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The Transpersonal Self:
2. Comparing Seven Psychological Theories

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Abstract

This is the second of two papers in which I examine the meaning and significance of concepts of the transpersonal self. An earlier paper focussed on the historical development and experiential foundations of religious and metaphysical ideas about the soul. The present paper focuses on a critical comparison of ideas about the transpersonal self as understood within seven major psychological theories - those of Abraham Maslow, C.G. Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Stan Grof, Ken Wilber, Michael Washburn and Peggy Wright. From an examination of these various approaches, I identify nineteen 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. On the contrary, it is important to learn from each of these interesting and very different perspectives.

This is the second of two papers in which I discuss the meaning and significance of the concept of the transpersonal self. In the first paper (Daniels, 2002) I considered the historical development and experiential foundations of religious and metaphysical ideas about the soul. The present paper examines the ways in which various psychological theories have addressed the question of the transpersonal self. I shall question how comprehensive and useful these theories are, and what can we learn from the differences among them. In this, I shall focus my discussion on seven of the major theoretical approaches in transpersonal psychology. These are:

1. The Metamotivational Theory of Abraham Maslow
2. The Analytical Psychology of C.G. Jung
3. Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis
4. The Holotropic Model of Stan Grof
5. The Structural Model of Ken Wilber
6. The Analytic Model of Michael Washburn
7. The Feminist Theory of Peggy Wright

Before discussing each of these theories in turn, it perhaps useful to point out that they all share certain common assumptions about the nature of the transpersonal and transpersonal identity. These assumptions are:

- Transpersonal identity involves a *developmental achievement*.
- This achievement entails going *beyond* the experience of both *egoic* and *existential* (authentic) identity.
- Transpersonal identity is associated with the realisation of modes of functioning and experience that have distinctly "*spiritual*" qualities.

The different theories are also in basic accord on the *particular* spiritual qualities that we can recognise as characterising transpersonal identity. Frances Vaughan (1985, p. 28) identifies these as: compassionate, loving, wise, receptive, allowing, unlimited, intuitive, spontaneous, creative, inspired, peaceful, awake, open, and connected.

Where the theories fail to agree is in their *conceptual understanding* of the transpersonal self, and in their *developmental psychology* or explanations of how transpersonal identity may be achieved.

The Metamotivational Theory of Abraham Maslow

Maslow is generally acknowledged as one of the founders of both humanistic and transpersonal psychology. In the late 1960s, together with his colleagues Stan Grof, Anthony Sutich and others, he proposed the term *transpersonal psychology* to distinguish what they saw as the "fourth force" that was then emerging from the "third force" of humanistic psychology.

Maslow's own interest in the transpersonal derives from his investigations into the experiential and motivational characteristics of exceptional, "self-actualising" people. In particular, Maslow became interested in the nature and consequences of mystical-type "peak experiences", or moments of highest happiness and fulfilment, that were reported by many (but not all) self-actualisers. According to Maslow, peak experiences involved a special mode of transcendent cognition (Cognition of Being, or B-Cognition) that exhibits qualities of, for example, exclusive attention, holistic perception, self-forgetfulness, and receptivity. Maslow also noted that In B-Cognition, the world was perceived in terms of universal values (B-Values) such as truth, goodness, beauty, unity, aliveness, perfection, justice, order and meaningfulness. As a result of these experiences, the person's values and goals were often transformed - they were now *metamotived* by the universal B-Values rather than by self-interest. Moreover, so passionate was the commitment to the B-Values that these became *defining qualities of the self*. In this way the person identifies the "highest self with the highest values of the world" (Maslow, 1973, p. 327) and thereby begins to lose the distinction between self and non-self.

In arguing that the B-Values were genuinely universal, rather than simply cultural, this implied to Maslow that they must be a *biological* potentiality and therefore part of what he termed our organismic "inner core" or "Real Self".

> The value-life (spiritual, religious, philosophical, axiological, etc.) is an aspect of human biology and is on the same continuum with the 'lower' animal life (rather than being in separated, dichotomized or mutually exclusive realms). It is probably therefore species-wide, supracultural even though it must be actualized by culture in order to exist ... The spiritual life is then part of the human essence. It is a defining characteristic of human nature … It is part of the Real Self ... The spiritual life (the contemplative, 'religious', philosophical or value life) is within the jurisdiction of human thought and is attainable in principle by man's own efforts.
>
> (ibid. p. 341)

Although this may seem to some to be a crude form of biological reductionism, Maslow himself believes that nothing of the actual range, quality or human meaning of spiritual or religious experience is lost in this "humanistic" identification with the biological. All that is lost, he suggests, is the unnecessary belief in unprovable transcendent metaphysical realities such as the immortal soul, or God.

Maslow's theory can undoubtedly account for many types of transpersonal experience. However, his own emphasis is on the personal and transpersonal "heights" and as a result he tends to ignore the role of the unconscious and of spiritual crises such as the Dark Night (St John of the Cross, 1991).

The Analytical Psychology of C.G. Jung

Jung's approach to the transpersonal (a term that he did not use) is deliberately and consistently *psychological* rather than metaphysical. In some ways this is paradoxical because Jung was profoundly interested in the spiritual questions and immersed himself throughout his life in the religious and metaphysical literature of the world, especially that of Hermeticism and Gnosticism. He also had a life-long interest in the occult and experienced many events of a paranormal kind, including a profound near-death experience and encounters with "spirit guides" such as Elijah, Salome, and another that he named Philemon.

Jung's theory is based on the concepts of *archetypes* and the *collective unconscious*. Archetypes are universal patterns of experience, predisposing us to think and feel towards certain objects or events in particular ways. The archetypes exist in the collective unconscious - a universal level of the mind that is a kind of psychological storehouse of shared memories. The collective unconscious is "uberpersonlich", or "above the person", existing as a reality that is beyond the individual level of mind and to that extent may be considered to be transpersonal (or at least trans-individual). For Jung, therefore, transpersonal experiences (including the experience of God) are essentially those of the collective archetypes. In Jung's theory, there are four main archetypes relevant to the concept of the transpersonal self. These are

(a) *shadow*, (b) *soul-image* (*anima / animus*), (c) *mana personalities*, and (d) the *Self*.

The archetype of the *shadow* represents our own unacceptable, antisocial, frightening, irrational, or evil characteristics. These are a direct challenge to our conscious self-image and to our sense of rationality and mental control. This so disturbs the conscious mind that it attempts to dissociate from the shadow by repressing these tendencies into the unconscious. The shadow is also projected unconsciously onto other individuals and groups who thereby become the objects of our prejudice, hatred and scapegoating. In dreams and fantasies, the shadow is often experienced in the form of frightening, tormenting figures. For Jung, it was important to learn to *own* our shadow, thereby beginning the important psychological work of integrating the conscious and unconscious within the larger totality of the Self.

