

# In Togetherness



a transpersonal philosophy

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

# In Togetherness

Totality and Beyond

*a transpersonal philosophy*

by

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

# *In Togetherness*

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Frontispiece : Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, Fourth Miniature, 12<sup>th</sup> century

Back cover : *Crusader Bible*, Manna from Heaven, 13<sup>th</sup> century



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**to the psychonauts**



# Contents

Preface

Preamble

## PART I

The Epistemological Turn . 27

Normative Epistemology . 67

Genetic Epistemology . 89

Being versus Existence . 123

Matter, Information and Consciousness . 143

Perennial, Empiricist and Participatory . 201

## PART II

Mapping the Transpersonal Event . 237

Togetherness in Sacredness . 337

## PART III

Nearing Totality . 347

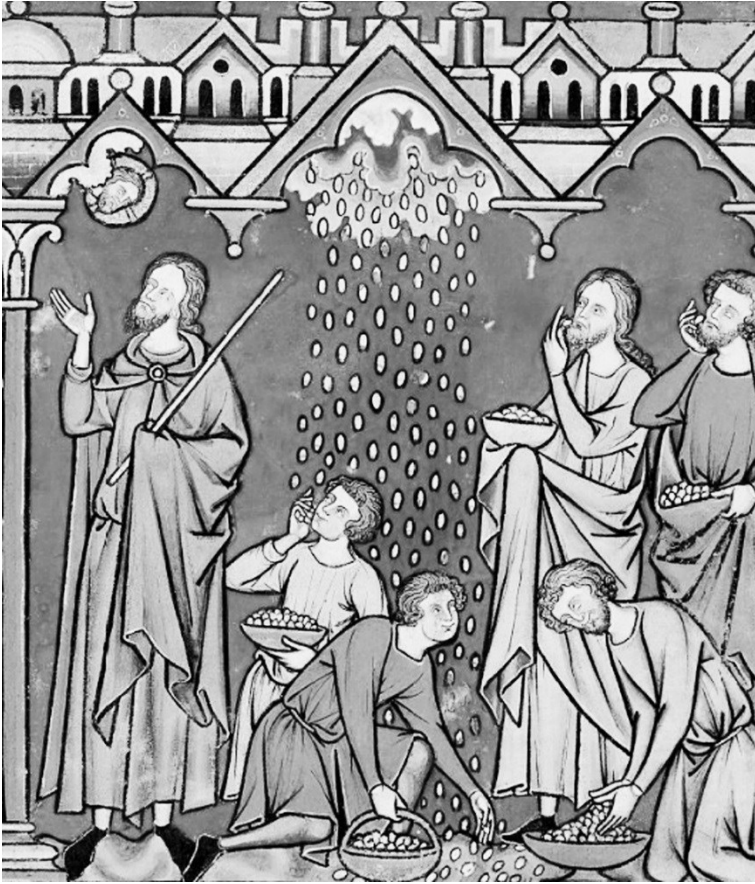
The Presence of the Infinite . 377

Epilogue . 431

Appendix . 441

Bibliography . 451

Index . 471



### **Manna from Heaven**

*Crusader Bible or The Morgan Bible*

illuminated in Paris (?), ca.1244-1254

The Morgan Library & Museum (Ms.M 638 fol.9v) – New York

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## Preface

When, at 21, I started to practice meditation, I could not possibly know what this would bring about in my life. On the one hand, I was ‘lucky’ in the sense that, already after my first session, the value of meditation became tangible to me. On the other hand, my daily routines and life expectations were utterly turned upside down, and it took me some time to adjust and find a new direction. The idea was to organize my life to study, reflect, and meditate daily, unhindered by the demands of society. In this, I was successful, and for over three decades, I made my way, seeking answers to the many questions my scientific and philosophically inclined mind wrestled with.

Critical of religious organizations and beginning my spiritual practice as a Saiva tantric, for years, I considered the traditional tenets of theism necessary to superstructure my spirituality. It caused considerable tensions with the scientific paradigm I believe to be of the utmost importance. In my view, rationality and spirituality (not to say ‘religion’) are to be harmonized. It led me to tweak my daily practice, returning to Mediterranean spirituality, assimilating aspects of the three ‘religions of the book,’ integrating elements from Qabalah, Christian mysticism, and Sufism. After years of dedicated practice, I realised that a lot of what the Semitic religions teach was rooted in Ancient Egyptian religion, prompting me to rekindle my study of Middle Egyptian.



These journeys did not end the many epistemological, ontological, and soteriological difficulties my mind continued to struggle with. The core of the problem was a stubborn fixation on wanting to understand what my yoga revealed to me in terms of a *substantial view on reality, and the absolute*, i.e., the idea ultimate reality exists from its own side, independent of the world, self-powered and with properties inhering in it.

When it dawned that spiritual reality could be superstructured by a processional, modal view, one *not* calling for inherent existing, I was ready to cast aside traditional theism and embrace another approach. I had been acquainted with process philosophy but had never made the connection between grasping things process-wise and at the same time thinking the absolute. My Platonic prejudice, stipulating that becoming was derivative and being the eternal model, had been very tenacious.

In 2006, I took refuge in the Three Jewels : the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. I ended all Platonizing theist practice. A year later, my meditation deepened, and my rational mind was finally at ease. It no longer felt overshadowed by irrational dogma and could assist rather than desist. Many of the issues it had encountered and could not have been solved without hurting the precept that the absolute is self-existing were gone. A deep sense of peace entered my heart. For the first time, the different facets formed a single diamond.

When I was a teenager, I got inspired by the teachings of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895 – 1986). Today, at 57, I still adhere to what he said in a speech in the Netherlands in 1929, dissolving the *Order of the Star*, rejecting to become the World Teacher prophesized by the heads of the Theosophical Society :

‘I maintain that truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized ; nor should any organization be formed to lead or coerce people along a particular path.’

Living a life of many blessings, I write this book as an organized summary of my findings. It is not intended as a manual, far from it, but as the roadmap of a view that has been gestating in my mind for years.

May it benefit other psychonauts and enable them to find their peace much sooner than I ever did.

