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Shadows of Substance, Illusions of Light: Psi, Transpersonal Psychology, and the New Science of Consciousness

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ABSTRACT: Philosopher Michael Grosso recently argued in this *Journal* for a reunion of parapsychology and transpersonal psychology, citing the practical and theoretical benefits to both disciplines if psi and spirituality were not regarded as separate or mutually exclusive categories. For Grosso, such a merger is the precursor to the birth of "a new science of spiritual consciousness." I argue that this proposed reunification would be a mistake. Although the data of transpersonal-type experiences may indeed be relevant to parapsychological inquiry, transpersonal theory—which is heavily influenced by the Hindu-Buddhist religious traditions—would only skew the data of psi and reinforce the very aspects of parapsychology that need to be questioned if the field is to progress. Rather than merge with transpersonal psychology, I argue that parapsychology should maintain its epistemological autonomy while subjecting itself to a sustained critical self-examination.

In a recent essay in the pages of this journal, philosopher Michael Grosso issued a clarion call for a new science of consciousness encompassing both parapsychology and transpersonal psychology (Grosso, 2000, pp. 101-129). According to Grosso, this new synthesis would be a more experientially oriented (or "shamanic") approach, uniting in a single, comprehensive discipline the presently divided territories of psi and spirituality—fields of study originally subsumed under the older rubric of psychical research. This original unity fragmented, creating separate and sometimes mutually antagonistic fields of study, as psychical research was succeeded in the 1930s by J.B. Rhine's statistical model of parapsychology, and further hardened as transpersonal

psychology developed as an autonomous discipline in the late 1960s.

Citing the current impasse in survival research as a prime case in point, Grosso argues that by healing the rift between parapsychology and transpersonal psychology, both sides would benefit. Certain traditional spiritual ideas would find in the data of psi both empirical and theoretical support, while creative theoretical reflection on the mass of data thus far accumulated by psi researchers in their laboratories, along with practical techniques for psi enhancement, would be fostered.

I find Grosso's argument undeniably brilliant and compelling. I also heartily endorse his call for "a more complete, more human approach" (Grosso, 2000, p. 102) to survival studies and to psi research in general (and have, in fact, made a similar recommendation myself on independent grounds [see Felser, 2000/2001]). Like Grosso, I believe that parapsychology should become more directly practical—more "shamanic."

Nevertheless, I am deeply reluctant to confer my blessing on the proposed marriage—or remarriage, as it were—between parapsychology and transpersonal psychology. To stay with the metaphor while dissenting from Grosso's conclusion, I think it would be a disastrous marriage for the simple reason that, at bottom, the two prospective partners are far too much alike. We simply can't get there (to a new science of consciousness) from here (the fields of psi research and transpersonal studies as presently constituted). In what follows, I shall try to explain why I believe this to be so.

"We Don't Work in That Field"

What, if anything, was lost when psychical research reinvented itself as parapsychology and moved out of the dark shadows of the spooky séance parlors of the Victorian and Edwardian eras and into the cold, bright, antiseptic light of the modern scientific laboratory? Is there anything of substance at stake in these contrasting images?

To address these questions, I will begin by citing two anecdotes that I believe reveal something fundamental about the paradigm within which parapsychology operates.

The first comes from journalist Bayard Stockton's (1989) biography of the famed out-of-body experiencer and paranormal author Robert A. Monroe (1971, 1985, 1994), founder of the Monroe Institute in Virginia. In the early days of his spontaneous OBEs, Monroe admitted to being terrified of what was happening to him (Stockton, 1989, p. 86). Terror was eventually tempered by curiosity, which led him to consult with a number of individuals in various fields, including parapsychology, about his strange experiences:

> Monroe went to the leading parapsychological investigator in the country, J.B. Rhine, a professor at Duke University. He told his tale of extra-body exploration. Rhine listened courteously, then turned Bob away with the brief remark, "We don't work in that field." (Stockton, pp. 89-90)

The late journalist and popular paranormalist Susy Smith (2000) reported a similar encounter with Rhine when she sought him out during the early days of her own psi experiences. Smith had come to believe that she was in contact with the spirits of the dead, including that of her own deceased mother, through the mechanism of automatic writing. As the experiences deepened, she felt compelled "to learn more on the subject" of "the survival of the human soul" (Smith, 2000, p. 90).

Smith eventually made her way to Rhine's laboratory as an invited guest. But she was soon disappointed to learn that he had no real interest in her experiences. She wrote:

> I found no gurus in my areas of interest. Here were no fellow partners of the veil. Instead I found myself among scholars and scientists whose goal was to prove extrasensory perception scientifically, but whose intentions were not to get involved in anything that might spoil their other fine work by causing them to receive the label "ghost-chasers." (Smith, p. 98)

Instead, the anxious and eager Smith was ushered into the library and given a stern warning to be highly discriminating in her reading (Smith, p. 99).

What, then, can we learn from these two different, but very similar, incidents?

PSYCHIC CONTRA PSI: MANY GODS OR ONE?

Rhine's reticence in the face of phenomena that didn't fit his experimental protocols was understandable. After all, hadn't psychical research trapped itself in a dead end by its obsessive preoccupation with the complicated, messy survival issue? Why climb back into that old cul-de-sac? There was no point in going off on exotic expeditions into the blind-alley territories of mediumship and the out-of-body experience. So Rhine doggedly stuck to a single, (relatively) more conservative path of attempting to provide verifiable proof of telepathy and precognition. Wasn't this only reasonable?

Let us now perform a small thought-experiment: Just how different would the reception have been for Monroe and Smith had they found themselves sitting across the desk from William James instead of J. B. Rhine?

Forever in quest of his "one white crow," James doubtless would have been intrigued by the tantalizing tales told by this eminently reasonable pair—a successful businessman and a newspaper reporter. And as James himself had suffered the anguish of depression, I suspect he would have followed the lure of the unknown quarry wherever it led, even into the dark forest of ignorance and fear. He was sensitive to the nuances in the varieties of experience and the manner in which they tend to overlap and implicate each other, "telescop[ing] and compenetrat[ing] and diffus[ing] into [their] neighbors" (James, 1911/1987b, p. 1008).

