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Some Developmental Issues in Transpersonal Experience

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Developmental understanding of transpersonal experience and its diverse impact on human life has been bedeviled by the opposed, monolithic extremes of Freud's regression to infant "narcissism," on the one hand, and more recent views of the transpersonal as the sole endpoint for any "higher" or "postformal operations" development of human intelligence, on the other. Here it is shown that "higher states of consciousness" can be more specifically understood as developments of a "presentational" intelligence, thereby constituting one line of adult development among the several open to our symbolic capacity. The demonstrated but relatively infrequent occurrence of transpersonal states in early childhood then becomes understandable as a developmental precocity akin to that shown in mathematical and musical prodigies. The overlap of this developmental line with some of the thematics and regressive states of psychoanalytic object relations theories of infancy follows from the experiential nature of presentational intelligence. Early emotional traumata and deficits must reappear in transpersonal experience to the extent that they were internalized as part of the mother–infant dyad whose structure underlies our symbolic, dialogic consciousness.

There are several problems with recent formulations of higher states of consciousness in light of the general psychology of cognitive and affective development. First, we do need to see meditative states as entailing a higher development, rather than, as in Freud's classic account, a regression to a supposed "oceanic" feeling of infancy. Based on an elaboration of Geschwind's (1965) theory that all forms of symbolic thought involve a capacity for cross modal translation, I have shown that "light of the void" experiences can be understood as an abstract self reference unfolding for its own sake and entailing synesthetic translations across the most basic structures of the perceptual modalities of sight, sound and touch (Hunt, 1984, 1985, 1989a). However, we

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also need some alternative to models of higher states of consciousness as the single formal end point of all development. Such views are found in Wilber's (1984a, 1984b) and Alexander et al.'s (1990) formulations of meditative realization as based on a *post* formal and/or *post* representational development — entailing the view that by comparison all more specific "frames" of development (i.e., aesthetic, political, verbal, mathematical, or interpersonal intelligences) are in some sense of the term "retarded." The danger here is that we merely invert Freud's and Piaget's monolithically linear model of cognitive growth going from narcissism to reality/formal operations, and place what *we* admire on the top and all lesser, "applied" frames of mind below — as "horizontal" specializations that ultimately can only detract from the fullest realization of human potential. If, as Howard Gardner (1983) states, there are multiple frames of symbolic intelligence, each with its own line of development from primitive to abstract, then we might wish in turn to "decenter" a bit and try to understand how higher states of consciousness could be one line of hierarchic development, not necessarily the only one. The danger is that otherwise our theories may come to enshrine an unwitting spiritual arrogance.

Second, a major challenge for *any* view of transpersonal states of consciousness as developmentally advanced comes from copious anecdotal evidence of the occurrence of out-of-body experiences, lucid dreams, near-death experiences, and white light and samadhi-like fusion experiences in children around four or five, with some accounts at two years or earlier (Armstrong, 1984, 1985; Hoffman, 1990; Laski, 1961). If we take such accounts seriously, and many seem genuine and contextually supported, then these experiences are occurring before the capacities for self reference and cross modal translation that would make them possible have been established in ordinary cognitive development. We can, as Jayne Gackenbach suggests (personal communication, 1990), regard such "consciousness savants" as developmentally precocious, much as Gardner makes potential precocity a criterion for status as a core frame. However, we still need to address how this form of "consciousness" precocity could work in naturalistic developmental terms. I assume that we do need such a nonreductionistic, but still naturalistic account, rather than Armstrong's (1984) and Wilber's (1990) speculations about these experiences being early childhood signs of the reincarnation of high self actualizers.