‘There is a togetherness of the component elements in individual experience. This “togetherness” has that special peculiar meaning of “togetherness in experience.” It is a togetherness of its own kind, explicable by reference to nothing else. For the purpose of this discussion it is indifferent whether we speak of a “stream” of experience, or of an “occasion” of experience. With the former alternative there is togetherness in the stream, and with the latter alternative there is togetherness in the occasion. In either case, there is the unique “experiential togetherness.”’

Whitehead, A.N. : *Process & Reality*, 1929, § 288.

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## Preamble

What is the meaning of ‘transpersonal’ in ‘transpersonal psychology,’ ‘transpersonal event’ and ‘transpersonal philosophy’ ? The word ‘transpersonal’ means ‘beyond or through the personal,’ and refers to ‘experiences, processes, and events in which the usual self-conscious awareness is transcended and in which there is a sense of connection to, or participation with, a larger, more meaningful reality.’<sup>(1)</sup> So, there is a distinction between, on the one hand, what belongs to ‘normal’ egoic existence, and what, on the other hand, is part of a reality beyond the immediate grasp of the empirical ego. The transpersonal has normative and soteriological (salvic) aspects.<sup>(2)</sup> ‘Normal’ mental operations are identified using statistical, normative, and genetic criteria.<sup>(3)</sup> *Homo normalis* functions in the most common, standard, and apposite way possible. *Mutatis mutandis*, the transpersonal, is uncommon, non-conforming and untimely. It points to a mental condition deemed more valuable and satisfying than mere egoic existence, promoting the need for human transformation.

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(1) Daniels, M. : *Traditional roots, history, and evolution of the transpersonal perspective*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal psychology*, Wiley – Sussex, 2015, p.23.

(2) Caplan, M., Hartelius, G. & Radin, M.A. : *Contemporary viewpoints in transpersonal psychology*, in : *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 2003, 35(2) pp.143-162.

Ferrer, J.N. : *Integral transformative practice : A participatory perspective*, in : *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 2003, 35(1), pp.21-42.

(3) *statistical* : the median of a sample, *normative* : what *must* be the case, *genetic* : the case in a given developmental stage.

The term ‘transpersonal’ is recent and was used for the first time by William James (1842 - 1910).<sup>(1)</sup> The actual phenomena at hand have been known for millennia. They were part of Shamanism and Ancient Egyptian religion,<sup>(2)</sup> and of the experiences of Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhists and Taoist mystics and spiritual practitioners alike.<sup>(3)</sup> While superstructured<sup>(4)</sup> in various ways, ‘transpersonal’ points to *a common experiential core*.<sup>(5)</sup> Transpersonal psychology is the branch of psychology specializing in investigating transpersonal phenomena or events and their impact on society. It is not a psychology of religion, for it moves beyond mere description and psychological analysis of religious experiences.<sup>(6)</sup> This psychology proactively addresses the transformation of human beings, their *metamorphosis* into creative and spiritual individuals in charge of themselves, able to stand on their own two feet, empowering self-governance (*enkrateia*).

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(1) Hastings, A. : *Transpersonal psychology : The fourth force*, in : Moss, D. : *Humanistic and transpersonal psychology : A historical and biographical sourcebook*, Greenwood Press – Westport, 1999, pp.192-208.

William James uses the term ‘trans-personal’ in a 1905 Harvard course syllabus – Taylor, E. : *William James and transpersonal psychiatry*, in : Scotton, B.W., Chinen, A.B. & Battista, J.R. : *Textbook of transpersonal psychiatry and psychology*, Basic Books – New York, 1996, pp.21-28.

(2) Naydler, J. : *Shamanic wisdom in the Pyramid Texts*, Inner Trad. – Rochester, 2005.  
van den Dungen, W. : *Ancient egyptian readings*, Taurus Press – Brasschaat, 2016.

(3) van den Dungen, W. : *Het open hart*, Edicola – Deventer, 2015.

(4) Staal, F. : *Over zin en onzin in filosofie, religie en wetenschap*, Meulenhoff - Amsterdam, 1986.

Staal, F. : *Superstructures*, in : Woods, H. : *Understanding mysticism*, Image – New York, 1980, pp.92-108.

(5) Staal, F. : *Exploring mysticism*, Penguin – New York, 1980.

(6) Fontana, D. : *Psychology, religion and spirituality*, Blackwell – Leicester, 2003.

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Transpersonal psychology is considered more an applied science than a purely descriptive discipline. It not only investigates transpersonal events but wishes to bring them about. After finding 80 definitions of ‘transpersonal psychology’ published between 1991 and 2002, Shapiro et al. (2002)<sup>(1)</sup> concluded the standard terms pertained to the transcendence of the empirical ego. Sutich (1968)<sup>(2)</sup> published the first formal definition in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. It focused on ‘humanity’s highest potential’ and ‘unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness.’ A meticulous study of 160 definitions published from 1968 to 2003 found a focus on three themes : (1) ego-transcendence through elevated states of mind, (2) the importance of integrative and holistic psychology and (3) psychology of transformation.<sup>(3)</sup> The ‘beyond-ego’ aspect includes exceptional human experiences resulting from spiritual practices, such as Shamanism, Yoga, meditation, mystical practices, and  $\Psi$  phenomena not involving intentional practices (near-death and out-of-the-body experiences). The holistic pursuit integrates larger contexts, such as the body, the social situation, the therapeutic relationship, etc.

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(1) Shapiro, S.L., Lee, G.W. & Gross, P.L. : *The essence of transpersonal psychology*, in : *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 21, 2002, pp.19-32.

(2) Sutich, A.J. : *Transpersonal psychology : An emerging force*, in : *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 8(1), 1968, pp.77-78.

(3) Hartelius, G., Caplan, M. & Radin, M.A. : *Transpersonal psychology : Defining the past, divining the future*, in : *The Humanist Psychologist*, 2007, 35(2) pp.135-160.