In his introspective essay "A Suggestion About Mysticism" (1910/1987c, pp. 1276-1277), for example, he described several of his own more intense experiences of "telescoping" consciousness, including an incident where he seemed to be dreaming several different dreams simultaneously. Although the incident smacked at once of the psychic ("am I getting into other people's dreams? Is this a 'telepathic' experience?"), the transpersonal ("I was losing hold of my 'self'"), and the pathological ("I began to feel curiously confused and *scared*"), James refused to separate the supernormal, the abnormal, and the paranormal aspects of his experience. To him, it was all of a piece.

Thus, whereas James was open to intellectual detours and accepting of life's "blooming buzzing confusion" (James, 1911/1987b, p. 1008), Rhine was committed to sifting through the confusion of particulars in order to arrive at generalized conclusions that could be duplicated, to the letter, by others. James was a

solitary explorer excited by the prospect of discovering "Exceptions," Rhine a team captain respectful of "The Rules."

My suggestion, then, for what it is worth, is that Rhine's resolute single-mindedness—his steadfast refusal to be distracted by "side" issues—was far more than a mere reaction to perceived failures of his predecessors. It was more than a mere trait of personality (or moral virtue, inasmuch as we are culturally conditioned to regard this trait as inherently praiseworthy). Nor did it represent a strictly tactical concession to the requirements of academic and scientific specialization. It goes much deeper than that.

I hesitate to say that this quality is indicative of a deep philosophical difference between Rhine and James only because of the tendency to conflate "philosophy" with "ideology"—beliefs consciously held by the rational intellect. Rather it is suggestive of a deeper division between what the English philosopher R. G. Collingwood (1922/1964) referred to as "habits of mind," by which he meant a certain reflexive, deeply ingrained, sometimes only semiconscious way of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and acting. James and Rhine—and by extension, psychical research and parapsychology—were dominated, respectively, by two radically different habits of mind.

The best insight into these rival habits is provided, I believe, by the psychologist James Hillman, who employs the theological terms "monotheism" and "polytheism" as metaphors to distinguish between two different mindsets (Hillman, 1989, pp. 36-49).

The "monotheistic" type, says Hillman, searches for a pure and simple ultimate, an overarching principle of order, be it the Atom or the Absolute, Jehovah or the Clear Light. The (Real) One is always valued over the (Illusory) Many, and the (abstract) General over the (concrete) Particular. Psychologically and metaphysically, there is a tendency to envision development as a "progress through [well-defined] hierarchical stages" in which one moves "from chaos to order, from multiplicity to unity, and where the health of wholeness has come to mean the one dominating the many" (Hillman, p. 40). Epistemologically and heuristically, there is a marked preference for clear and distinct Cartesian concepts, enabling the focus to remain fixed within a strictly demarcated subject area, and giving rise to the temperament of the single-minded type who heroically "fight[s] off temptations toward dispersion" (Thomas Moore, in Hillman, p. 36).

For the "polytheist" however, there are multiple centers of meaning, truth, and reality, each having its own valid claim on our

attention and loyalty, none reducible to the other, each existing in creative tension with its companions. The many gods of the ancient Greek pantheon and the many spirits of the animists represent, metaphysically, this perspective. To make the point philosophically, Hillman (approvingly) cites James's statement, in *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), that "Reality MAY exist in distributive form, in the shape not of an all but of a set of *eaches*, just as it seems to be" (quoted in Hillman, p. 43). "There is more room for variance," notes Hillman, "when there is more place given to variety" (Hillman, p. 40). Thus, what appears from the standpoint of the single-minded monotheist to be merely deviant, disordered, confusing, incidental—or just plain distracting—may herald an important direction that must be followed.

James and his fellow researchers nosed around dimly lit séance parlors and bedrooms where spirits of the dead came to converse with the living (as with Smith) and the living transformed themselves into blithe astral spirits who could walk among the dead (as with Monroe). In these settings they were beset by an often bewildering array of apparent side effects from the shadowy sides of human nature—mental instability, cheating, and "deviant" sexuality, to name a few—accompanying apparently legitimate instances of psychic phenomena (Wilson, 1971, pp. 493-494). Exasperated researchers sometimes felt as if they were chasing their own tails—as James himself ruefully acknowledged in his "Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher" (1909/1960) when he confessed the lack of progress toward a general theory of psychic phenomena.

Yet, James still insisted that it was only by patient attention to "just these dingy little mediumistic facts" (James, 1909/1960, p. 325) in all their messy actuality that understanding would eventually come. In this regard he continually counseled patience: "We shall not *understand* these alterations of consciousness either in this generation or in the next" (James, 1910/1987c, p. 1280). He did not shrink from the rich complexity of the data by falling prey to (monotheistic) oversimplifications or reductive "nothing but" type thinking. As he declared in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1938, p. 26), "If there were such a thing as inspiration from a higher realm, it might well be that the neurotic temperament would furnish the chief condition of the requisite receptivity." Not madness *or* psi, but madness *and* psi—such are the paradoxes of polycentrism.

Indeed, the ability to endure rather than attempt to prematurely resolve the tension of paradoxes is one of the chief hallmarks of the polytheistic habit of mind. As the classical scholar Peter Kingsley (1999, p. 68) observes, the ancient Greek myth embraced the paradoxical notion that the true home of the sun is the underworld, from whence it comes each morning and back into which it goes every night. But Socrates and his successors rejected the earlier polytheism and instead sought in a heavenward ascension the One pure Apollonian light of universal truth completely outside and above the dark ignorance of the nitty-gritty realm of particulars. Thus, in Plato's (Plato, 1941, pp. 227-235) famous allegory of the cave, the dark hollow of Mother Earth that once upon a time served as the hallowed place of shamanic dream incubation and initiation (see also Campbell, 1969, pp. 299-354) becomes the emblem of slavish ignorance and illusion.