Third, the psychology of the transpersonal, while it rightly rejects a simple regression-to-narcissism model, must more adequately confront how it is that higher states of consciousness entail themes and feelings which the contemporary psychoanalysis of object relations and self locates in the first two years of life. In particular, the emphasis on the nurturant, compassionate nature of void or being-as-such is strikingly reminiscent of Winnicott (1971) on the holding–containing–allowing quality of primary maternal preoccupation,

while descriptions of meditative samadhi seem to be an abstracted form of Mahler's (1968) notion of symbiotic fusion between infant and mother in the first six months of life. Correspondingly, there is now considerable consensus (Engler, 1984; Wilber, 1984b) that higher states of consciousness can create and/or stir up "spiritual illnesses" or "metapathologies" with the clinical features of narcissistic/borderline disorders — such as grandiose omnipotence, withdrawal, and loss of felt reality and sense of meaning. In turn, clinical narcissism can include mystical features, as in the need for periodic epiphanies to gain some sense of feeling real or alive, the desire for and fear of oblivion, and the need for a transference relationship of resourceless dependency in which the therapist is treated as a sort of deity who will hold and contain the patient's difficulties — all this to counter the despairing lack of any sense of beingness, presence, or felt reality in the client's life (Balint, 1968; Khan, 1974). How do we formulate these ties between spirituality and the psychoanalysis of deficits in infancy and early childhood so as to be consistent with the equally compelling evidence that higher states of consciousness are abstract forms of development coming into their own in adulthood and even old age (Alexander et al., 1990; Erikson, Erikson, and Rivnick, 1986; Jung, 1961)?

Higher States of Consciousness: One Line of Development? One of Many? One of Two or Three?

My first point is that there is a more scientifically parsimonious way of conceptualizing higher states of consciousness and the meditative path than in terms of a *post* formal or *post* representational stage of cognitive development. While such a stage "beyond Piaget" has been widely posited by developmentalists as involving synthesis or intuition, it is less clear how it explains the specific processes of transpersonal experience. Certainly meditative realization involves a developmental advance based on the relatively rare, full engagement of abstract self reference. It makes good sense to conceptualize this development, as did Alexander et al. (1990), as an attunement to pure consciousness or awareness-as-such via a de-embedding of consciousness from cognition, and clearly this can produce a felt unity between consciousness and all facets of physical reality. Alexander et al. (1990) cite copious research on long term meditation showing an unusual EEG hemispheric coherence and the facilitation of all aspects of organismic functioning — intellectual, emotional, creative, psycho-motor, and biochemical. But are we thereby entitled to make the perhaps tempting leap to posit such development as somehow "post" all ordinary cognitive processes — as far beyond formal operations as formal operations are beyond the sensori-motor stage of infancy? This leaves us with a *single* line of cognitive growth on

which to array all cognitive frames and all of humanity — a dangerous business in our pluralistic world.

I would suggest that a more parsimonious model, and one fully consistent with research findings, is that advanced meditation shows a difficult and rarely achieved approximation to *formal* operations within what Piaget called the affective schemata, in contrast to the more carefully researched line of intellectual development that we associate with Piaget. For Piaget (1962, 1963) the affective schemata covered the side of cognition involving energetics, valuation, feeling, and the experience of self and other. They are most immediately reflected in dream symbolism. Although the concepts do not coincide perfectly, Piaget covers some of the same ground here as Eugene Gendlin (1962) on "felt meaning" and Susanne Langer (1972) on the "presentational symbolisms" of the arts — in which meaning emerges spontaneously from immediate experiential immersion in the properties of the expressive medium, in contrast to the more automatized reference of "representational" language. In *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood* (1962), Piaget stresses that affective development must lag behind the intellectual–logical stages, because there is no fixed point of accommodation within the affective schemata to parallel the way in which the physical world offers a fixed resistance that pushes the breakthrough into formal decentering and reversibility. Here one thinks of Sullivan's (1953) pointed demonstrations of an all too typical egocentricity in our interpersonal relations, such that it remains difficult for most adults to see another's point of view nonprojectively and in its own right. "Taking the role of the other" may underlie all cognitive operations (Mead, 1934), but its lived realization is decidedly incomplete.

