will stimulate rather than frustrate the reader.

As part of the revision of these articles, I have striven to minimize repetition or unnecessary duplication of ideas. This has not always been possible, however, and in the interests of maintaining the coherence and flow of thought, and to maintain the integrity of each chapter, some repetition remains. For this I apologize and beg the reader's indulgence.

Chapter 1 of this book provides a general introduction to transpersonal psychology, including definitional issues, an historical overview, and a summary of the major theoretical approaches within the discipline. It ends with a description of some of the major resources in transpersonal psychology, including academic courses, journals, and organizations.

In Chapter 2, I consider two main questions: (1) What is the relationship between paranormal experience and transpersonal experience? (2) What is the relationship between transpersonal psychology and parapsychology? I look at examples of experiences that may be considered both paranormal and transpersonal and at how these two realms of experience have been associated throughout history and across cultures. I question whether distinctions need to be made between the paranormal and the transpersonal and examine potential pitfalls in various approaches that have been taken to understanding this issue. Finally, I discuss the differences between parapsychology and transpersonal psychology in terms of the contrasting perspectives and research paradigms that these disciplines take on paranormal experience. These approaches are considered in terms of Wilber's quadrant model (e.g., Wilber, 1997) in an attempt to understand how they provide alternative views that are complementary rather than opposed.

Chapter 3 discusses the meaning of 'holism' in spiritual and transpersonal circles. I argue that it is important to distinguish between three versions of holism: Holism 1 (New-Age Holism) involves the integration of *positive* aspects only of the Body, Mind and Spirit. Holism 2 (Psychological Holism) recognizes the importance of accepting and integrating the darker, *shadow* aspects of our being. Finally, Holism 3 (All-Quadrant Holism) proposes the need to integrate the individual body-mind-spirit (positive and negative) in the social, cultural and natural worlds. In arguing that transpersonal psychology should adopt the perspective of Holism 3, I note that an exclusively *psychological* approach to the transpersonal can never be sufficient.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the relevance of the archetype of the *shadow* for our understanding of transpersonal psychology, examining this in relation to two interdependent themes: (a) manifestations and implications of transpersonal psychology's own shadow, and (b) the importance of recognizing and incorporating our transformative experiences of the archetypal shadow. On the basis of this discussion I present a preliminary taxonomy of transpersonal experiences and practices that incorporates aspects of the transformative shadow. This taxonomy itself raises a number of important and largely ignored questions within transpersonal psychology, including that of the ontological status and psychological significance of the transcendental and of the archetypes of good and evil.

In Chapter 5, I examine the philosophical and psychological roots of moral evil, which I see as a potential that emerges alongside the development of ego consciousness and personality. In this way, ego development gives rise to the possibilities of both chosen (deliberate) and unchosen (characterological and projective) evil. I then examine the ways in which characterological and projective evil may be consequences of damaging socialization experiences in which there is a failure of empathic concern for the developing child. On this basis, I propose a model in which the various forms of human good and evil can be understood in terms of the two dimensions of (1) empathy vs. egocentrism and (2) benevolence vs. malevolence. The solution to human evil is the encouragement of both empathy (head) and benevolence (heart), together with the capacity for moral effectance (hands). Such development may largely depend upon the role that significant others can play in acting as empathic,

benevolent and morally effective 'self-centres'. Finally I discuss the implications of Ken Wilber's quadrant model for our understanding of human evil before proposing a general transpersonal perspective in which moral good is seen in terms of an increasing expansion of empathy and moral concern. From this perspective, moral expansion is a critical feature in the process of self-realization, which may be viewed simultaneously as the realization of spirit.

Chapter 6 traces the development of Abraham Maslow's concept of self-actualization through four decades of his published writings. I argue that his views evolved both in content and sophistication, but that he never achieved a final coherent theory of self-actualization. I suggest that certain characteristics in Maslow's approach may have precluded the development of a satisfactory formulation.

In Chapter 7, I argue that the principal function of a theory of self-actualization is to establish a 'myth' or meaningful narrative account of human development that provides conceptual support for people seeking fulfillment and offers clear normative and practical guidance. Self-actualization theory should be evaluated primarily in terms of its effectiveness as myth rather than its logical precision or empirical confirmation. An effective myth, I suggest, must be believable, consequential, and morally defensible. An examination of Maslow's theory of self-actualization reveals inadequacies as a mythical interpretation of personal development. There are ambiguities and contradictions in the theory, and several conceptual elements may actually inhibit or corrupt the process of self-actualization. The failure of Maslow's theory is due, I suggest, to confusing the project with naturalistic science and to the adoption of biological metaphors and empirical methods that are fundamentally inappropriate. A more fruitful approach may be found in emphasizing a mythical perspective from which life becomes a shared quest for the human good.