The *soul-image* is a complex set of ideas about a person's general relationship to the unconscious mind (which includes much more than the shadow). Essentially the soul-image is an *archetypal personification* of the unconscious, which is therefore experienced as having a distinct personality of its own (Jung believed that this personality was generally contrasexual). The soul-image thus portrays a hidden, mysterious and fascinating part of the self that is experienced by the conscious self as a semi-autonomous "other" with whom a relationship is possible. The soul-image appears in multiple guises and has both a positive and negative aspect. In practice, the soul-image is typically projected onto persons of the opposite sex. It also appears in our dreams, fantasies or visions in various opposite-sex personifications. A man's *anima* may be experienced or projected as, for example, a maiden, witch, whore, or mother. For Jung the *anima* or *animus* is also a source of inspiration, vitality and creativity - a person's inner Muse. Jung interpreted his own encounters with Salome as an example of *anima* experience.

Mana is a Polynesian and Melanesian word referring to the essential force or power that resides in objects, plants, animals, and people. For Jung, the *mana personality* represents the archetypal personification of the extraordinary inner power found deep within the unconscious. In contrast to

the soul-image, the mana-personality is generally experienced as (or projected onto) same-sex figures. For men, it may appear as the *puer aeternus* (eternal boy), Hero, Father, or Wise Old Man, whereas, for women, it may manifest as the *puella aeterna* (eternal girl), Amazon, Great Mother or Sibyl. Jung's experiences with Elijah were understood as a manifestation of the mana personality.

In Jung's psychology, the *Self* is an archetypal image representing the primal ground and totality of the psyche (conscious and unconscious). More specifically, it refers to the psychological goal of union between consciousness and the unconscious. In this sense, the Self is something to be *realised*. However, this is a theoretical goal that can never be fully attained in practice because, for Jung, the totality of the Self can *never* be fully known (the unconscious will always remain). The Self is also experienced as an inner guiding and organising principle that is always seeking union and balance within the psyche. The Self appears in dreams, fantasies and myths in forms that symbolise wholeness, balance, harmony and perfection - for example, as Christ, Krishna, Buddha, Sun, Circle, Wheel, Square, or mandala.

Jung's theory is extraordinarily full and rich and provides a framework within which we may interpret very many of the experiences that suggest a transpersonal aspect to the self (see Daniels, 2002). These include shamanic journeying, encounters with spirit guides, near-death experiences, mediumistic experience, reincarnation experiences, intuition and inspiration, conversion and rebirth, revelations, guiding impulses, cosmic consciousness, and unitive experience (spiritual marriage). Furthermore the theory is metaphysically extremely parsimonious - everything hinges on the single assumption of the reality of the collective unconscious.

Where Jung has particular difficulty, however, is in accounting for the experiences of formless and non-dual consciousness. In 1958 the Zen scholar Shin'ichi Hisamatsu visited Jung's home at Kusnacht in Switzerland. Their discussion focussed on the relationship between Jung's concept of Self and the Zen notion of "No Mind" or "Original Self". Hisamatsu was very surprised by Jung's insistence that the Self could not be fully known, because there was always an unconscious stratum.

Hisamatsu: Now then, which is our True Self, the unconscious or consciousness? Which one is called "True Self" or "Self"?

Jung: Consciousness calls itself "I" (*ich*), while the Self (*Selbst*) is not "I" at all. The Self is the whole, because personality - you as a whole - consists of consciousness and the unconcscious. It is the whole or, in other words, the "Self." But I know only consciousness; the unconscious remains unknown to me.

Hisamatsu: According to your view, the "Self" is the whole. From this the question follows: Is "I-consciousness" different from "Self-consciousness" or not?

Jung: In ordinary usage, people say "self-consciousness", but psychologically this is only "I-consciousness". The Self is unknown, for it indicates the whole, that is, consciousness and the unconscious …

Hisamatsu: What? The self cannot be known?

Jung: Perhaps only one half of it is known, and that is the *ego*. The *ego* is half of the Self …

Hisamatsu: The essential point of … liberation is how we can be awakened to our Original Self. The Original Self is the self which is no longer bound by a myriad of things. To attain this self is the essential point of freedom. It is necessary, therefore, to release oneself even from the collective unconscious and the bondage which derives from it … What we generally call "self" is the same as the self [*Selbst*] characterized by you, Professor Jung. But it is only after the emancipation of this self that the "Original Self" of Zen emerges. It is the True Self described in Zen as the Self which is realized in absolute emancipation and is without dependence on anything … The True Self has no form or substance, whatsoever ... It is quite different from the ordinary *Atman*. Zen's True Self has neither spiritual form nor physical shape ... Therefore the True Self can never be bound by a myriad of things. Liberation, the essence of religious freedom, rests on this point ... Ultimately, to become "The Formless Self" is the essence of Zen.

(Meckel & Moore, 1992, 106-113)

This fascinating exchange encapsulates the critical difference between Jung's concept of the Self and that of Zen. Thus for Zen, the Original Self is fully known and awakened unto itself. In Hisamatsu's commentary on their conversation, he writes:

> "No Mind" of Zen is … not only known, but most clearly known, as it is called *"Kaku"* (awakening) or *"ryoryo jochi"* (always clearly comprehending). But this is not a state in which something is merely known. Rather, it is a clear "self-awakening in and to itself" that is without a separation between knower and known. "No Mind" is a state in which self is most clearly awakened to itself, such as when we are utterly absorbed in our work ... the "Self" of Zen is not concerned with anything internal or external … Rather, it is unbounded self-awakening. Therefore the "Self" of Zen is neither the *ego* of psychoanalysis, which is excited and disturbed by the *unconscious*, nor is it the self, which is composed of *ego* and unconscious.
>
> (ibid., p. 117)

Jung himself was clearly very dissatisfied with their conversation, and he wrote to the translator:

> I am sorry to say that your plan of publishing Dr. Hisamatsu's interview with me … is a most delicate and correspondingly dangerous procedure, with which I can hardly consent … You would be astonished at how little our knowledge and understanding of Zen is, which I gathered from my talk with Dr. Hisamatsu. That is not his fault, but my incompetence. Yet this is equally true as regards our European psychology of the Unconscious in Dr. Hisamatsu's case.
>
> (ibid., p. 114-115)

As well as Jung's apparent failure to grasp the nature of formless or non-dual consciousness, there is another problem that some commentators (e.g., Assagioli, 1993; Wilber, 1995) have identified in his whole approach to the transpersonal. This is that the concept of the collective unconscious fails to make any clear or adequate distinction between genuinely transpersonal ("higher" or spiritual) archetypes and those that are non-transpersonal or

"lower". For these commentators, archetypes such as the *shadow*, *anima* or *mana-personality* may indeed be universal-collective, but there seems to be nothing specifically or necessarily *transpersonal* about them. Although the mana-personality often takes the form of numinous figures such as the Wise Old Man or Priestess, it may also manifest as the eternal boy or girl. Assagioli (1993, p. 19) thus observes that "what Jung has called the 'collective unconscious' … includes elements of different, even opposite natures, namely primitive, archaic structures and higher, forward-directed activities of a superconscious character". Wilber argues more forcefully that Jung is guilty of "elevationism", i.e., reading "a deeply transpersonal and spiritual status into experiences that are merely indissociated and undifferentiated and actually lacking any sort of integration at all" (1995, p. 206).