However, earlier visionaries, such as Parmenides, learned from the shamans and took the old myth of the underworld sun seriously. They knew of another, darker, more mysterious Apollo. Dark Apollo was a god, not of sweetly harmonious rational order, but of oracles and "[dream] incubation and caves and dark places," a god whose riddles were "full of ambiguities and traps"—especially for those "who believed that everything was bright and clear" (Kingsley, p. 87). These visionaries knew that there was great intelligence and wisdom in the dark places—in the depressions of the earth and of the psyche—and were unafraid of following these descending, often meandering paths:

> Sometimes [the longing for self-knowledge] appears as depression, calling us away from everything we think we want, pulling us into the darkness of ourselves. The voice is so familiar that we run from it every way we can; the more powerful the call the further we run. It has the power to make us mad, and yet it's so innocent: the voice of ourselves calling to ourselves. The strange thing is that the negativity isn't in the depression—it's in running from the depression. And what we're afraid of really isn't what we're afraid of at all. (Kingsley, p. 67)

Modern scientific parapsychology wanted no part of this fear and negativity. It wanted out of James's "dingy" facts, dead-end corners, and the wildly inelegant paradoxes of the psychic realm. Parapsychology needed its "psi" to be neat and clean and socially

respectable (not to mention grant-fundable). From Rhine's perspective, Monroe and Smith must have appeared to be inconenient throwbacks to an archaic intellectual past in which hapless researchers aimlessly circled about their quarry like a pack of blindfolded, drunken sailors on shore leave spoiling for a fight.

It will be objected, of course, that Monroe was eventually studied by two leading parapsychologists, namely Puharich (1962) and Tart (1967). And Smith went on to write her numerous books on paranormal subjects. So where's the harm? Furthermore, mediumship and survival issues have indeed found their way into the laboratory (Schwartz, 2002). So am I not guilty of conflating the character of parapsychology with the behavior of only one, if admittedly prominent, researcher? What's the big deal?

I think this objection misses the point. For the "monotheistic" type, there will always be, in effect, *that field in which we don't work*, and, characteristically, *that field* will be a dark, fearful place in which reside unpleasant, ambiguous truths that conflict with our received wisdom and make a mess of our tidy categories. The recurrent pattern is an obsessive need to control nature (in both her physical and metaphysical dimensions). This compulsion may take the form of a Baconian scientist's injunction to "put Nature to the rack," the religious fundamentalist's rigidity of moral judgment, or the rationalist philosopher's addiction to totalistic theoretical systems. And such obsessions naturally go hand in hand with the fear of a loss of control and the denial of that fear.

Thus Grosso (1996) himself has observed that even self-proclaimed "believers" in psi not only unconsciously fear it and its effects but go out of their way to avoid facing that fear and the recognition of the cognitive dissonance it engenders; for they half hope that psi doesn't really work. Likewise, Tart (1995, p. 4) has gone on record with his admission that early on in his career he "had ambivalent feelings about how well psychic events should work, and maybe there were negative uses of psi, even though I did 'nice' positive experiments." The reflex of the monotheistic type is to paper over this ambivalence as best one can and (in modern political parlance) "stay on message."

From the standpoint of the positive, upbeat progressivism of the monotheist, the negative—the deviant, the downbeat, the dingy places of fear and depression—must be avoided at all costs, or else relegated, via an act of intellectual imperialism, to a strictly marginal or provisional status. Ironically, like the prophets and saviors of old, scientific psi investigators envisioned themselves

successfully scaling the high mountain of Truth while trusting that their erstwhile predecessors went astray as they wallowed in the misty psychic vales and swamps of illusion. Up or down? Which way do we go?

SPIRIT *OR* SOUL, PSI *AND* SPIRITUALITY

These images are telling. As Hillman makes clear, there is indeed a close and revealing affinity between the metaphors of "ascent" and the monotheistic type, on the one hand, and the symbolic images of "descent" and the polytheistic type, on the other. Thus he sees "polytheism" and "monotheism" as elements of a more comprehensive psychological and philosophical opposition, namely, the conflict between what he calls "soul" and "spirit." Here it is worth citing his discussion at some length:

> The spiritual point of view always posits itself as superior [to that of soul], and operates particularly well in a fantasy of transcendence among ultimates and absolutes. . . . Images of the soul show first of all more feminine connotations. *Psyché*, in the Greek language, besides being soul, denoted a night moth or butterfly and a particularly beautiful girl in the legend of Eros and Psyche. . . . [T]he relationship of psyche with dream, fantasy, and image . . . has also been put mythologically as the soul's connection with the night world, the realm of the dead, and the moon. We still catch our soul's most essential nature in death experiences, in dreams of the night, and in the images of *lunacy*.
>
> The world of spirit is different indeed. Its images blaze with light, there is fire, wind, sperm. Spirit is fast, and it quickens what it touches. Its direction is vertical and ascending; it is arrow straight, knife sharp, powder dry, and phallic. It is masculine, the active principle, making forms, order and clear distinctions. Although there are many spirits, and many kinds of spirit, more and more the notion of *spirit* has come to be carried by the Apollonian archetype, the sublimations of higher and abstract disciplines, the intellectual mind, refinements and purifications.