As an approach to transformation, psychospiritual development is the focus. 'Here the transpersonal is not merely the content of a beyond-ego psychology, nor just the widened context of a whole-person psychology, but also the force or catalyst that drives human development towards its greater potentials.'<sup>(1)</sup>

In his 1901 – 1902 *Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion* at the University of Edinburgh, published in 1902 as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James studied religion through the psychological analysis of religious phenomena. He wrote : '... our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. (...) No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these others forms of consciousness quite disregarded.'<sup>(2)</sup> Later, in 1912, he argued religious experience to be a legitimate subject matter of scientific psychology, investigated by way of a 'radical empiricism'<sup>(3)</sup> taking on board internal mental states and processes.<sup>(4)</sup>

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(1) Hartelius, G., Rothe, G. & Roy, P.J. : *A band from the burning : Defining transpersonal psychology*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal psychology*, 2015, p.5.

(2) James, W. : *The varieties of religious experience*, Penguin – New York, 1982, p.388.

(3) James, W. : *Essays in radical empiricism*, Longmans & Green – New York, 1912.

(4) Taylor, E. : *William James on consciousness beyond the margin*, Princeton University Press – Princeton, 1996.

James also pioneered psychical research, central to understanding many religious questions and was acquainted with Swedenborg, American Transcendentalism, Theosophy, Christian mysticism, Sufism, Buddhism, Vedānta, and Yoga and conducted his experiments with the psychoactive *nitrous oxide* (laughing gas).<sup>(1)</sup> Characterizing mystical experience, James identified four characteristics ‘sufficient to mark out a group of states of consciousness peculiar enough to deserve a special name and to call for careful study.’<sup>(2)</sup> These are : (1) ineffability, (2) noetic quality, (3) transiency, and (4) passivity. Later, Stace (1960)<sup>(3)</sup> would enlarge this list, published in a systematic form by Pahnke et al. (1972).<sup>(4)</sup> It mentions eight traits : (1) undifferentiated unity, (2) insightful knowledge about existence and certainty about it, (3) space/time alterations, (4) sense of sacredness, (5) positive mood, (6) paradoxicality defying Aristotelian logic, (7) ineffability and (8) transiency. In 1965, Roberto Assagioli<sup>(5)</sup> identified 15 symbols of ‘transpersonal experience’ : introversion, descent, ascent, expansion, revival, light, fire, development, empowerment, love, pilgrimage, transmutation, rebirth, liberation, and resurrection.

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(1) James, W. : *Consciousness under nitrous oxide*, in : *Psychological Review*, 5, 1898, pp.194-196.

(2) James, W. : *The varieties of religious experience*, p.382.

(3) Stace, W. : *Mysticism and philosophy*, Lippincott – New York, 1960, p.79.

(4) Pahnke, W.N. & Richards, W.A. : *Implications of LSD and experimental mysticism*, in : Tart, Ch.T. : *Altered states of consciousness*, Anchor – New York, 1972, pp.409-439.

(5) Assagioli, R. : *I simboli del supernormale*, in : *Verso la luce*, 9, 1965, republished as : Assagioli, R. : *Transpersonal development*, Smiling Wisdom – Scotland, 2007, pp.80-97.



It brings us to the second use of the word ‘transpersonal,’ in expressions like ‘transpersonal event’ or ‘transpersonal experience.’ Experiences are ‘dynamic mental occurrences through which we endeavor to apprehend our circumstances.’<sup>(1)</sup> These occurrences are fed by the sensory apparatus (outer) and by volition, affects (emotions and feelings), thoughts, and consciousness. The former are sensate objects, the latter mental objects. Consciousness is the ‘subjective awareness and experience of both internal and external phenomena. These phenomena may include but are not limited to : internal sensations, perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and the sense of self, as well as perception of all classes of external objects, events, and other stimuli.’<sup>(2)</sup> Consciousness also refers to various ways to organize experience. Thus, an ‘altered state of consciousness’ (ASC) is defined in terms of a baseline state of consciousness or nominal consciousness. The latter is the waking state in which most day-to-day affairs are conducted. Alternate patterns of experience differ qualitatively from this typical baseline state. Vedānta identified a ‘fourth state’ (*turiya*) next to waking (*jāgrat*), dreaming (*svapna*) and deep, dreamless sleep (*suṣupti*).<sup>(3)</sup> This ‘pure’ background underlies and transcends the others.

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(1) Jeagwon, K. & Sosa, E. : *A companion to metaphysics*, Blackwell – Massachusetts, 1995, p.157.

(2) Garcia-Romeu, A. & Tart, Ch.T. : *Altered states of consciousness and transpersonal Psychology*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal psychology*, 2015, p.123.

(3) *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, verse 7, ca.6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

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In Ancient Egypt, admission to the priestly office was based on hereditary rights, cooption, purchase, royal appointment, and induction. The induction rituals, unknown in detail, implied a presentation in the temple, purification, anointment of the hands and beholding the deity. Induction had an impact on the person consecrated.<sup>(1)</sup> Although this does not seem to have been the primary target, it indeed had a welcome side-effect. As in Shamanism, induction aimed to permanently transform the priest's mind, making him or her 'fit for the job.'

'I was presented before the god, being an excellent young man while I was introduced into the horizon of heaven (...) I emerged from Nun, and I was purified of what ill had been in me ; I removed my clothing and ointments (...). I advanced before the god in the holy of holies, filled with fear before his power.'<sup>(2)</sup> In Ancient Greece, as far back as 1500 BCE, Dionysius, son of Zeus, was worshipped as the god of wine and intoxication. His worship called for ritual madness, dancing, and music accompanied by alcohol intoxication, generating an ecstatic state allowing the spirit of the god to possess the body.<sup>(3)</sup>

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(1) Sauneron, S. : *The priests of Ancient Egypt*, CUP – New York, 2000, p.48.

(2) van den Dungen, W. : *Egyptian initiation* : [sofiatopia.org/peret\\_em\\_heru.htm](http://sofiatopia.org/peret_em_heru.htm) - text found on statue n°42230 of the Cairo Museum.

(3) Kerényi, C. : *Dionysos : Archetypal image of indestructible life*, Princeton University Press – Princeton, 1976.

Walsh, R. : *The world of shamanism*, Llewellyn Publications – Minnesota, 2010, pp.15-16.