I am suggesting that it is the "witness set" or "observing self" of meditation that can provide the fixed and unwavering point to which subjective states must then accommodate. This would gradually generate the permanent sense of presence, openness, and compassion that constitutes "formal affective operations" — finally as reversible and decentered in their own fashion as logical intelligence. Piaget held that affective schemata must stay primitive because self reference will always require the projective use of sensory imagery:

> . . . radical egocentrism makes consciousness of the ego impossible, and the only means by which the affective assimilations can then have any consciousness of themselves is by incorporating images as a support. (1962, pp. 211–212)

The requirement of specific imagery for self consciousness (what Mead [1934] and Jung [1944] have called the incomplete and metaphoric basis of all human self reference) keeps that capacity developmentally concrete.

On the contrary and in contrast to Piaget, the witness set of meditation (and related spontaneous development in late adulthood) would provide the point around which symbolic imagery accommodates, allowing a develop-

ment beyond the concrete projective animism of the child. Eventually the more abstract qualities of the physical world — light, space, energy — become correspondingly abstract and open metaphors for self and consciousness. In other words, consciousness itself gradually becomes sensed to be as open and undefined and allowing as space is allowing of a simultaneous infinity of multiple perspectives.

This analysis is consistent with research suggesting that meditation involves a temporary *suppression* of verbal cognition and a simultaneous enhancement of visual–spatial intelligence. This in turn is consistent with findings of increased hemispheric coherence in EEG studies, which would favour an ordinarily subordinated right hemisphere based self awareness (Hunt, 1989b). Brown (1987) finds that advanced Buddhist meditators show a lower tachistoscopic threshold for recognition of light flashes than control subjects, but a comparatively elevated, less accurate recognition for letters. This seems less *post* representational, than a shift to a different developmental line related more to imagistic processes. Research by Gackenbach (Gackenbach and Bosveld, 1989) and Hunt (Spadafora and Hunt, 1990) showing that lucid dreaming and waking mystical experience are associated with superior performance on tests of visual–spatial skills (embedded figures and block designs) and even with good physical balance is consistent with the idea that spatial capacity would be the bedrock of an abstract line of self reference, based on de-embedding increasingly abstract structures from the perceptual array to serve as metaphors mirroring consciousness as such.[1]

Meditation as abstract, formal self reference within an affective line of development also fits better with Dillbeck and Alexander's (1989) observations that meditation on pure consciousness is possible from the age of ten and even in the mildly retarded. Accordingly, such early stages of meditation seem less on the way to the post formal, or post representational, than an initial unfreezing of affective egocentricity — with its possible fixation points dating back to the sensed deficiencies posited by psychoanalytic object relations theory. Correspondingly, meditation does not need to *follow* formal cognitive operations but instead can develop at the same time. The actual lag between intellectual and affective growth then becomes a difference in their typical developmental timing, perhaps especially in modern western societies, and not "formal" or inherent. Indeed, both Wilber (1984a) and Alexander et al. (1990) picture the first stage after formal cognitive operations as involving feelings, intuition, and self awareness. "Abstract develop-

[1]Accordingly, Gardner's (1993) recent placing of religious–mystical development within the "frame" of intrapersonal intelligence, while consistent with our use of Piaget, misses the specific engagement of spatial structures and metaphors in "higher states of consciousness." Something more is going on.

ment of affect and ego" may be most parsimoniously considered in terms of this typical developmental lag between intellect and feeling, rather than as something "post formal." The ordinary barriers to the analogue for formal operations within affect and self reference seem clear enough.