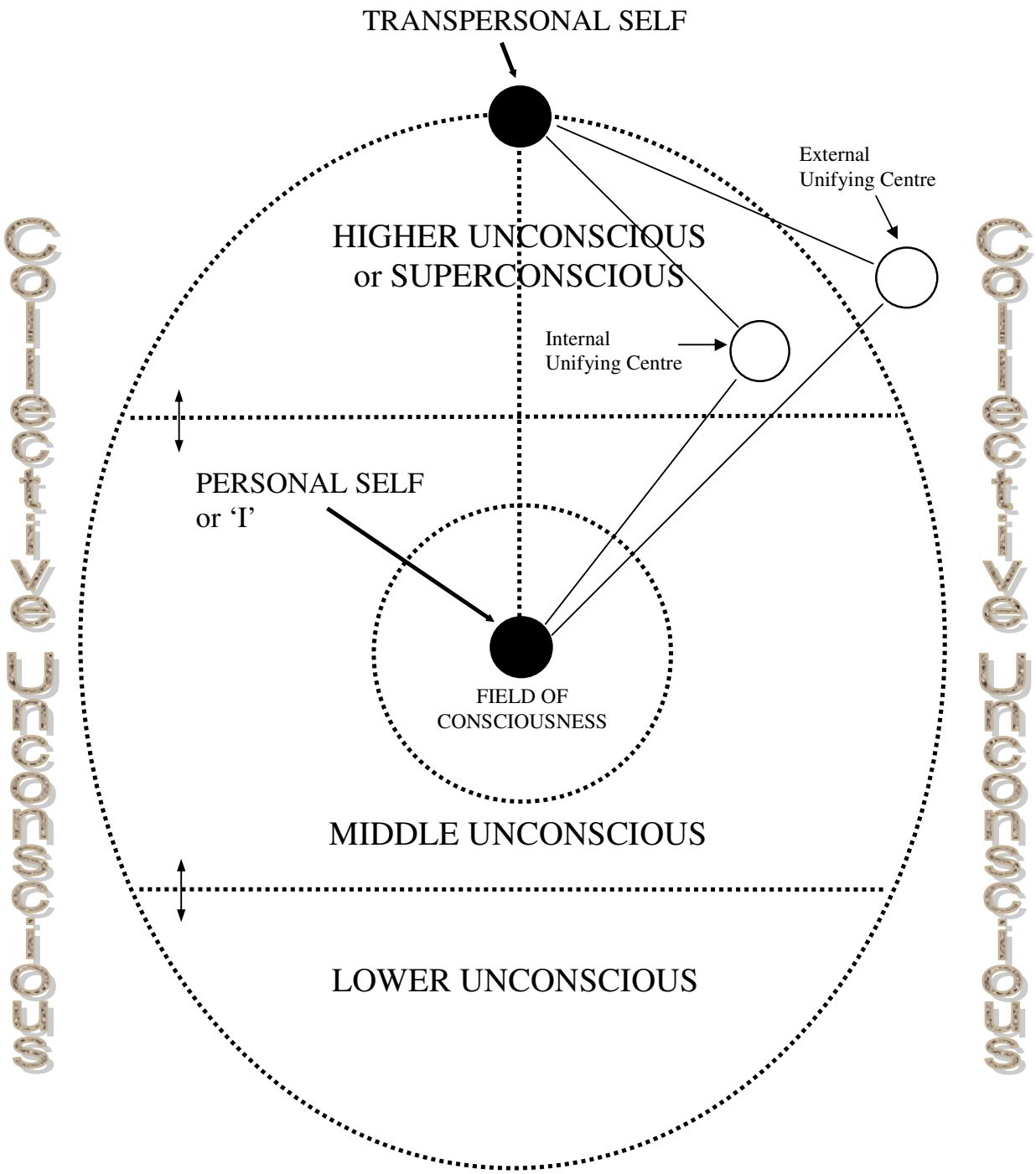
Now this leads us directly to one of the key issues in transpersonal psychology - what do we really understand by the term *transpersonal*? For Jung, the collective unconscious is itself a transpersonal ("uberpersonlich") reality precisely because it is *universal* - transcending both individual and social-cultural experience. According to this view, *any* archetypal experience is a transpersonal experience. But what, then, are we to make of the specifically *spiritual* archetypes such as the Sage, God or Goddess? What is unique or special about these? Jung's answer, and it may indeed be adequate, is that the spiritual archetypes are those of *mana personality* and *Self* - archetypes that represent "spiritual power" or the realisation of wholeness, balance and perfection. For his critics, however, the concepts of archetypes and collective unconscious are simply too neutral and too inclusive to qualify as a full and satisfactory psychological account of transpersonal experience.

Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis

It is precisely the need to distinguish between the "higher" and "lower" levels of the unconscious that is emphasized in Assagioli's psychosynthesis theory. Assagioli was a practitioner of Patanjali's Raja Yoga and student of the esotericist Alice Bailey and in many ways his theories represent an attempt to psychologise these spiritual teachings. In particular, Assagioli was concerned to reintroduce the concept of the personal *soul* into psychology.

Assagioli's theory of the transpersonal (a term that he adopted in his later writings) is summarised well in his famous "egg diagram" (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Assagioli's Model of the Human Psyche



Adapted from Assagioli, (1965), Firman & Gila (1997)

The first thing to note about this diagram is that the personal egg contains *both* the higher and lower unconscious. In Assagioli's model, therefore, the higher unconscious (or "superconscious") is distinguished from the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious represents the individual's relationship with "other human beings and with the general psychic environment" (Assagioli, 1993, p. 19). In contrast, the higher unconscious is the source of "higher intuitions and inspirations … higher feelings … states of contemplation, illumination, and ecstasy … higher psychic functions and spiritual energies" (ibid., p. 17-18). It is also the source of higher values. The higher unconscious, then, is essentially the realm of spiritual *content* (images, energies, etc.). Experience in this realm, according to Assagioli, generally *precedes* consciousness of the Higher Self.