In the Eleusinian Mysteries, dedicated to Demeter, ‘something was drunk by each initiate and each saw something during the initiation that was utterly unexpected, transformative, and capable of remaining with each participant as *a powerful memory for the rest of their life*.’<sup>(1)</sup> In Yoga, Hindu and Buddhist, purification and union with higher spiritual states are the fruit of the path and imply altered states of consciousness.<sup>(2)</sup> These traditions : ‘can enable the activity of the mind to settle down and disappear entirely so that its fundamental inner nature, independent of all the contents of ordinary awareness, can be experienced with clarity.’<sup>(3)</sup> While psychoactives were not essential, their use in Tantric Buddhism is attested.<sup>(4)</sup> However, even in prehistory, archaeological, anthropological, and neuropsychological findings reveal that cave paintings were most likely influenced by imagery related to altered states.<sup>(5)</sup> Those evoked by hallucinogenic mushrooms may have played a significant role in the evolution of human language and symbol use.

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(1) McKenna, T. : *Food of the gods : The search for the original tree of knowledge, a radical history of plants, drugs, and human evolution*, Bantam Books – New York, 1992, p.133, my italics. The drug could have been *Amanita muscaria*, ‘child of the gods’ and ‘food of the gods’ or an LSD-like ergot derivative, cf. Wasson, G., Hofmann, A. & Ruck, C.A.P. : *The road to Eleusis*, North Atlantic Books – Berkeley, 2008.

(2) Feuerstein, G. : *The Yoga tradition : Its history, literature, philosophy and practice*, Hohm Press – Prescott, 1998.

(3) Shear, J. : *Eastern approaches to altered states of consciousness*, in : Cardena, E. & Winkelman, E. : *Altering consciousness : Multidisciplinary perspectives*, Volume 1 : *History, culture, and the humanities*, Praeger – Santa Barbara, 2011, p.140.

(4) Crowley, M. : *Secret drugs of Buddhism*, Amrita Press – California, 2016.

Metzner, R., Alpert, R. & Leary, T. : *The psychedelic experience*, Penguin – New York, 2008.

(5) Lewis-Williams, D. : *The mind in the cave*, Thames & Hudson – London, 2002.

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The use of psychoactive plants can be traced back to the period from 4200 to 6000 BCE, as evidenced by the appearance of the opium poppy, hemp seeds and the cultivation of beer and wine.<sup>(1)</sup> The discovery of bird-bone pipes from as far back as 30.000 years ago led to the conjecture that music and dancing were used to alter the mind.<sup>(2)</sup> So, altered states of consciousness have been around for quite some time. In the West, at least until Late Antiquity (ca. 2<sup>nd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), the prevalent context in which altered states happened was primarily ‘creative, religious, or spiritual in nature, and in some cases these states were specifically invoked for the purpose of healing or transformation.’<sup>(3)</sup> With the advent of Christianity, despite the visions of prophets like Ezekiel and the prophetic tradition of Early Christianity, the widespread rejection of both matter and body (*sōma sēma*) got coupled with a rebuff of altered states. During the best part of the Middle Ages (ca. 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries), these were associated with possession and trance. Dance, music, and the consumption of psychoactive drugs, the supposed fungi of Early Christianity (4), were forbidden, leading to Satan.

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(1) Ustinova, Y. : *Consciousness alteration practices in the West from prehistory to late antiquity*, in : Cardeña, E. & Winkelman, E. : *Altering consciousness : Multidisciplinary perspectives*, Volume 1 : *History, culture, and the humanities*, 2011, pp.45-72.

(2) Ustinova, Y. : *Ibidem*, p.49.

(3) Garcia-Romeu, A. & Tart, Ch.T. : *Op.cit.*, 2015, p.126.

(4) Allegro, J.M. : *The sacred mushroom & the cross*, Hodder & Stoughton – London, 1970.

Brown, J.A. : *John Marco Allegro : The maverick of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Eerdmans – Cambridge, 2005.

King, J.Ch. : *Christian view of the mushroom myth*, Hodder & Stoughton – London, 1974.

From the Enlightenment forward, ASC were identified with hypnosis, mesmerism, mediumship, and intoxication. William James was the first to probe the nature of consciousness. With his radical empiricism and the study of first-person accounts, an open, unbiased, independent investigation became possible. He was a forerunner who planted the seed for the scientific study of consciousness. In an essentially materialistic climate, reducing conscious states to neurological processes, this was a remarkable achievement. However, despite his work, psychology was too much steeped in materialism, behaviourism and Freudian psychoanalysis to explore consciousness in its own right.<sup>(1)</sup> We have to wait for the 1960s to taste the beginning of the effect of the changed socio-cultural context and its impact on scientism and physicalism,<sup>(2)</sup> the prevalent scientific paradigm or constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by relevant sign-interpreters (scientists) in a particular historical period.<sup>(3)</sup> While the materialist paradigm is still trying to keep its ground, entrenched as it is in the academic mentality, developments in physics, biology and psychology, not in the least thanks to transpersonal studies, bring about a new, more inclusive perspective, pointing to three interlocked by irreducible operators : matter, information and consciousness.

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(1) Moser, P.K. & Trout, J.D. : *Contemporary materialism*, Routledge – London, 1995.

(2) Tart, Ch. : *The end of materialism*, New Harbinger – Oakland, 2009.

van den Dungen, W. : *The end of physicalism* : [sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/materialism.htm](http://sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/materialism.htm).

(3) Kuhn, T. : *The structure of scientific revolutions*, UCP – Chicago, 1962.

In physics, particularly in quantum mechanics, the role of consciousness is persistent and, for most materialists, enigmatic.<sup>(1)</sup> In biology, the strict determinism advanced by Monod (1970) et al.<sup>(2)</sup> has been criticized experimentally as well as theoretically.<sup>(3)</sup> In psychology, the role of intention, inner life, and the first-person perspective has become central in existential, humanistic and transpersonal schools, steering away from the behaviourist model. Psychologists like Maslow,<sup>(4)</sup> Tart<sup>(5)</sup> and Grof<sup>(6)</sup> made unprecedented strides ‘in defining, researching, understanding, and working with altered states from within the Western paradigm.’<sup>(7)</sup>

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(1) Rosenblum, B. & Kuttner, F. : *Quantum Enigma*, Oxford Univ. Press – Oxford, 2006.

(2) Monod, J. : *Le hasard et la nécessité*, Seuil – Paris, 1970.

Dawkins, R. : *The selfish gene*, Oxford University Press – Oxford, 2016.