> We can experience soul and spirit as interacting. At moments of intellectual concentration or transcendental meditation, soul invades with natural urges, memories, fantasies, and fears. At times of new psychological insights or experiences, spirit would quickly extract a meaning, put them into action, conceptualize them into rules. Soul sticks to the realm of experience and to reflections within experience. It moves indirectly in circular reasonings, where retreats are as important as advances, preferring labyrinths and corners, giving a metaphorical sense to life through such words as *close*, *near*, *slow*, and *deep*. Soul involves us in the pack and welter of phenomena and the flow of impressions. It is the "patient" part of us. Soul is vulnerable and suffers; it is passive and remembers. It is water to the spirit's fire, like a mermaid who beckons the heroic spirit into the depths of passions to extinguish its certainty. *Soul is imagination*, a cavernous treasury—to use an image from St. Augustine—a confusion and a richness, both. Whereas spirit chooses the better part and seeks to make all one. Look up, says spirit, gain distance; there is something beyond and above, and what is above is always, and always superior. (Hillman, pp. 121-122)

From the spiritual perspective, the problem is that the soul is easily trapped in the illusory fantasies of its own making and its pathological attachment to "the ten thousand things of life in the world" (Hillman, p. 123). What, then, is the (spiritual) solution? Alas, "the soul must be disciplined, its desires harnessed, imagination emptied, dreams forgotten, involvements dried. For soul, says spirit, cannot *know*, neither truth, nor law, nor cause" (Hillman, p. 123). The spirit—and only the spirit—*knows*.

To return, then, to the central question I raised at the outset of the discussion: What was lost in the transition from psychical research to scientific parapsychology? In Hillman's terms, the movement from the psychic to psi was a movement away from the lunar night moth of *psyche* toward the solar *pneuma*, from feminine "chaos" to masculine "order," from circumambulating anecdotalism to straight-arrow experimentalism, from the dark depths of doubt to the sunny heights of rationalistic certainty. In other words, having lost its soul, parapsychology became a deeply "spiritual" discipline

(and, I would argue, does not need to be made more so). We are blind to this fact only because we have been taught by our culture to view the natural sciences as the enemy of traditional spirituality (as science itself has tended to believe and propagandize). In truth, however, science—despite its surface affinity for materialist metaphysics—is rather the historical successor to traditional spirituality (or religion), and at a deeper level shares the basic psychological and conceptual structure of its predecessor. They are more alike than not.

Psychical research was a more "soulful" discipline because it was born in the agonizing depths of the Victorian crisis of belief, when all the old spiritual certitudes had dissolved. When, on a December 1869 evening, Henry Sidgwick and Frederick Myers took their famous "walk under the stars" and founded psychical research, each confessed that he could no longer call himself a Christian in any meaningful sense (Wilson, 1985, pp. 112-113). And when James delivered the1908 Hibbert lectures at Manchester College in England (subsequently published in 1909 as *A Pluralistic Universe*), he went even further when he pronounced the "older monarchical theism" as such "obsolete or obsolescent" (James, 1909/1987a, p. 643). Nor was this, in his view, such a bad thing.

Myers, says Grosso (2000, p. 125), sought to rescue "the soul from disillusionment and metaphysical depression." But I submit that the richness of Myers's work, and that of the other "unhappy questioners" (Wilson, 1985, p. 112) of the SPR and ASPR, arose out of this very pit of soulful despair. Painful as it was for them all to suffer, it was a sign of health and vitality and not (as Myers himself seemed to fear) a symptom of enervating decay. It heralded—and fueled—a creative breakthrough to a true inquiry.

Traditional spirituality does not foster such open-ended inquiry. Sam Keen (1994) retells the old joke about the Sunday school teacher who asks his class:

> 'What little gray animal climbs trees, gathers nuts, and has a long, bushy tail?' A little boy answers: 'I know the answer is supposed to be Jesus or God, but it sounds like a squirrel to me.' No matter what the question, the answer for the Christian is always Jesus or God. (Keen, 1994, pp. 76-77)

For the spiritual standpoint, its singular Absolute—its one method, one system, one theory of everything, one true God—can

answer all questions. I have elsewhere referred to this epistemological totalitarianism as "Answerism" (Felser, 2005). The breakdown of Christian Answerism made the solid ground open up beneath the feet of James and his cohorts. They had to let go of their Answers and ask real questions as they descended into the maelstrom of what Hillman calls "the pack and welter of phenomena and the flow of impressions." Impatience with this process aborted the inquiry as science rushed into the vacuum left by the old-time religions, promising a new and improved brand of (mathematical) certitude. Faith in numbers replaced faith in God. And so the psychic became psi.

But was this truly progress? Or was it a regressive and premature retreat to lofty ideals of spirit when only the patient, painstaking experiential work of soul would do?

PSI *VERSUS* PSI?

To address these questions, let us at last bring transpersonal psychology into the conversation. Is there hope of transforming parapsychology into, *pace* Grosso, a more complete, more human approach that would be congenial to a spiritual "democracy of higher consciousness" (Grosso, 2000, p. 113) if it aligns itself with transpersonalism?

Grosso defines the transpersonal in terms of "experiences in which the boundaries of the normal sense of self and world dissolve and open up to larger realities" (Grosso, 2000, p. 118). The agent experiences a sense of "self-transcendence" which leads to "enlargements of personal identity and function" (Grosso, 2000, p. 119).

Historically, it was undoubtedly C. G. Jung who first employed the term "transpersonal" roughly in this sense in his early monograph *On the Psychology of the Unconscious* (1917/1972), where he used it as a synonym for his concept of the "collective" unconscious. And, as Grosso notes, James and Myers could be construed as fellow transpersonal pioneers. But it was Abraham Maslow (1971) and the humanistic psychology movement of the 1960s that paved the way for the growth of transpersonal studies as an autonomous field.

Given this heterogeneous pedigree, some might fault Grosso for oversimplifying when he writes of "*the* transpersonal vision" [italics mine] (Grosso, 2000, p. 123). But I think there is an important truth being communicated here, whether or not it was

intended. For just as parapsychology has been dominated by Rhine's statistical approach since the 1930s, so transpersonal psychology, on its theoretical side, has been shaped by Americanized versions of Asian spirituality, particularly the Hindu-Buddhist traditions.