Assagioli's equivalent to the personal soul appears at the apex of the higher unconscious. Assagioli variously refers to this as the Self, Higher Self, Spiritual Self, True Self, Real Self, Noumenal Self, or Transpersonal Self. The Higher Self is different from the Conscious Self, or I - the "point of pure self-awareness … the center of our consciousness" (ibid. p. 18) - which is merely the reflection or projection of the Higher Self. However, such reflection or projection means that there are not really *two* selves in us - this is simply a relative appearance:

> Indeed, it is *as if* there were two selves, because the personal self is generally unaware of the other, even to the point of denying its existence; whereas the other, the true Self, is latent and does not reveal itself directly to our consciousness … There are not really two selves, two independent and separate entities. The Self is one; it manifests in different degrees of awareness and self-realization. The reflection appears to be self-existent but has, in reality, no autonomous substantiality. It is, in other words, not a new and different light but a projection of its luminous source."
>
> (ibid. p. 20)

The Higher Self is therefore the "permanent center … situated beyond or 'above' [the conscious self]" (ibid. p. 18). The Higher Self can, however, be

consciously realised in states of cosmic consciousness or by using psychological methods such as Raja Yoga.

> The real distinguishing factor between the little self and the higher Self is that the little self is acutely aware of itself as a distinct separate individual, and a sense of solitude or of separation sometimes comes in the existential experience. In contrast, the experience of the spiritual Self is a sense of freedom, of expansion, of communication with other Selves and with reality, and there is a sense of Universality. It feels itself at the same time individual and universal.
>
> (ibid., p. 87)

Such realisation - the expansion of personal consciousness into that of the Self - makes possible the transformation of the whole personality around this new center. This, for Assagioli, is the goal of *spiritual or transpersonal psychosynthesis* (which he distinguishes from *personal psychosynthesis*, or the development of a well-integrated personality).

However, spiritual psychosynthesis cannot generally be achieved immediately or directly (even temporary states of cosmic consciousness or samadhi do not fully or permanently transform the personality). Instead, the spiritual ascent or growth is long and difficult, involving a series of intermediate stages and plateaux, perhaps including some form of explicit psycho-spiritual practice. More generally, it entails developing relationships with dynamic "unifying centres" (representations or ideal models of the Higher Self) that serve to create a link between the conscious self and Higher Self. Such unifying centres may be external (e.g., a Guru, spiritual ideology or good cause), or internal (e.g.,an inner teacher or inner Christ).

Assagioli also mentions two wider forms of psychosynthesis. *Interindividual psychosynthesis* involves the recognition of our interconnectedness and interdependence and the development of harmonious interpersonal and inter-group relationships. Beyond this, there is *cosmic synthesis* or "the Supreme Synthesis". This is the individual expression of a larger or wider "spiritual, super-individual Reality … a divine being or … cosmic energy - the Spirit working upon and within all creation … shaping it

into order, harmony and beauty, uniting all beings ... with each other through links of love" (ibid. p. 31).

Assagioli's theory accounts effectively for the vast majority of transpersonal experiences. What Jung understands as the expressions of spiritual archetypes (experiences of spirit guides, near-death experiences, intuition and inspiration, etc.) Assagioli sees as manifestations of the higher unconscious, or superconscious. Assagioli's theory provides, however, a more convincing account of cosmic consciousness, which is understood as the conscious realisation of the Higher Self. Where Assagioli seems to have some difficulty is in explaining the differences between cosmic consciousness and the other major types of mystical experiences such as formless Witnessing, theistic unitive experience, and non-dual consciousness. Unitive and non-dual experience could both be considered as experiences of the supreme reality (divine being or *Brahman*), but that begs the question why, then, are these experiences so different?

However, there is perhaps a price to pay for the seemingly greater scope and precision of Assagioli's model. This is the increase in the number of metaphysical assumptions made. Assagioli himself is quite clear about this when appealing to a cosmic "spiritual, super-individual Reality". Where he is less clear is in relation to the Higher Self. It is quite difficult to read Assagioli without drawing the conclusion that he views the Self as an actual ontological reality (the Soul, or *Atman*). However, like Jung, he claims to be concerned essentially with the undeniable *psychological* reality of spiritual Self, rather than with the question of its ontological or metaphysical status.

> We would therefore emphasize our neutrality towards those "ultimate" problems, for our concern is to focus on living psychological experience and psychological facts … We are not attempting to force upon psychology a philosophical, theological or metaphysical position
>
> (ibid. p. 193)

In Jung's case, this type of explanation may satisfy the reader, simply because it is unclear exactly what Jung's own religious beliefs were (cf.

Daniels, 2001). With Assagioli, however, it is much less convincing because of his known allegiance to particular spiritual and esoteric doctrines.

The Holotropic Model of Stan Grof

Stan Grof's approach to the transpersonal is perhaps the most comprehensive of all the major theorists. This is because it incorporates, and provides explicit accounts of, a remarkably wide range and diversity of transpersonal experiences. The origins of Grof's theory lie in his extensive investigations of the therapeutic potential of psychedelic drugs and of Holotropic Breathwork™, a experiential procedure which he developed involving lengthy sessions of altered breathing, music and energy work. Grof found that the types of extraordinary experience reported using LSD and Holotropic Breathwork were remarkably similar and included sensory alterations, emotional reliving of past events and traumas, death and rebirth episodes, and a wide variety of psychic, archetypal and mystical experiences.

In order to account for these experiences, Grof suggests that we have access to three domains of the psyche. In addition to the personal or biographical unconscious of psychoanalysis, there are the *perinatal* (literally "around birth") and *transpersonal* domains. He suggests that, in practice, experiences of a spiritual and transformational nature can represent both perinatal and transpersonal influences and may result from the mediation of the transpersonal by the perinatal.

The perinatal domain represents the effect of intrauterine and birth experiences, which can be understood in terms of four common (archetypal) patterns. These patterns, known as Basic Perinatal Matrices, continue to affect us throughout our lives - an influence that includes the modification or colouring of transpersonal experience. For example, the symbiotic union and security of intrauterine existence (BPMI) is connected with blissful "oceanic" experiences of oneness with the universe, or encounters with blissful deities. BPMII (associated with uterine contractions) may lead to experiences of being caught hopelessly in a dangerous and grotesque world of nightmare creatures and images, or to the Dark Night of the Soul. BPMIII (represented by the opening of the cervix and the movement down the birth canal) is a time of

optimism, excitement and struggle. BPMIII experiences may take the form of titanic death-rebirth struggles, apocalytpic visions, or wild, sexual ecstasies. BPMIV represents the moment of birth. It is typically associated with experiences of ego death and rebirth, sacrifice, visions of brilliant light, or ecstatic union with specific deities, God or the Divine Self.