(3) Henikoff, S., Keene, M.A., Fechtel, K. & Friston, J.W. : *Gene with a gene*, in : *Cell*, 44, 1986, pp.33-42.

Watson, J.D., Gilman, M., Witkowskij, J. & Zoller, M. : *Recombinant DNA*, Scientific American Books – New York, 1992.

Denton, M.J. : *nature's destiny*, The Free Press – New York, 1998.

Aravind, L. : *Apoptotic molecular machinery : vastly increased complexity in vertebrates revealed by genome comparisons*, in : *Science*, 2001, pp.1279-1284.

Courseaux, A. & Nahon, J-L. : *Birth of two chimeric genes in the Hominidae lineage*, in : *Science*, 2001, pp.1293-1297.

Nagel, T. : *Mind & cosmos : Why the neo-Darwinian conception of nature is almost certainly false*, Oxford University Press – Oxford, 2012.

(4) Maslow, A.H. : *A theory of human motivation*, in : *Psychological Review* 50(4), 1943, pp.370-396.

Maslow, A.H. : *Towards a psychology of being*, Van Nostrand – New York, 1968.

(5) Tart, Ch. : *A psychophysiological study of out-of-the-body experiences in a selected subject*, in : *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research*, 62, 1968, pp.3-27.

Tart, Ch. : *Altered states of consciousness*, Wiley & Sons – New York, 1969.

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Tart, Ch. : *Waking up*, New Science Library – Boston, Massachusetts, 1986.

Tart, Ch. : *The end of materialism*, New Harbinger – Oakland, 2009.

(6) Grof, S. : *Realms of the human unconscious : Observations from LSD research*, Viking Press – New York, 1975.

(7) Garcia-Romeu, A. & Tart, Ch.T. : *Op.cit.*, 2015, p.128.

Recent scientific advances have put ASC on the map. Their occurrence in illness and injury,<sup>(1)</sup> sleep and dreaming,<sup>(2)</sup> hypnosis,<sup>(3)</sup> meditation,<sup>(4)</sup> mystical experiences,<sup>(5)</sup> near-death experiences<sup>(6)</sup> and out-of-the-body experiences<sup>(7)</sup> has been rigorously investigated.

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(1) Avner, J.R. : *Altered states of consciousness*, in : *Pediatrics in Review*, 27(9), 2006, pp.331-338.

(2) Kokoszka, A. & Wallace, B. : *Sleep, dreams, and other biological cycles as altered states of consciousness*, in : Cardeña, E. & Winkelman, E. : *Altering consciousness : Multidisciplinary perspectives*, Volume 2 : *Biological and psychological perspectives*, 2011, pp.3-20.

LaBerge, S. & Grackebach, J. : *Lucid dreaming*, in : Cardeña, E., Lynn, S.K. & Krippner, S. : *Varieties of anomalous experience : Examining the scientific evidence*, American Psychological Association – Washington, 2000, pp.151-182.

(3) Kallio, S. & Revonsuo, A. : *Hypnotic phenomena and altered states of consciousness : A multilevel framework of description and explanation*, in : *Contemporary Hypnosis*, 2003, 20(3), pp.111-164.

(4) Cahn, B.R. & Polich, J. : *Meditation states and traits : EEG, ERP, and neuroimaging studies*, in : *Psychological Bulletin*, 2006, 132(3), pp.180-211.

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(5) Austin, J. : *Zen and the brain*, (1998), *Zen-brain reflections*, (2006), *Zen-brain horizons*, MIT Press – Cambridge, 2014.

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Joseph, R. : *Neurotheology*, University Press of California – San Jose, 2002.

(6) Greyson, B. : *Near-death experiences*, in : Cardeña, E., Lynn, S.K. & Krippner, S. : *Varieties of anomalous experience : Examining the scientific evidence*, American Psychological Association – Washington, 2000, pp.315-352.

(7) Blackmore, S. : *Consciousness : An introduction*, OUP – Oxford, 2004.

Blanke, O. & Arze, S. : *The out-of-the-body experience : Disturbed self-processing at the temporo-parietal junction*, in : *The Neuroscientist*, 2005, 11(1), pp.16-24.

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Add to this the recent advances in parapsychology, and the concept ‘transpersonal experience’ has matured. ‘The evidence for Extra Sensoric Perception (ESP) and Psychokinesis (PK) (...) seems to be adequate. Serious attention to the evidence should be convincing to all except those who are irreversibly committed to the worldview of materialism and sensationalism, according to which ESP and PK are impossible in principle.’<sup>(1)</sup> Inspired by Gof (2015),<sup>(2)</sup> we may restrict ASC by identifying a subcategory encompassing all ‘technologies of the sacred,’ namely those ASC ‘oriented toward wholeness’ or ‘moving towards wholeness.’ This dynamic can be further characterized by distinguishing between, on the one hand, *ergotropic* (aroused) and *trophotropic* (calm) states<sup>(3)</sup> and, on the other hand, three soteriological dynamic ‘vectors’ : *ascending*, *descending* and *extending*.<sup>(4)</sup> These are also found in psychosynthesis<sup>(5)</sup> and will prove fruitful in combination with Deikman’s bimodality.<sup>(6)</sup>

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(1) Griffin, D.R. : *Parapsychology, philosophy and spirituality : a postmodern exploration*, State University of New York Press – New York, 1997, p.89.

Radin, D. : *Entangled minds*, Paraview – New York, 2006.

Radin, D. : *Supernormal*, Random House – New York, 2013.

(2) Grof, S. : *Revision and re-enchantment of psychology*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal psychology*, 2015, pp.92-93.

(3) Fischer, R. : *A cartography of ecstatic and meditative states*, in : *Science*, 1971, 174, pp.897-904.

(4) Daniels, M. : *Perspective and vectors in transpersonal development*, in : *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 2009, 13(1), pp.87-99.

(5) Assagioli, R. : *Psychosynthesis*, Penguin – New York, 1976.

(6) Deikman, A.J. : *Bimodal Consciousness*, 1971.