Aldous Huxley (1970), whom Grosso mentions, was, of course, a student of the Vedanta. But over the past twenty-five years or so, the singularly most influential transpersonal theorist has been Ken Wilber, who acknowledges that his model of cosmic genesis and development owes much to the Tibetan Vajrayana school of Buddhism (Wilber, 1985, p. 161). To be sure, other prominent transpersonal theorists and clinicians have criticized Wilber's positions —including Washburn (1988), Rosen (1994), and Grof (1985). But despite (or perhaps because of) their dissent, the critics cannot help but attest to Wilber's role in framing the terms of the debate. He is unquestionably the polestar.

Wilber's *oeuvre* is vast, owing to his Hegelian comprehensiveness. His views have developed over time and he has shown a certain willingness to respond to criticism, even if only on an *ad hoc* basis. Yet, despite these overtures (and the sheer complexity and volume of his writings), there remains a deep constancy to his position. For Wilber clearly belongs to the "spiritual" camp—those for whom "soul" tends to be pathological.

Like Hegel, for whom reality is a "mystical game" that Spirit plays with itself (Findlay, 1958, p. 38), Wilber envisions a cosmic game in which Absolute Consciousness creates the world of the ten thousand things in a playful act of self-forgetting—an "involutional" reduction of the higher to the lower. The task of the Absolute is to recall and reclaim its true identity. Evolution is thus "the movement from the lower to the higher," the purpose of which "is to awaken as Atman, and thus retain the glory of the creation without being forced to act in the drama of self-suffering" (Wilber, 1985, p. 162). Here Wilber is close to his Buddhist sources, which disdain world-involvement as an unfortunate entanglement. Alas, Spirit is, was, and will be, above all that:

> During the course of the universe's history (and science helps us here), we have evolved from level-1 (which began approximately 15 billion years ago with the Big Bang) to level-2 (which occurred several billions of years later when matter awakened into some realization of life) to level-3 (which so far has been

> reached fully by humans only). Evolution is, as it were, half completed. "Mankind," said Plotinus, "is poised midway between the gods and the beasts."
>
> But in the past course of human history, some men and women, through the evolutionary discipline of higher religion, succeeded in pushing their own development and evolution into level-4: that of saintly religion and the first intuition of a transcendental reality, one in essence, lying above and beyond the ordinary mind, self, body and world. This "beyond" was poetically called Heaven; this oneness was called the one God. This intuition did not fully occur until around 3000 B.C., with the rise of the first great monotheistic religions. (Prior to that time, there were only polytheistic realizations—a god of fire, a god of water, etc. This is really shamanistic magic, stemming from a simple manipulation of level-2, emotional-sexual energies and rites.) By the time of 500 B.C., however, certain evolutionary souls pushed their development into the [higher] causal [plane]—Christ, Buddha, Krishna, the great axial sages. Their insights were drawn out and extended to produce what the Tibetans called the *Svabhavikaya* path—the path of level-6, or already realized Truth, the path of Zen, Vajrayana, Vedanta. What remains is for the world to follow suit, via evolutionary or process meditation, into the higher realms, culminating at infinity. (Wilber, 1985, p. 162)

Wilber's scheme thus fits the pattern of Hillman's monotheistic/spiritual type to a tee. It exults the transcendental One over the immanent many, the "higher" religions over the "lower" (the "great" monotheistic faiths over "mere" polytheism and animism), the fiery spirit over the watery soul and the earthy body, etc. In short, it's the Old-Time Religion, gussied up in a shiny, New-Age, postmodern package. But there's nothing really *new* here for those looking toward a genuinely new science of consciousness.

Jung warned over seventy years ago in his famous essay on "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man" (1928/1933) that this tendency of the spiritual to denigrate the body (and soul) would have to be transcended in the next stage of consciousness:

> But if we can reconcile ourselves with the mysterious truth that spirit is the living body seen from within, and the body the outer manifestation of the living spirit—the two being really one—then we can understand why it is that the attempt to transcend the present level of consciousness must give its due to the body. We shall see that belief in the body cannot tolerate an outlook that denies the body in the name of the spirit. (Jung, 1928/1933, p. 220)

While Jung's model equating body and spirit is, to borrow a contemporary idiom, "holographic," Wilber's architectonic scheme is rigidly hierarchical, epistemologically aristocratic, and utterly condescending toward the "eachness" of the ten thousand things. What Colin Wilson said of Huxley and his *Perennial Philosophy* over forty years ago could easily apply to Wilber today: "Huxley is . . . a man who will never feel a Whitmanesque acceptance of the world. He cannot control his dislike . . . [He's a] world-hater . . . [and his doctrine is] curiously dehydrated, bodiless" (Wilson, 1962/1973 p. 231).

Wilber's elevated notion of spirit, his conceptual rigidity, and his linear model of evolutionary development lead him to devalue and dismiss (if not outright pathologize) unusual experiences that do not fit his paradigm. As he did, for example, when he openly ridiculed purported UFO abductees as "narcissistic and egocentric" victims of hysteria (Wilber, 1999, p. 89). The Truth is already known by the Great Spiritual Gurus of "level-6"—it's up to the rest of us *chelas* to merely follow along in their hallowed footsteps, pausing only to kiss the hem of their saffron robes. No genuinely new metaphysical discoveries could, or need, be made. There are no surprises or novelties to anticipate, and no cause for seriously questioning our preconceived interpretations or pre-established categories. Like Hegel before him, it is clear that Wilber would like to see his own understanding of cosmic history, and therefore his own system, as final, comprehensive, definitive.

For some—even, admittedly, for some psi experiencers—Wilber's version of Answerism has solid appeal. For example, Jan Holden, the current president of IANDS (The International Association for Near-Death Studies), is a transpersonal psychologist and counselor as well as a self-described "transpersonal experiencer" (Holden, 2003, p. 14). She confesses that she is "currently

enamored with Ken Wilber's Integral Theory that, as Wilber claims, addresses everything, including NDEs" (Holden, p. 14).