Grof does not attempt, however, to fully explain all spiritual-archetypal experiences in terms of perinatal influences. Thus he also postulates the existence of a "genuinely" transpersonal (universal) level of reality. The fundamental difference, then, between the perinatal and the transpersonal domains is that the perinatal is essentially an aspect of *personal* psychology (a consequence of individual and collective human-personal experience), whereas the transpersonal represents a level of *universal* mind or consciousness.

> To understand the transpersonal realm we must begin thinking of consciousness in an entirely new way … as something that exists outside and independent of us, something that in its essence is not bound by matter … Transpersonal consciousness is infinite, rather than finite, stretching beyond the limits of time and space
>
> Grof, 1993, p. 83

In this way, Grof's understanding of the transpersonal domain differs from both the collective unconscious of Jung and the higher unconscious of Assagioli. Jung's collective unconscious thus partly overlaps with both perinatal and transpersonal, whereas Assagioli's Higher Unconscious is essentially a subset of the transpersonal.

Grof suggests that it is useful to divide the transpersonal domain into three major regions of experience:

(a) The extension of consciousness *within* ordinary space-time reality. This includes experiences such as identification with other people or groups, union with the physical world, clairvoyance, and memories of past lives.

(b) The extension of consciousness *beyond* ordinary space-time reality. This includes shamanic journeying, channeling, encounters with mythical-archetypal figures, and formless consciousness (Void).

(c) "Psychoid" experiences. These are experiences that are neither clearly mental nor physical, such as UFO encounters, synchronicities, psychokinesis, poltergeists and magic.

Grof's account of transpersonal experiences is remarkable for its originality and scope, and for the challenge that it offers to our traditional understanding of spiritual experience. His daring suggestion that spiritual experience reflects or is modified by intrauterine and childbirth events is, of course, highly controversial (see, for example, Wilber 1997, chap. 7) as is his willingness to include paranormal experiences within the realm of the transpersonal (cf. Daniels, 1998).

In relation to the transpersonal *self*, Grof recognises a variety of such *experiences* (e.g., of the inner core, divine Self, universal self, etc.) but, unlike Assagioli, he does not prioritise or reify the concept of Self. Grof's metaphysical position emphasises the fundamental realities of the *psyche* and of a *universal consciousness* which overlaps, but is not identical, with the material world. This universal consciousness itself contains many levels or regions of experience. These include not only the personal, archetypal and spiritual, but also other universes and other dimensions.

The Structural Model of Ken Wilber

Ken Wilber provides an approach to the transpersonal based on the "perennial philosophy" that he suggests may be found among all sophisticated spiritual traditions. The perennial philosophy recognises an ultimate Ground (e.g., Consciousness, Spirit, or God) that manifests in time as the Great Chain of Being. The Great Chain begins when the Ultimate Reality first becomes *involved* in Matter, and then *evolves* in progressively higher forms (Life and Mind), before it eventually *realises itself* as Spirit. In this way the evolutionary process manifests as a "spectrum of consciousness" (Wilber, 1993). Wilber's suggestion that such a philosophy is "perennial" is highly contentious. In practice his theory is based closely on Vedanta and Buddhism, and on the

integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo. His ideas also may also be compared with the process philosophies of Teilhard de Chardin (1959) Alfred North Whitehead (1929) and Charles Hartshorne (e.g., 1964).

For Wilber, transpersonal experience can be understood in terms of the evolution of higher modes of human consciousness. Following the successive development of egoic and existential (*centaur*) identity, consciousness evolves through various levels of transpersonal experience - *subtle*, *causal* and *ultimate*, each of which also has its own particular "shadow" and associated pathologies (for an interesting discussion of these transpersonal pathologies, see Wilber, 1986, chap. 4). Students of Vedanta will immediately recognise Wilber's adoption of terms from the teaching of the "three bodies" (gross, subtle, causal).

The *subtle* level refers to all transpersonal experiences that operate at the level of *thought*. These include, for example, psychic perceptions, cosmic consciousness, visions, hypnotic states, illuminations, encounters with spirit guides, subtle-body awareness, past-life memories, archetypal experiences, and unitive experiences. Wilber sometimes distinguishes between low-subtle (psychic-astral) and high-subtle (archetypal-divine) experiences (e.g., Wilber, 1996, chap. 8). At the low subtle or psychic level, experiences are still closely tied to the gross physical realm (Wilber, 1995, p. 607-608). Such experiences include nature mysticism, cosmic consciousness, clairvoyance, *siddhis*, ghosts, and Grof's "psychoid" experiences. The high subtle (or truly subtle), on the other hand, represents experiences that are entirely at the level of thought, with little reference to the gross realm. These include deity mysticism, visions, illuminations, and experiences of archetypes.

In contrast to the subtle, the *causal* level operates not with thought, but with the *root of attention*. Causal experiences, therefore, are those that are based on our capacity for Witnessing. Such experiences include soul mysticism (Zaehner, 1961; Happold, 1970), silent awareness, *sunyata* or emptiness, formless radiant bliss, the "No Mind" of Zen, and identity with Eckhart's Godhead (rather, than God). Wilber sometimes distinguishes between the "low causal" and "high causal" (see, for example, Wilber, 1996, chap. 9). In the low causal, there is still some sense of self or identity (e.g., as

the Godhead, Brahman, or "final God"), whereas at the high causal, the sense of self is entirely transcended in the experience of pure formlessness or Void.

According to Wilber, *beyond* the causal, there is the possibility of "Ultimate" non-dual consciousness, *Rigpa*, or "One Taste". He describes non-dual consciousness as follows:

> When one breaks through the causal absorption in pure unmanifest and unborn Spirit, the entire manifest world (or worlds) arises once again, but this time as a perfect expression of Spirit and as Spirit. The Formless and the entire world of manifest Form - pure emptiness and the whole Kosmos - are seen to be not-two (or nondual). The Witness is seen to be everything that is witnessed, so that, as Ramana puts it, "The object to be witnessed and the Witness finally merge together … and Absolute consciousness alone reigns supreme." But this nondual consciousness is not other to the world: "Brahman is the World … the whole cosmos [Kosmos] is contained in the Heart … All this world is Brahman." … No objects, no subjects, only this … ever-present as pure Presence, the simple feeling of being: empty awareness as the opening or clearing in which all worlds arise, ceaselessly: I-I is the box the universe comes in. … the world arises as before, but now there is no one to witness it … In that pure empty awareness, I-I am the rise and fall of all worlds, ceaselessly, endlessly. I-I swallow the Kosmos and span the centuries … It is as it is, self-liberated at the moment of its very arising. And it is only *this*.
>
> (Wilber, 1995, p. 308-310)

This description of non-dual experience is very clear. However, it begs the question: How exactly is non-dual One Taste different from the cosmic consciousness that Wilber has also attributed to the low-subtle (psychic)? Compare the description above with, for example, Wilber's own discussion of cosmic consciousness as exemplified by Emerson's experience and account of the Over-Soul.