Let us turn to the subject matter of this book, ‘transpersonal philosophy.’ According to William James, the role of philosophy in the psychological study of religious experience is one of elimination and comparison, leading to a hypothesis less open to objection. He writes : ‘The spontaneous intellect of man always defines the divine which it feels in ways that harmonize with its temporary intellectual prepossessions. Philosophy can, by comparison, eliminate the local and the accidental from these definitions. Both from dogma and from worship, she can remove historic incrustations. By confronting the spontaneous religious constructions with the results of natural science, philosophy can also eliminate doctrines that are now known to be scientifically absurd or incongruous. Sifting out in this way unworthy formulations, she can leave a residuum of conceptions that at least are possible. With these, she can deal as a *hypothesis*, testing them in all the manners, whether negative or positive, by which hypotheses are ever tested. She can reduce their number, as some are found more open to objection. She can perhaps become the champion of one which she picks out as being the most closely verified or verifiable. She can refine upon the definition of this hypothesis, distinguishing between what is innocent over-belief and symbolism in the expression of it, and what it is to be literally taken.’<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) James, W. : *Varieties of religious experience*, 1982, pp.455-456.

Transpersonal philosophy develops philosophical ideas as part of a framework trying to understand transpersonal phenomena. It explicitly moves away from a pathological interpretation of these events,<sup>(1)</sup> nor does it deem the traditions bringing them forward as wishful thinking and delusion.<sup>(2)</sup> It accepts transpersonal events as phenomena in their own right, experienced by exceptional individuals (like mystics),<sup>(3)</sup> but also by *Homo normalis* in everyday contexts.<sup>(4)</sup> Without such an explicit philosophy, transpersonal research tends to fall back to modern philosophy ideas.<sup>(5)</sup>

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- (1) Freud, S. : *The Future of an illusion*, Martino Fine Books – Eastford, 2011.  
 Leuder, I. & Thomas, P. : *Voices of reason, voices of insanity*, Routledge – Philadelphia, 2000.
- (2) Ringoet, K. : *Was Plato schizofreen ?*, Soethoudt – Antwerpen, 1981.  
 Ellis, A. & Yaeger, R.J. : *Why some therapies don't work : The dangers of transpersonal psychology*, Prometheus Books – Buffalo, 1989.
- (3) Bridges, H. : *American mysticism from William James to Zen*, Harper & Row – New York, 1970.  
 Curle, A. : *Mystics and militants, A study of awareness, identity, and social action*, Barnes & Noble – New York, 1972.  
 D'Aquili, E. & Newberg, A.B. : *The mystical mind*, Fortress Press – Minneapolis, 1999.  
 Furse, M.L. : *Mysticism, window on a world view*, Nashville – Abingdon, 1977.  
 Happold, F.C. : *Mysticism, a study and an anthology*, Penguin – Baltimore, 1970.  
 Harkness, G. : *Mysticism, its meaning and message*, Abingdon Press – Nashville, 1973.  
 Otto, R. : *Mysticism East and West, A comparative analysis of the nature of mysticism, ré*, MacMillan – New York, 1932.  
 Scharfstein, B.A. : *Mystiek ervaren*, Servire – Katwijk, 1987.  
 Stace, W.T. : *The teachings of the mystics*, Mentor – New York, 1960.  
 Stace, W.T. : *Mysticism and philosophy*, Macmillan – London, 1973.  
 Underhill, E. : *Mysticism*, Dutton – New York, 1912.  
 Woods, H. : *Understanding mysticism*, 1980.
- Zaehner, R.C. : *Mysticism, sacred & profane*, Oxford University Press – Oxford, 1961.  
 Zaehner, R.C. : *Zen, drugs & mysticism*, Vintage – New York, 1974.  
 Zaehner, R.C. : *Hindu & Muslim mysticism*, Oneworld – Oxford, 1994.
- (4) Laski, M. : *Everyday ecstasy*, Thames & Hudson – London, 1980.
- (5) Hartelius, G. & Ferrer, J.N. : *Transpersonal philosophy : The participatory turn*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal psychology*, 2015, p.187.

In *Book of Lemmas* (2016) and *Regulae* (2016),<sup>(1)</sup> philosophy proper, clearly distinguished from its ‘logistics’ (the study of its encyclopedia, history and themes), is divided into (a) normative philosophy, (b) descriptive, theoretical philosophy or metaphysics and (c) the philosophy of the practice of philosophy.

(a) Normative philosophy : transcendental inquiry digs out the rules of thought (truth), affect (beauty), and action (goodness) we have been using all along, giving rise to three normative disciplines : epistemology, esthetics, and ethics ;

(b) Descriptive philosophy : once it is known what we must think, do and expect, descriptive, theoretical philosophy or (immanent) metaphysics advances *a totalizing picture of the world*, one in which matter (physics, cosmology), information (biology) and (human) consciousness are put together to explain what exists in nature ;

(c) The practice of philosophy : the *philosophy of the practice of philosophy* complements the normative and descriptive work. As *praxis*, the psychology, sociology, economics, etc., of acquiring wisdom are integrated, increasing efficiency.<sup>(2)</sup> Transpersonal philosophy is the work of theoretical philosophy backed by normative studies *in casu* epistemology.

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(1) van den Dungen, W. : *Book of lemmas*, Taurus Press – Brasschaat, 2016.

van den Dungen, W. : *Regulae*, Taurus Press – Brasschaat, 2016.

(2) van den Dungen, W. : *Philosophy : theory and practice*, 2007 : [www.sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/philo\\_study.htm](http://www.sofiatopia.org/equiaeon/philo_study.htm)

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Maslow (1966)<sup>(1)</sup> was the first to criticize scientific objectivity as applied to psychology and sketched the outlines of an *alternative* psychological paradigm.<sup>(2)</sup> But this did not bring about an alternative to the modernist framework, with its objectivity and empiricism. At the start of this century, three paradigms integrating transpersonal events existed : *empiricist*, *perennialist*, and *participatory*. The *empiricist* is rooted in the approach of physical science, focusing on testability and arguability, requiring a trained observer to replicate its claims. The *perennialist*, while taking many forms (cf. *infra*), in essence, claims ‘that spiritual traditions use culturally diverse language and symbols to represent what is essentially the journey to a single spiritual ultimate.’<sup>(3)</sup> The *participatory* view has transpersonal events as participatory. ‘They are not made up inside a private mind, but are something that happens in the shared world. Nor are these experiences something happening *to* the individual, but actions that world and self bring forth together. (...) Self and world, part and whole, shape each other reciprocally in an ongoing process of mutually transforming participation.’<sup>(4)</sup> Instead of ‘rivers leading to the same ocean,’ there is ‘an ocean with many shores’ ...