Proceeding further along the lines of theoretical parsimony, experiences of a "unified field" between consciousness and physical reality in advanced meditative states — "every object as an expression of self" — also fits with formal self reference as being a later developmental transformation of childhood animism. Consistent with Vico (1744/1970), Jung (1944/1958), and Lakoff (1987) on the necessity of physical metaphor for any reference to subjective awareness, the most abstract features of the physical world (light, space) offer correspondingly open and inclusive images of consciousness. Whether consciousness is ultimately the same as world or which of these comes first as a generating principle may depend on the point of view (subjective or objective) from which one approaches their ostensible identity. It seems plausible, however, that there would be a core set of metaphors available for knowledge of consciousness and knowledge of world and that at their most abstract levels these would be the same. Whether that finally says more about the structure of consciousness or more about physical reality, may be intrinsically indeterminant.

However, the view that meditative consciousness is a potential line of growth for the mind, but not its only genuine end point in formal developmental terms, faces a significant problem. "Consciousness," although usefully considered from Gardner's (1983) perspective of a multiplicity of forms of symbolic intelligence, is not just another such frame. We cannot just list symbolic forms as follows: mathematical, aesthetic, political, intrapersonal, scientific . . . consciousness. For consciousness is the ongoing medium for all these more specific symbolic frames. (Simply adding another such frame termed "religious" avoids these difficulties on nominal grounds only.)

Here we may get some guidance by further pursuing Langer's distinction between representational and presentational forms of symbolism, a superordinate distinction between the more denotative expressions of mind (in which intentional reference is all and medium becomes a relatively automated code) and forms in which meaning emerges more open-endedly and unpredictably through the immediate feelings and physiognomies evoked by the symbolic medium. Manipulative-motor effectance might be added as the third deep or metastructure. Both denotative reference (sign) and felt meaning or inner physiognomy (state) are inextricably bound up in all Gardner's frames, but with very different degrees of balance and emphasis. When each is developed to its maximum degree of independence (but never final separation) we might find mathematical logic on the one hand, reflecting perhaps the abstract ordering principle of syntax, and higher states of consciousness on the other, reflecting the abstract forms underlying the various frames of the arts and self knowledge.

The arts rest on experiential immersion in the properties of the various concrete media of expression (visual, auditory, tactile–kinesthetic), but the ultimate medium would have to be consciousness per se. Consciousness is ordinarily embedded within specific applications of mind and so invisible, but it is experienced as such and freed from any fixed forms of expression in higher states — with the latters' sense of pure significance, being-as-such, and felt reality. We could say then, borrowing from Almaas (1986, 1988; Hunt, 1989c), that higher states involve a presentational shift in which previous representational and action structures can be metabolized into an expanded, spacious sense of isness and a concomitant sense of personal presence. Whether released by specific expressive (artistic) media or emerging as such in higher states, states of presentational felt significance seem best understood as neither pre nor post representational, but as their own potential line of development — an imagistic meta-frame variously involved with all Gardner's frames and which in itself could be retarded or precocious in its manner of expression.[2]

The contrast between presentational and representational uses of mind is also reminiscent of Winnicott's distinction between dilemmas of being and dilemmas of doing. Their relation, accordingly, to stages of development is complex and nonlinear, but we can see each pole alternately predominating across Erikson et al.'s (1986) stages of life-span development. Issues of being and felt reality would typically predominate during his phases of trust and autonomy, dropping out again during the concrete doings of mid childhood and the school years, and returning again during the identity dilemmas of adolescence. In western society the adult years are generally a time of practical representation and the doing of one's family and career. Midlife crisis and Erikson's account of old age see a shift back to the dilemmas of meaning-as-such. Each line of growth would have its stage-specific pathological or healthy forms and their varying degrees of relatively onesided differentiation or balanced integration. Erikson's account of old age and its optimal unfolding as an increased capacity for wisdom, detachment, and compassion is especially reminiscent of the attributes of advanced meditative realization. This potential overlap between the fruits of meditation, say in early adulthood, and the spontaneous unfoldings of healthy old age is most parsimoniously interpreted, not as a post representational capacity, but as a return in the latter to the unfinished business of formal affective growth — earlier left unrealized in favour of more outward commitments.