Chapter 8 examines the development and experiential foundations of religious and metaphysical ideas about the soul. These ideas, I suggest, have profoundly influenced psychological approaches to the transpersonal self. A psychohistorical examination of the concept of the soul suggests that it encompasses a varied and complex set of aspects and meanings. The different aspects of the soul are, I suggest, based on interpretations of a

wide variety of human experiences, including life and death, dreams, out-of-body experiences, hauntings, possession, self-reflexive consciousness, inspiration, and mystical experience. In general terms, concepts of the soul seem to have evolved from a primitive belief in a quasi-physical reality, through the later incorporation of psychological qualities, to what may be a relatively recent focus on spiritual experience. Conceptual difficulties can arise when we fail to recognize the differences between these levels of interpretation.

Chapter 9 focuses on a critical comparison of ideas about the transpersonal self as understood within nine major psychological theories – those of Abraham Maslow, C.G. Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Stanislav Grof, Sri Aurobindo, Ken Wilber, Michael Washburn, Peggy Wright and Jorge Ferrer. From an examination of these various approaches, I identify twenty distinct meanings of the transpersonal self. I suggest that it is not possible at this stage in the development of transpersonal psychology to select any one theory or conception as being the most adequate although I state my own preference for a concept that emphasizes the integrated, embodied spiritual life. It is important, I suggest, to learn from each of these interesting and very different perspectives.

Chapter 10 examines the meaning of ‘transcendence,’ distinguishing between the phenomenological and metaphysical uses of the term and considering various difficulties with the approaches to transcendence taken by Jung and Wilber. I suggest that transpersonal psychology should adopt a more phenomenological perspective on transcendence and should be more cautious and explicit in its metaphysical assumptions. Moreover, I argue that the transpersonal does not *depend upon* a conception of the metaphysical Transcendent and that, as a science, transpersonal psychology cannot be *based upon* such metaphysical assumptions.

In Chapter 11, I define mysticism as ‘the individual’s direct experience of a relationship to a fundamental Reality’. A review of the literature reveals many different conceptions and descriptions of mystical experience. I examine in particular the approaches of William James, Evelyn Underhill, R.C. Zaehner, F.C. Happold, Walter Stace, Rudolf Otto, Andrew Rawlinson, Ken Wilber and John Welwood. On the basis of this review, I propose a new framework for understanding mysticism

(the '5 x 5' model) that identifies twenty-five distinct forms of mystical experience. These forms derive from the combination of five different *contexts* or objects of mystical experience (theistic, nature, social, mental, and monistic) and five different *modes* of experience (numinous, dialogic, synergic, unitive, and nondual). Assumptions and implications of the model are discussed.

Finally, in Chapter 12, I consider the current status of transpersonal psychology, including a summary of what I see as the major issues and controversies facing the discipline at this time. I also offer some suggestions for how transpersonal psychology might aim to develop a more integrative approach.

In this retelling of my intellectual journey in transpersonal psychology, several common and consistent themes emerge, many of which have been present in my thinking from the outset. In order more clearly to orientate the reader to my approach, I would, in particular, emphasize the following:

- A *humanistic* approach, which focuses upon the human origins, significance and value of transpersonal phenomena.
- The need to recognize, and to value, the full *range and variety of transpersonal experiences*.
- The close relationship between *paranormal and transpersonal experience*.
- A *pluralistic* approach that recognizes and values different perspectives on the transpersonal.
- A *pragmatic* approach to the transpersonal, in which the *transformative* function and potential of transpersonal experiences and events is primary.
- The need to develop adequate *narratives, myths and theoretical models* that are capable of guiding people towards transformation.
- The centrality of *morality* to human spirituality.
- The need for a *holistic* approach to spirituality that incorporates not only the shadow, but our relationship to other people, and the world in general.
- The importance of the *immanent* and the mundane.
- The need for transpersonal psychology to adopt a *scientific, investigative* approach that does not, however, preclude a normative agenda.