> [In] direct Kosmic consciousness … the Over-Soul becomes, or is *directly one with* [KW's italics] the physiosphere and biosphere and

> noosphere … And Emerson means this literally! According to Emerson, this Kosmic consciousness is not poetry … rather, it is a direct realization …With the Over-Soul, the World Soul, it is not that individuality disappears, but that … it is negated and preserved in a deeper and wider ground, a ground that conspicuously includes all of nature and its glories … since the Over-Soul is an experienced identity with all manifestation, it is an identity that most definitely and exuberantly embraces nature, and, to that degree, it begins to undercut the subject/object dualism. Emerson explains:
>
> > We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul [the Over-Soul, the World-Soul]. And this deep power in which we exist and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, *but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one*. [MD's italics]
>
> (Wilber, 1995, p. 284-285)

In some endnotes, Wilber (1995) attempts to explain why this does not count as a genuinely nondual or ultimate experience. Thus he writes:

> [Psychic mysticism] is mysticism, but mysticism with one foot still in the gross. It is gross-oriented mysticism (and that is what *all* of these wildly different phenomena have in common, from paranormal to kundalini to nature mysticism to cosmic consciousness … the psychic is, and can be, the home of anything from initial meditation experiences to paranormal phenomena, from out-of-the-body experiences to kundalini awakenings, from a simple state of equanimity to full-blown cosmic consciousness: they are *all* the subtle realm breaking into the gross realm at the common border: the psychic … Emerson's own insights and awakenings often pass into the causal and the nondual, but it is a matter of degree, and his paradigmatic presentation is of the psychic-level Over-Soul … nation-nature mysticism does not generally recognize the

> subtle or causal dimensions … It is an identity with all of the waking-state (gross) Kosmos.
>
> (ibid. p. 609)

Now this *might* be a satisfactory explanation, although it seems to promote an unfortunate devaluation of the physical world and essentially depends upon our acceptance of Wilber's ideas about the spectrum of consciousness and the three bodies of Vedanta. Also to most people, I think, there is a vast difference in the apparent spiritual quality and value of an OBE and cosmic consciousness. More problematic, however, is the fact that Wilber's later and more informal accounts of non-dual One Taste (1999) seem clearly to contradict the view that it is fundamentally different from cosmic consciousness.

> You simply <u>are</u> everything that is arising moment to moment. You do not see the sky, you are the sky. You do not touch the earth, you are the earth. You do not hear the rain, you are the rain. You and the universe are what the mystics call "One Taste" … subject and object become One Taste and infinity happily surrenders its secrets … *One Taste or "cosmic consciousness"* - the sense of oneness with the Ground of all creation - is the deepest core of the nearly universal consensus of the world's great wisdom traditions … It is very simple, very obvious, very clear - concrete, palpable, unmistakable.
>
> (Wilber, 1999, p. 56-57, my italics)

In my view (and Wilber seems here to imply the same), there may be no fundamental conceptual or experiential difference between cosmic consciousness and non-dual One Taste. It is true that the *focus* of cosmic consciousness may be with the natural world, whereas One Taste also includes mental and "spiritual" forms. Yet, for me, both experiences imply a non-dual union of subject and object. The same can also be said for the deity mysticism of the unitive spiritual marriage, so that there may, in fact, be no essential *psychological* distinction between any of these experiences. Cosmic consciousness, spiritual marriage and One Taste may thus differ psychologically only in the particular *object* or *focus* of their union. Of course

this leaves open the question of whether there is an important *religious, theological* or *moral* distinction between the experiences, but that is another, larger matter.

This aside, Wilber's distinction between psychic, (high) subtle, causal and non-dual consciousness provides a useful means of classifying transpersonal experiences (although, of course, it is not entirely original). It is comprehensive in its coverage and clearly articulates the different qualities associated with various experiences. However, the question of whether Wilber is right to propose a *developmental or evolutionary sequence* through these "levels" of experience is more problematic since, for example, it implies that soul mysticism (e.g., formless consciousness) is a "higher" form of experience than God mysticism (e.g., spiritual marriage). Unfortunately I do not have space to discuss adequately this important question in the context of the present paper.

What, then, does Wilber have to say about the transpersonal *Self*? In this, I shall attempt to follow his most recent psychological formulations (Wilber, 2000). Wilber (ibid. p. 125) argues that the three "great realms - gross, subtle, and causal - are home to three different lines of self". These are *ego*, *soul*, and *Witness*.

The *ego* (or frontal self) includes all those self-structures or self-stages that serve to orient us to the gross (physical) world. The *soul* (or deeper psychic) is the self-system that operates at the level of subtle reality (pure thought). Finally the *Witness* (or Self) is adapted to the causal realm (root attention). According to Wilber, these lines or streams of the self are more or less independent. They are always simultaneously present, although to varying degrees, and each *develops* alongside the others.

The Self (Witness) is also charged with the role of attempting to integrate the various self-streams, along with other aspects of our experience (such as our cognitive development, world view, moral values, or sexual identity). In general terms, psychological development can be understood as a process whereby the "center of gravity of consciousness increasingly shifts from ego to soul to Self" (ibid. p. 127). Although arguing for the importance of

integrating the different self-streams, Wilber also emphasises that integration should not be seen as an entirely interior and individual endeavour. In contrast, the truly integrated life must involve a *simultaneous* development in the collective and exterior domains (or "quadrants"). In this way we should engage in a truly "integral therapy" or "integral practice" that includes, for example, physical training, relationship work, community service and political action (see, for example, Wilber, 1999, 129-131; Wilber 2000, 112-114)

As a *psychological* account of the transpersonal self, Wilber's theory is neat, internally consistent and in accord with much of the experiential and developmental data. However, Wilber does not intend his analysis to be merely psychological and, as a consequence, it merges almost seamlessly with a particular metaphysical perspective. Thus the soul and Witness are not understood simply as *psychological structures* that emerge during the lifetime of the individual, but rather they exist as immortal or timeless *metaphysical realities*.