For others, however, Wilber's claim represents a species of what Hillman calls *pneumopathology* (Hillman, p. 123)—a spiritual sickness. Such is the view, for example, of the philosopher and culture historian William Irwin Thompson (1996):

> Wilber seeks to control the universe through mapping, and the dominant masculinist purpose of his abstract system is to shift power from the described to the describer. As an autodidact from the Midwest, Wilber wants to promote himself as "the Einstein of the consciousness movement" and so he is announcing a trilogy of thousand page tomes that will explain everything once and for all. This form of scholarship is really a mode of psychic inflation and self-magnification; it is a grand pyramid of systems of abstract thought, piled on other systems of abstract thought, with Wilber's kept for the top. Never does one come upon a feeling for the concrete, a new look at an individual poem, a painting, or a work of architecture. (Thompson, 1996, pp. 12-13)

Thompson correctly diagnoses Wilber's transpersonal vision as myopically indifferent to the "eachness" of particulars, including the particular experiences of individuals. The meaning, value, and importance of any conceivable experience have been pre-assigned by the System. What level are you on? The System will tell you.

Grosso declares that, "In the spirit of James's radical empiricism, we need to embrace *all* of the data" (Grosso, 2000, p. 119). I could not agree more. But nothing could be further from the spirit of James's inclusive empiricism than Wilber's systematically exclusive *a priorism*—a type of abstract thinking that James abhorred. For there is a vast difference between embracing the data *as it is* and "embracing" it like a mobster planting the kiss of death on the cheek of his enemy—only, that is, in order to bury it by force-fitting it to one's preconceptions. The former is radically empiricist, the latter radically Procrustean. Our theories must fit the facts, not the other way around.

Finally, what's the fun of joining an "expedition" if the territory has already been thoroughly explored, mapped out, and colonized? If we truly want to encourage a democracy of spiritual consciousness in which "more people learn to critically record and share their [psi and transpersonal] experiences" (Grosso, 2000, p. 116), then I suggest that the model of wholeness that dominates transpersonal theory is not the place to look for support. We must look elsewhere if we aspire to the individual exploration of the extraordinary dimensions of human consciousness. But where, then?

Epistemological Crises, Survival Research, and a "New" Kind of Storytelling

One place parapsychology must look if it hopes to progress is to its own past. More specifically, it must revise its understanding of itself and rewrite its history. The historian Herbert Butterfield warned long ago of the danger of falling prey to the fallacy of "Whig history," by which he meant the tendency "to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present" (quoted in Fischer, 1970, p. 139).

Parapsychology must cease to see its past as mere prologue to the present. It must cast a cold and critical eye upon the story, oft told, of the "bad old days" of antiquated psychical research and how hard science and the statistical approach saved the day. The older, soul-centered, more humanistic approach of psychical research has much to offer in counterbalancing the spirit-centered view of modern experimentalism.

Which brings us to one of Grosso's central preoccupations: the current state of survival research. To appraise this condition, Grosso in effect re-examines the history of the inquiry. His conclusion: "afterlife research seems to be at an impasse" largely because of "the ambiguity of the data" (Grosso, 2000, p. 105). No matter how "tantalizing and suggestive" the evidence seems, says Grosso—he cites case studies of veridical out-of-body experiences (OBEs), apparitions, mediumship, and reincarnational effects—the data "always seems open to non-survival interpretations" (Grosso, 2000, p. 107).

One such interpretation, he notes, is the venerable "superpsi" hypothesis, which explains information gathered by mediums as resulting not from contact with the dead, but rather from the operation of the (far more metaphysically palatable) faculties of telepathy and/or clairvoyance directed by, and to, the living. After all,

the venerable principle of Occam's Razor says one should prefer the simpler explanation.

Other weak points of the evidence include the old standby accusations of error, illusion, and fraud, as well as the inherent difficulty of proving the reliability of testimony, no matter how *prima facie* credible the witnesses (or experimenters).

When all is said and done, then, the believer in psi falls short of rational justification and is unable to decisively refute the skeptic. And yet the skeptic is left unable to explain away all the data except by resorting to an obtusely dogmatic *a priori* approach that dismisses the very possibility of survival out of hand. This, in short, is the impasse of which Grosso speaks. In his own words, the history of survival research is thus "a story crying out for closure" (Grosso, 2000, p. 105).

Grosso argues that the way beyond the impasse is not so much to solve the problem as to "dissolve" it (Grosso, 2000, p. 112). By this he means that pure theory must give way to, or be supplemented by, practice. Individuals must boldly go where they have not gone before by taking up the challenge of directly experiencing those exceptional states of consciousness, in the here and now, that are, at the very least, closely akin to what may await us when we die (and if we survive). These states would include, for example, induced visions and OBEs.

Like Grosso, I think we should accept the invitation to self-inquiry and heed the call of "personal experience and vibrant individual discovery" (Grosso, 2000, p. 113). But I believe that individuals will be motivated to do this only if they have a subtly different perspective on the story that Grosso says "cries out for closure." Indeed, I think we ought to ignore this cry, or at least not give into the temptation of trying to silence it. Or, to borrow the paradoxical form of thinking favored by the "polytheistic" type, I think the survival story cries out at once for closure *and* openness. What do I mean?

The impasse that Grosso describes with respect to survival research is a special case of what the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1980) has dubbed an "epistemological crisis." Not only disciplines but also ordinary agents suffer through such crises, says MacIntyre—for example, when someone is suddenly fired from a job or dumped by a lover. In such cases, the relationship of "seems" to "is" has been disturbed:

> What [these agents] took to be evidence pointing unambigously in some one direction now turns out to have been equally susceptible of rival interpretations. Such a discovery is often paralyzing . . . . [Thus] the individual may come to recognize the possibility of systematically different possibilities of interpretation, of the existence of alternative and rival schemata which yield mutually incompatible accounts of what is going on around him. (MacIntyre, 1980, pp. 54-55)

Epistemological crises are resolved, in MacIntyre's view, when "the multiplicity of possible interpretations open to us" (MacIntyre, 1980, p. 54) is reduced, if only provisionally, to a single, coherent meta-narrative. This new story must explain why it was reasonable to believe that the evidence seemingly pointed in a direction diametrically opposite to that which one now knows (or reasonably thinks that one knows) to be true.