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(1) Maslow, A. : *The psychology of science*, Harper & Row – New York, 1966.

(2) Maslow, A. : *Towards a psychology of being*, 1966.

(3) Ferrer, J.N. : *The perennial philosophy revisited*, in : *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 32(1), 2000, pp.7-30.

(4) Hartelius, G. & Ferrer, J.N. : *Transpersonal philosophy : The participatory turn*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal psychology*, 2015, p.197.

Each of these philosophical points of view has strong and weak points. The demarcation of both calls for a critical exercise. Undoubtedly, the importance of what is accessible to experience via the senses cannot be denied. It is as crucial to discuss what is experienced and come up with a language to talk about it in symbols. Such discourses happen in concepts, conventional abstract constructs or glyphs solidifying meaning. Science, using testability and arguability, is the best conventional truth around. According to Staal (1980),<sup>(1)</sup> the scientific exploration of mystical states must involve the daily practice of meditation. Without actually experiencing the holotropic<sup>(2)</sup>, the scientist cannot articulate a valid symbolic system of meaning regarding these events nor design an empirically informed practice. The problem with empirically informed theories is the dubious status of sense-data.<sup>(3)</sup> Affirming their ‘hard’ and ‘indubious’ nature is itself *not* a sense-datum. In actuality, mind (theory) and appearance (fact) co-arise. The so-called ‘neutral’ sense-datum is always part of *other mental states*. Indeed, ‘most think in terms of experiential data being explicitly or implicitly interpreted *post factum*.’<sup>(4)</sup> A wrong view ...

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(1) Staal, F. : *Exploring mysticism*, 1980.

(2) ‘Holotropic’ was coined by Grof, S. : *Revision and re-enchantment of psychology*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal psychology*, 2015, p.92. A holotropic event belongs to a subgroup of ASCs and is always ‘oriented towards wholeness.’

(3) ‘observations, and even more so observation statements and statements of experimental results, are always *interpretations* of the facts observed’ – Popper, K. : *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Harper Torchbooks – New York, 1965, p.107f.

(4) Geurts, J.M.P. : *Feit en theorie*, Van Gorcum – Assen, 1978, p.73, my translation.

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The perceptual experiences of the knowing subject are the only epistemic validators for claims about the external world, i.e., *no cognition of any reality existing independently of consciousness is possible*. ‘Hence our truth-claims cannot be immediately and definitely grounded on, or redeemed by, intuitional evidence ; for all intuitional evidence of perception *is always symbolically interpreted evidence*, or, in other words, is language-impregnated or even *theory-impregnated*.’<sup>(1)</sup> Cognitive states occur as part of a set of other cognitive states and within a cognitive system (Searle, 1996).<sup>(2)</sup> Our experiences are always our own, be they individual (First Person), shared (Second Person) or communal (Third Person). Sensate objects are co-dependent on the content of consciousness. While science calls for an experiential stance, participant observation is unavoidable. We must remain critically aware sensate objects appear in subjective and intersubjective interpretative frameworks one cannot reduce or eliminate ; this is critical realism instead of ontological realism. As will be discussed later, an ‘empirical transpersonal philosophy’ may well be a *contradictio in terminis*.

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(1) Apel, K.O. : *C.S.Peirce and the post-Tarskian problem of an adequate explication of the meaning of truth*, in : *The Monist*, 63 (3), pp.390, my italics ; ‘intuitional’ here means ‘based on sensory input, perception.’

(2) Searle, J.R. : *Speech acts : An essay in the philosophy of language*, Cambridge University Press – Cambridge, 1970.

Searle, J.R. : *The construction of social reality*, Penguin – New York, 1996.

Searle, J.R. : *The mystery of consciousness*, Granta – London, 1997.

Perennialism, on the other side of the spectrum, upholds the idea that the same spiritual truths underlie all spiritual traditions, namely the fact of an objective but unseen, immeasurable and publically inaccessible domain or ontological stratum of reality. Encountering this through private practice constitutes objective empirical inquiry. As in Platonism and neo-Platonism, an ontological duality or ontological divide (*chōrismós*) persists, experientially accessible as an individual, subjective experience. The exceptional individual perceives the transcendent and Divine, be it a shaman, seer, prophet, mystic, or healer. Ferrer (2000)<sup>(1)</sup> identified five different types of perennialist thought (cf. *infra*).

Indeed Perennialism, as an idealist paradigm of sorts, stretches its reach. However, the ‘nugget of gold’ of such a linear, standardizing approach, aiming to generate a grand meta-theory or ‘theory of theories’, is the idea some underlying ultimate reality exists of which more can be said than it being merely a ‘mystery.’ Indeed, this ultimate reality is a datum of direct subjective experience. Perennialists tend to focus on this single nondual reality. Wilber (2006)<sup>(2)</sup> posits a world of objective things-in-themselves (*noumena*) behind the world of phenomena ; a form of Platonism.

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(1) Ferrer, J.N. : *The perennial philosophy revisited*, in : *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 32(1), 2000.

(2) Wilber, K. : *Integral spirituality : a startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*, Shambhala – Boston, 2006.

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In Ferrer's 'participatory turn,' the diversity of all spiritual traditions is put to the fore. A pluralistic point of view emerges. Cultural differences are accepted as more than just 'outer' factors to be distinguished from the transpersonal event proper. Generalizations about the object of transpersonal experiences are not made. Participatory thought views the world as a dynamic and open-ended living system constantly co-creating itself (Ferrer, 2011).<sup>(1)</sup> The modern division between the rational mind and the objective world is criticized, for the subject and the world, part and whole, shape each other reciprocally. Rejected is the modern notion that 'the human mind is something quite separate from the material world : either it observes objective reality from a wholly different dimension, or else it is sequestered from objective reality.'<sup>(2)</sup>

The problems with pluralism are : (1) the *minimalization of the commonalities* between spiritual traditions (to avoid a 'grand theory'), (2) a description *lacking interpretation*, (3) a *vague research agenda* and (3) the *absence of any understanding of ultimate reality* beyond calling it 'the Mystery of existence' or 'the Ocean of Emancipation'.<sup>(3)</sup>

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(1) Ferrer, J.N. : *Participatory spirituality and transpersonal theory : A ten-year retrospective*, in : *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 2011, 43(1), pp.1-34.