As well as Vedanta, Wilber's metaphysics is based closely on that of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Freemantle & Trungpa, 1992). It is also very similar to the metaphysical perspective of Sri Aurobindo (e.g., 1970). According to this view, the soul (deeper psychic being) evolves from one life to the next, descending into the present body from the *bardo* realms in which it continues to exist between death and rebirth. Wilber argues that only such a view logically and convincingly explains the fact that young children can have genuinely *transpersonal* experiences, even before the frontal egoic (*personal*) identity has developed. Such experiences, he considers, represent the "trailing clouds of glory" (after Wordsworth) of the continuing awareness and memory of the deeper psychic being (see, for example, Wilber, 1996, chap. 18; 1997, pp. 179-184; 2000, pp. 141-142). This is, of course, an intriguing and exciting possibility. Unfortunately, however, the *logical necessity* of such an interpretation requires an acceptance of Wilber's own theoretical assumptions (i.e., that the transpersonal cannot *precede* the personal). Grof's theory, for example, provides a powerful alternative interpretation of infants' transpersonal experiences.

As well as the arguing for the pre-existence of the soul, Wilber suggests that the experience of *timelessness* associated with cosmic consciousness, formless awareness and One Taste provides direct confirmation of the eternal existence of the Transcendent Witness or Self.

> The pure Witness, itself being timeless or prior to time, is equally present at all points of time. So of course this is the Self you had before your parents were born; it is the Self you had before the Big Bang, too. And it is the Self you will have after your body - and the entire universe - dissolves … because it exists prior to time, period.
>
> (Wilber, 1999, p. 366)

However, Wilber seems to be confusing here two quite separate meanings of "timeless". I do not doubt that we can have experiences in which there is no associated sense of time and, *in that sense*, they are timeless, taking place "outside of" or with no reference to time. But that kind of *momentary timelessness* is not the same thing as being *eternal* in the sense of lasting forever or *throughout all time*. In fact, the two conceptions totally contradict each other. Better evidence that the Witness is eternal would be a *memory* of existing in a previous life, although again that is problematic for a variety of logical and psychological reasons.

Wilber's sophisticated theory undoubtedly represents a major achievement to which all transpersonal psychologists are indebted. For me, however, Wilber tends to be inconsistent and prejudicial in his analysis of mystical experience. As well as being highly metaphysical in its outlook and assumptions, Wilber's theory also relies perhaps too heavily upon the *particular* religious and metaphysical perspectives of Vedanta and Buddhism. For this reason it may not be as universally valid, or applicable, as Wilber would have us believe.

The Analytic Model of Michael Washburn

Michael Washburn (e.g., 1994, 1995) has developed a transpersonal psychology based on psychoanalytic, ego-developmental and Jungian perspectives. His theory focuses on the changing developmental relationship between two fundamental systems: (a) the *Dynamic Ground* or *nonegoic core*

and (b) the *ego*. According to Washburn the psyche originally exists as a dynamic, nonegoic core or ground of potentials (both *preegoic* and *transegoic*). With the emergence of the ego, the non-egoic core becomes repressed, leading to a fundamental separation between ego and Dynamic Ground. Transpersonal development involves the reconnection and integration of the ego with the nonegoic core, leading to a psycho-spiritual regeneration and redemption.

Transpersonal development generally begins around midlife when the mature ego has completed its own developmental tasks. At this time, in order to fulfil the larger agenda of integrating the whole psyche, the ego withdraws from the world, turns inward and begins to open up to the dynamic ground. The pull to withdraw from the world often leads to an experience of alienation and aridity - i.e., to the *Dark Night of the Senses* described by St John of the Cross (1991). Following this, the ego approaches the threshold of the unconscious nonegoic core. It does this with some ambivalence since the nonegoic core is experienced as primitive, dark and dangerous, but also as exciting and fascinating. If the ego is ready to undergo its "night sea journey" into the realm of the unconscious it begins to make contact with the deeper, numinous, *transegoic* potentials of the dynamic ground. This may result in ecstasies, illuminations, visions and experiences of subtle energies. However, according to Washburn, such experiences are, at this stage, of an immature variety and this false dawn soon gives way the *Dark Night of the Spirit* described by St John of the Cross (1991). Thus the ego is thrust into an abyss of darker, frightening, negative experiences such as guilt, worthlessness, dread, cynicism, paranoia, intimations of evil, strangeness, visions of wrathful deities and devouring demons.

> The ego struggles against these forces with all its strength but finally succumbs and is taken captive by them. It is swallowed up in the "belly of the beast"
>
> (Washburn, 1994, p. 238)

For Washburn, this voyage into the depths of the unconscious is not a psychotic breakdown, but represents a *regression in the service of*

transcendence. Eventually, as the ego learns to endure these experiences and to recognise them as expressions of the self's own nonegoic core, it ceases the struggle against them. This change of attitude results in the ego becoming increasingly open to the *positive*, *transegoic*, potentialities of the nonegoic core. These include a sense of enchantment, spiritual intoxication, rejoicing, religious ecstasy, love, rebirth, integration, guiding or angelic visions, and a sense of greater connection with other people, the body, and nature. As these positive experiences gradually come to predominate over negative experiences, the ego moves from the stage of *regression in the service of transcendence* to that of *regeneration in spirit*. Washburn argues that the ultimate goal and purpose of such transpersonal regeneration is "postdualistic integration" (ibid. p. 27) or the integrative life. This represents the ego's stabilisation on the plane of transpersonal experience and the integration of such experience in the personality, in relationships, and in engagement with the world: Thus "in achieving integration, we finally become complete human beings." (ibid. p. 293). The integrated life, Washburn suggests, is characterised by transparency and I-Thou intimacy, the feeling of blessedness, "hallowed resplendence" (the equivalent of One Taste or cosmic consciousness), mature contemplation (enstatic absorption, with or without form), "tertiary cognition" (creative thinking), and the physical embodiment of spiritual qualities.

As we have seen, there are just two main components to the self in Washburn's theory - the nonegoic core and the ego. Transegoic experience does not represent a *third* component, but is rather the consequence of the change in the ego's *attitude* towards the nonegoic, which has always contained both preegoic and transegoic potentials. However, Washburn does also talk about a "higher self" or "transpersonal self" at the centre of the nonegoic core. Thus in the process of regeneration in spirit:

> The ego now sees that behind the surface of ego identity and at the center of the repressed depths of the soul there lies a redeemable core, a higher self - a self of spontaneity and generosity, outgoingness and outreachingness - that needs to be elicited into activity and induced to grow.

(ibid. p. 258)

It is unclear from Washburn's account exactly how he conceives the higher self - whether as an experience, as a metaphor, symbol or archetypal personification of human perfection, as a psychological structure, as a potentiality, or as an actual metaphysical entity. Wilber (e.g., 1997, chap 6) has criticised Washburn's theory more generally for what he sees as its reductionistic metaphysical assumptions and its failure to distinguish adequately between the preegoic and transegoic potentialities of the nonegoic core. According to Wilber, Washburn's model simply confuses the great "domains" of body and spirit. Washburn responds to this criticism by arguing that Wilber's own theory is unparsimonious and is based on the fallacy of concluding that what is a real difference between pre-eogic and transegoic *stages of development* (or *experiences*) necessarily implies the existence of different prepersonal and transpersonal *structures* (Washburn, 1998).