Note that the paralysis wrought by the confrontation with radically ambiguous evidence is, of course, exactly the problem diagnosed by Grosso with respect to survival studies. In MacIntyre's formulation, the epistemological trajectory is from the One to the Many and back to the One; or, alternately, from closure to openness, and back to closure; or, from (false) certainty to doubt, and back to (truer) certainty. Multiplicity (of readings) is the basic problem that cannot be tolerated, and unity—of a decidedly monotheistic kind—the solution. But is this the only possible way of viewing such crises?

Consider that texts possessing clear-cut, definite endings—a story that is simply closed, in other words—have a very different psychological effect on the reader than those that do not. For example, in Plato's early dialogues, the central question with which Socrates and his interlocutors struggle—e.g., "What is piety?" in the *Euthyphro*, or "What is corruption?" in the *Apology*—is deliberately left unanswered by the author at the end. It is indeed those very characters who believe themselves to be in possession of clear-cut, certain answers who are exposed as pretentious fools. In line with this, Socrates even goes so far as to define "wisdom" as recognizing one's own ignorance.

By leaving the key question open at the conclusion, Plato creates a space for the reader to enter the dialogue as an active participant rather than passively observe from the sidelines. This enables the reader to experience the wonder that Plato himself believed to be the font of all philosophical inquiry. Now the use of this narrative form obviously requires an enormous amount of trust

in the individual. In his later dialogues, however (one has only to think of the *Republic* or the *Laws*), Plato seems to have lost this trust. He becomes yet another doctrinaire Answerist, instructing his audience in great detail as to what they ought to think and do. The reader is now treated as the passive recipient of a ready-made doctrine. These texts are closed in a way that subtly discourages, rather than actively encourages, self-inquiry and the direct experience of wonder.

Note, however, that the more open-ended method favored by Plato in his early dialogues has a venerable tradition well known in the oral cultures of ancient tribal shamans —the very shamans from whom Grosso would have us learn. So let us learn.

In his autobiography, the Native American activist Russell Means (1995) tells about his boyhood relationship with his beloved Grandpa John, who kept Means spellbound with exciting tales of young boys facing all sorts of dangerous trials on their way to manhood. For example, Grandpa John would tell the story of a brave hunter searching for meat to feed his tribe who finds himself, after a series of adventures, on the banks of a raging river apparently unable to cross. End of story. Means would plead with his grandfather to reveal what happened next, but Grandpa John always refused. This perplexed and frustrated the young boy. Years later, however, he understood:

> Much later in my life, I realized Grandpa John was teaching me the Indian way of thinking, teaching me to use my imagination, to figure things out for myself, to study, and to analyze. He caused my unformed mind to frame questions—and then search out the answers. He also taught me patience. It took years to figure out some of the questions, but still more years to find the answers. (Means, 1995, p. 13)

Patience—a prime virtue, as Hillman would have it, of the soul (as opposed to the quickening spirit)—is part and parcel of "the Indian way of thinking." I would also argue that this "Indian way of thinking" and its narrative style is necessarily underpinned by the (polytheistic) animist metaphysics of these native peoples. Trust in and equality of individuals were ultimately based upon the conviction that anyone is capable of experiencing and knowing the depths, for there is nothing that is not infused with the Great Mystery. The All is available to all, all the time, all over the place—

even to a little boy like the young Means—or to the great Sioux holy man Black Elk, who had his "great vision" at the tender age of nine.

For a theorist like Wilber, the life story of Black Elk (Neihardt, 1932/1972) will taste like a bewildering, indigestible stew of what Rhea White (1997) calls Exceptional Human Experiences (EHEs). This rich mélange includes psi-like instances of telepathy and precognition, communication with plants and animals, out-of-body episodes, prophecy, shamanic healing, archetypal incursions, along with transcendent mystical insights, and symptoms of mental pathology. Even elements of modern UFO abduction reports may be found therein, if one reads carefully, as in the following description of the ecstasy that preceded Black Elk's great vision: "[A] little cloud was coming very fast . . . [it] stooped and took me and turned back to where it came from, flying fast" (Neihardt, p. 19). Moreover, Black Elk's narrative makes it clear that these various elements are deeply intertwined and not easily separable from one another. Nor, from his (animistic) metaphysical standpoint, should they be.

For a Wilber with his notion of a linear, ladder-like evolution of consciousness, this is an unintelligible mishmash. All of the elements not belonging to the "higher," or "genuinely transpersonal," levels would have to be dismissed as archaic regressions, "merely pre-personal," of no authentic "spiritual" value. Yet, to excise just these elements from the phenomenology would constitute a radical surgery that would violate rather than illuminate the whole body of nonordinary experiential data, including that of psi. The result would be a Frankenstein's monster: an animated corpse of a theory wreaking havoc on the facts and giving us not history but rather a philosophical fantasy.

But this likewise suggests that any attempt by parapsychologists to extract a "pure psi" from the welter of other anomalous experiences is also bound to fail, for these experiences interpenetrate and cross-fertilize each other in ways that tend to confound the abstract intellect and all of its theoretical models. Psi cannot be separated from the rest of life any more than the rest of life can be separated from psi.

In short, if we want to have a more shamanic discipline, we will have to begin to think like shamans, and tell stories like shamans. What would this mean in practice?

Grosso would have us escape the impasse in survival research by, in effect, doing an end-run around the skeptic (whether of the

crude metaphysical materialist kind or the subtler methodological Occamist). We are to flee to a welcoming oasis of acceptance where we can drink from the living waters of direct experience and trod the well-worn paths of traditional spirituality as interpreted via the models of transpersonal theory. Grosso's aim, as I understand it, is positive and therapeutic. For him, skepticism (particularly in its hardcore materialist version) remains an oppressive and depressing cultural influence, and so he regards his philosophical mission, on its practical side, as that of "offer[ing] first aid to the victims of spiritual depression" (Grosso, 2002, p. 2).