(2) Hartelius, G. & Ferrer, J.N. : *Transpersonal philosophy : The participatory turn*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal psychology*, 2015, p.194.

(3) Ferrer, J.N. : *Revisioning transpersonal theory*, State University of New York Press – New York, 2002, p.145.



Ferrer's 'participatory turn' avoids the naive realism of empiricism and the objectivism and individualism of the perennialists. The mystery is not 'explained' or poured into neat theoretical categories. However, for Friedman, it is a 'mini-theory,' 'allowing for acknowledging and respecting cultural differences,' while building 'silos that separate, abnegating the possibility of finding useful connections.'<sup>(1)</sup>

Taking the strong points together, we understand how the scientific approach of transpersonal events, based on argument (theory-formation) and experiment, results in empirically informed spiritual practice. This endeavour is rooted in the modern distinction between subject and object of an experience only leads to problems when the latter are substantialized (as in Cartesian rationalism), i.e., deemed *different* substances instead of *distinct* operators sharing a common ground. Science is process-based, not substance-based. Moreover, it needs to be 'forthrightly acknowledged and accepted that there are areas within the transpersonal that truly elude scientific efforts.'<sup>(2)</sup> Nondual observation thought and action<sup>(3)</sup> are non-conceptual and so beyond the reach of science. While the capstone of transpersonal theory is ineffable, its direct experience is not.

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(1) Friedman, H.L. : *The role of science in transpersonal psychology*, in : Friedman, H.L. & Hartelius, G. : *Transpersonal psychology*, 2015, p.303.

(2) Friedman, H.L. : *Ibidem*, p.307.

(3) Loy, D. : *Nonduality*, Humanity Books – New York, 1988.

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Perennialism is correct in describing and interpreting the commonalities between the various spiritual traditions and their take on transpersonal phenomena. However, it cannot presuppose a Platonic rift, i.e., two ontological strata of existence, an incommensurable ontic difference between relative (conventional) and absolute (ultimate) reality and truth, for such a distinction is merely epistemic, not ontological. Nor are direct (yogic) perception and common dualistic observation empirical in the same sense of the world. *Gnosis*, being non-conceptual, is a datum of direct experience (affect both senses and mind), but the latter is always a first-person event that cannot be communicated to anyone else by way of language and the use of symbols. It is a datum of un-saying.<sup>(1)</sup> Transcendence may be the object of sublime spiritual poetry, but such art is unrevealing to those who never had any gnostic encounters. Of course, while *gnosis* (*jñāna*) is the high-end result or ‘apex’ of any transpersonal transformation, lower-end transpersonal states exist, and these, happening to the conceptual mind, may be communicated to an intimate friend (second-person) and the world at large (third person).

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(1) Sells, M.A. : *Mystical languages of unsaying*, University of Chicago Press – Chicago, 1994. ‘The Aporia of Transcendence. a) X transcends all names and referential delimitation. b) If the major premise is true, it must also be false or incomplete because if X is ineffable in this rigorous sense, it cannot be called X. c) This dilemma leads neither to silence nor to a distinction between two kinds of names (...). d) The aporia yields an open-ended process by which the original assertion of transcendence continually turns back critically upon itself.’ (p.207)

The participatory turn invites us not to become too puffed up with our theoretical constructs, and rightly so. We need a model devoid of presupposed absolutes, firmly anchored in the individual and shared experience. The influence of culture and language (semiotics) cannot be underestimated, and the idea that all spiritual traditions are so many rivers leading to the same ocean does injustice to the fecundity of the transpersonal. The pre-given spiritual reality cannot be experienced except by the gifted individual and is impossible to put into words (such as nondual cognition), is indeed the transcendent, supernatural aspect of the transpersonal.<sup>(1)</sup> Like transcendent metaphysics,<sup>(2)</sup> it is untestable and beyond conceptualization (*nirvikalpa*). However, this does not preclude transpersonal events from staying within the limitations of the natural order (part of the world). Such naturalism is not necessarily ontological materialism, as will become clear later. For Friedman, Perennialism is a grand theory. He places the participatory turn on the other side, together with ‘mini-theories that avoid explaining much of anything.’ The scientific approach called the ‘critical paradigm,’ is ‘middle-range.’<sup>(3)</sup> ‘Rather than trying to explain everything, these theories carve out a limited, but not so limited as to be just local, context in which to explain how things might operate

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(1) Friedman, H.L. : *The role of science in transpersonal psychology*, *Op.cit.*, 2015, p.307.

(2) van den Dungen, W. : *Book of lemmas*, 2016, Lemmas 44-54.

(3) Friedman, H.L. : *Op.cit.*, p.303.

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and they attempt modest generalizations across local situations in search of regularities without becoming fixated on either grandiosely explaining everything or humbly denying the possibility of any valuable explanations. Middle-range approaches focus on balancing the interplay between theory and data without privileging either, which recognises the equal importance of both, providing a solid foundation for developing scientific theory further. In contrast, grand theories can be seen as overly focused on building one-size-fits-all theory to the exclusion of attending to the specifics of data, while mini-theory can be seen as overly focused on gathering specific data to the exclusion of building generalizable theory.’<sup>(1)</sup>

The idea of a middle-range theory is one backed by Criticism –a post-positivistic, hyper modernist theory of knowledge– and in tune with methodological pluralism, a process-view on what exists and an *expanded*, non-reductionist naturalism taking into account matter, information and consciousness. As ‘the dominance of materialist naturalism is nearing its end (...) A genuine alternative to the reductionist program would require an account of how mind and everything that goes with it is inherent in the universe.’<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Friedman, H.L. : *The role of science in transpersonal psychology*, *Op.cit.*, 2015, pp.303-304.

(2) Nagel, T. : *Mind & cosmos*, 2012, p.18.