Washburn's (1994) discussion of the phenomenology of transpersonal experiences is both rich and comprehensive, and he provides a convincing analytic-developmental explanation of many of these experiences. His suggestion that transpersonal development represents a *spiralling* process in which the ego must return to the depths of the unconscious before it becomes regenerated in spirit contrasts starkly with the essentially *linear* ascent from prepersonal, to personal, to transpersonal proposed by Wilber. Washburn's theory is consistent with much of the clinical data and undoubtedly represents many people's experience of transpersonal development especially, perhaps, those who do not follow a structured path of meditation (for whom Wilber's theory may have greater appeal). Washburn (e.g., 1994, xiii-xiv) also points to important cultural differences, and he suggests that the spiral paradigm (shared by Jung and Grof) is closer to Western experience of spiritual development, whereas the ladder paradigm is more consistent with Eastern spirituality (especially Buddhism and Vedanta). We are not yet in a position, he argues, where a truly cross-cultural transpersonal perspective has been achieved.

The Feminist Theory of Peggy Wright

Peggy Wright (1998) criticises much of the theorising in transpersonal psychology, especially that of Wilber, for being androcentric and patriarchal in its assumptions and therefore for ignoring or devaluing women's experience of spirituality (cf. Heron, 1998). She argues that these theories also pay insufficient attention to the spiritual experiences of indigenous peoples, which are often simply dismissed as "primitive".

Wright's own transpersonal approach is based on her experience with indigenous ways of knowing (including shamanic journeying) and on feminist theories of the self, especially the work of Nancy Chodorow (1978) Jean Baker Miller (1991) and Carol Gilligan (1993). These emphasise the concept of a "connected self" or self-in-relationship. As well as recognising our relationship and interconnectedness with other people, Wright also argues for the importance of establishing healthy relationships with our body and emotions, and with the natural world. To encourage this, we should pay much more attention to experiences of Goddess-focussed and indigenous spirituality. This immanent, descending and feminine approach to the transpersonal is contrasted with what she sees as the dominant transcendent, ascending and masculine approach of Wilber.

According to Wright, the connected self is one that is open, empathic and responsive to others. In particular, to exist as a self-in-relationship requires us to have "permeable" boundaries. This permeability allows self and other to be simultaneously experienced in a form of non-dual awareness. Wright sees permeability as a central feature of women's experience, including their experience of the transpersonal. Unfortunately this experience is misunderstood and misrepresented by Wilber, for whom permeability represents the primitive absence of clear boundaries between the self and the world. For Wilber, Wright's claim that permeability is a feature of women's transpersonal experience is therefore an example of what he calls the *pre-trans fallacy* (Wilber, 1980), i.e., the failure to recognise the difference between prepersonal and transpersonal levels. Wright responds by arguing that Wilber is himself guilty of what she calls the *pre-perm* fallacy, i.e., the

failure to distinguish between the prepersonal *lack* of boundaries with the mature *permeable* boundaries of the connected self.

Although it may seem that Wright is advocating the ideas of immanence and interconnectedness as *alternatives* to those of transcendence and individual achievement, she also recognises the importance of a healthy integration of these different perspectives. This, she argues, will require new models of transpersonal development that are capable of incorporating both the feminine and masculine value-spheres, and also the spiritual experiences of indigenous peoples.

Summary and Conclusions

We have covered some difficult and complicated territory. Let me try to summarise the various conceptions of the transpersonal self that these theories suggest or imply. According to these different conceptions, aspects of the transpersonal self, or transpersonal identity, may be understood as:

1. The organismic "inner core" or Real Self.
2. Self-identification with highest values.
3. The whole psyche - conscious and unconscious.
4. The higher unconscious.
5. An archetype (inspiring, powerful, integrating, spiritual).
6. The extension or "raising" of consciousness.
7. The integration of conscious and unconscious.
8. A guiding force or organising principle.
9. An inner unifying centre.
10. A permanent centre of Being.
11. The reincarnating psychic being.
12. A subtle self-stream.
13. The individualised divine soul (Atman).
14. The Universal Self (Atman-Brahman).

15. The Transcendent Witness (possibly eternal).
16. No Self or One Taste (anatta).
17. The spiritual transformation of the personality.
18. The connected / permeable self.
19. The integrated, embodied spiritual life.

In listing these various concepts, several of which show some overlap in meaning, I am seeking to do justice to their richness and diversity, and to recognise the importance of each for any attempt to understand fully the nature of transpersonal experience. I am not suggesting at all that we must choose between them, although I note that several imply metaphysical assumptions or conclusions. That may indeed be unavoidable if we are fully to make sense of people's experience of the transpersonal and I do not rule out such ideas. As long as are they are made explicit, and as long as they do not violate reason, or the facts, or morality, then fair enough. Neither am I arguing, a priori, in favour of any particular conception, although my own clear preference is with the integrated, embodied, spiritual life (No. 19). Having argued the need for transpersonal psychologists to be explicit about their metaphysical assumptions I should perhaps add that my own metaphysical views are not fully formed and I remain open to various hypotheses.

I have tried to give a fair and accurate account of all seven theories, while pointing out what others, and I, see as some of their failings and limitations. As with the various conceptions of the transpersonal self, I do not think that it is possible at this stage in the development of transpersonal psychology to select any one theory as being the most adequate. On the contrary, I think that we can all learn much from each of these interesting and very different perspectives.

In relation specifically to the concept of the transpersonal Self, I can think of no better words to conclude than those of Frances Vaughan.

> The concept of a transpersonal Self, like any theoretical construct, is … considered an expedient or transitional teaching rather than a final teaching ... To pursue this dimension of identity is to embark on the

spiritual path. But the person who sets out on the spiritual path never arrives at the destination, because who one thinks one is turns out to be only an illusion of a separate self that ultimately dissolves into the deity, or larger whole.

Once the illusory nature of all self-concept is perceived in the context of absolute subjectivity, the transpersonal Self can be perceived as an image of qualities one chooses to value, rather than a separate identity to be constructed. It may be considered as existing a priori as an embodiment of abstract ideals such as truth, goodness, and beauty … or it may be considered to have no existence apart from concrete expressions and manifestations … Either way, identification with and expression of a transpersonal Self is an alternative to choose, an identity to seek, a value to create, and a reality to be experienced as long as one feels that one exists as a subject, separate from the world of objects."

(Vaughan, 1986, p. 54).

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