I rather think we should be more patient with this impasse and the discomfort it creates—even the depression. For, as Russell Means retrospectively recognized, that pain may be likened to the irritating grain of sand that becomes, over time and under pressure, the shining pearl of wisdom. And, at the same time, as psi experiencers, we must cease to regard ourselves as passive victims of a culture not our own. As Hillman's soul-centered polytheist would have it, we should allow these contradictions their space, not merely to exist, but to flourish. And we should seek not merely to tolerate them as something external to us, but to embody them, as far as possible, within ourselves. Instead of short-circuiting or bypassing the skeptic, we should admit that, as inhabitants of a twenty-first century postmodern culture, we carry the burdensome history of modern scientism within us. This inheritance is not just an antiquated relic of a dead past, but a living element of our present, multifaceted, multidimensional selves that we can neither fully accept nor totally reject (see MacIntyre, 1969, pp. 16-17). The "enemy," in short, is not CSICOP, but us. If Paul Kurtz didn't exist, we'd have to invent him.

To fuel the exploratory inquiry into the full gamut of our Exceptional Human Experiences (EHEs), then, we must enact *all* the available roles, as conflicting as they may seem (or be): the Skeptic *and* the Believer, the Experiencer *and* the Philosopher, the Storyteller *and* the Statistician. And it is no accident that I capitalize these terms. For as Hillman says, "Words with capital letters are charged with affect, they jump out of their sentences and become images." (Hillman, p. 46)

If we wish to inspire new ideas and theories, then, we must ignite the creative imagination anew. The paranormal is not sheer entertainment (see Moody, 1999), but it is and must be dramaturgical—and open to improvisation. We cannot yield to a political correctness that requires us to revere "the great spiritual traditions"

of the past, as if they have been innocent of serious political, psychological, and epistemological oppression and corruption. Nor can we afford to be blind to the present reality that we inhabit. As the late mythologist Joseph Campbell declared: "We live, today, in a terminal moraine of myths and mythic symbols, fragments large and small of traditions that formerly inspired and gave rise to civilizations" (Campbell, 1988, p. 8). Those traditions are now moribund.

Playing the many parts assigned to us does not entail pasting these broken fragments, higgledy-piggledy, into a meaningless collage and crowning it a work of art or vehicle of truth. The choice is not, as some would suggest, *either* hierarchical unity *or* postmodern chaos. This is a false dichotomy. As Hillman says (p. 42), "unity too can be imagined polytheistically," that is, as the uncompromising fidelity to the "eachness" of the multiple powers within, even (or especially) when those powers are in conflict with each other. It is here, in the full and uninhibited participation in this dynamic experiential process, and not in an intellectual assent to some static theoretical structure or model, that we find the integrity we seek and the living pattern which connects.

There will be those who argue that such fidelity may be an impossibly tall order. I would refer these individuals to P. J. Gaenir's autobiographical *Bewilderness* (1993-2004), an EHE account serialized on the World Wide Web, and one of the most remarkable documents I have yet come across, on the Internet or anywhere else.

A respected Web design consultant, Gaenir recounts a series of extraordinary experiences that dominated her life for a period of several years during the 1990s. These experiences run the classificatory gamut, from animistic insights on the consciousness of "material objects" to Zen-like satori—and seemingly everything in-between, including precognition, out-of-body experiences, and UFO encounters and abductions.

Yet, in the true sprit of the polytheistic temperament, Gaenir refuses to settle for oversimplified either/or dichotomies; she plays all the dramatic parts with gusto, adopting with utter conviction even the most difficult role of all: that of skeptic. Highlighting, rather than glossing over, the parts of her narrative that suggest the possible presence of mental pathology, she openly questions her own sanity. And why not? Under the circumstances, what could be more dishonest than a refusal to consider that one might be more than a brick short of a full load? Gaenir comments: "I'm able to

hold a number of conflicting emotions and opinions simultaneously with no problem. It's not a matter of being confused, or fragmented, it's a matter of being able to see a number of views of things at once" (Gaenir, Chapter 21, p. 4). James would have understood—and approved.

As more and more individuals spontaneously develop and intentionally choose to cultivate this ability to sustain a mobile multivalent consciousness that does not yearn for simple narrative closure or hierarchical monotheistic unity in the old spiritual sense, a new science of consciousness will emerge as a natural and inevitable result. The future will be here, whether we like it —or are ready for it—or not.

Conclusion

To evolve, parapsychology need not coalesce with transpersonal psychology. In fact, such a partnership would represent a backward step, as the concepts and categories of traditional spirituality endemic to the dominant types of transpersonal theory would skew the very data that psi researchers need to see in new and uninhibited ways. Parapsychology ought to maintain its epistemological autonomy (see Felser, 1999, 2001).

This does not entail, however, that parapsychologists cannot, or should not, learn from other fields of inquiry. On the contrary, there is much data available in transpersonal psychology—not to mention in psychology, philosophy, anthropology, mythology, religion, and history—that parapsychologists may profitably study and employ.

But rather than seek union (or reunion) with another discipline whose dominant characteristics tend to mirror its own, parapsychology would be better served by searching out the recessive (if not repressed) elements of its own tradition. White and Brown (2000) have initiated this inquiry through their attention to the EHE process and their revival of the narrative mode of understanding that was central to the anecdotal approach of early psychical researchers like James and Myers. This is a key first step.

Those ordinary individuals who find themselves employing such methods of self-inquiry in their attempts to make sense of their own anomalous experiences may be in the forefront of an epochal transformation of human consciousness that will someday make the scientific revolution—as significant as it was—look tame by comparison. Only time will tell.

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