I suspect that there would be differences, and not necessarily hierarchical ones, between the qualities of detachment, compassion, and felt meaning

[2]The possible criticism that I am confounding post formal and post representational cannot be correct, since I redefine post formal as "formal" and post representational as "presentational," themselves quite distinct, and then define transpersonal states as their point of coincidence.

that would distinguish a monk, who withdraws from the more extraverted concerns of typical adulthood and pursues meditative realization starting in adolescence and into old age, from a business person or scientist who leaves behind concerns for meaning-as-such in adolescence only to find them re-surfacing later in life. It is the latter that constitutes Jung's (1961) and Maslow's (1971) spontaneous self-actualizer and Erikson's descriptions of the predominance of wisdom and compassion over despair in old age.

I would suggest that the wisdom of the monk will have a depth and stability lacking in the business person, but the latter may also be synthesizing a much broader range of life experiences than will be available to the monk. There is no objective way to judge such wisdoms in terms of intrinsic value, since there is no cross culturally valid way to elevate doing values over being or vice versa. All we can say is that there seems to be a typical oscillation back and forth across the life cycle between stages of predominantly representational and predominantly presentational uses of the mind, with considerable leeway for selective life-long specializations based on interactions among cultural valuation, inborn temperament (introvert, extravert), precocity, and potential trauma.

A figure like Carl Jung shows a life skewed from the beginning toward issues of being, while Winston Churchill might show the opposite bent; who is more "advanced" developmentally? Is one "post" the other? Surely Jung could not have saved England, and indeed he seems to have been as obtuse to the political realities of his times as Churchill was to mysticism (Stern, 1976). Thank goodness on both counts.

There is little room in this developmental model of multiple frames and metaframes for either Wilber's (1990) pre-trans fallacy or Washburn's (1988) model of spiritual experience as simply the adult re-assimilation of early childhood mentality. If one's development along a certain line, here "spirituality," is typically interrupted and fixated at an early stage of its unfolding, then its later re-engagement is not a regression, but a return to something left incomplete in order to "grow" it further — as in the way Jung's midlife crisis went from playing games with stone forts to his gradual personal discovery of the "alchemy" of consciousness. The concept of regression might better be reserved for a collapse of current capacities into their own more primitive precursors, not a *shift* into a previously undeveloped or truncated developmental line. The re-experience of early childhood in these states, while striking, is not the spiritual process itself, but the initial sign of its re-engagement as a line of development. With respect to Wilber, he is correct that no one would want to mistake the early stages of something for its later ones, whether studying history, art, or spirituality; but neither should one allow that worry to obscure the actual continuities within a line of organic growth, even if such a line unfolds intermittently over a lifetime. The "pre-

egoic" presentational states of childhood are the start of a development which the adult meditator renews and from which the "consciousness savant" never departed.

Almaas (1986) has argued that the continuity of being or felt presence in most of us is disrupted in childhood through failure of the environment to genuinely mirror our early spontaneity and wholeness. Later spiritual experience would begin by re-animating that lost true self and then progress through the various facets of adult realization of "essence," culminating in the highly abstract and powerful experiences of consciousness per se as "space." The Kalachakra Tantra in Tibetan Buddhism similarly seeks to revive childhood peak experiences of nonconceptual joy and absorption but in meditation these are to be reframed as an aid to a more abstract and adult realization of inherent emptiness (Gyatso and Hopkins, 1989).

Almaas (1986, 1988) also offers a view of the relation between "essential" development and attainment in representational and/or interpersonal capacities that mediates between my own separate-line-of-development model of spirituality and Wilber's and Alexander's all inclusive end point models. For Almaas, we have hitherto narrowed our discussion to the development of essential *awareness* only (as higher states of consciousness) and ignored other aspects of "essence" and their harmonious balance in full self realization. From this perspective any person whose achievements in politics, the arts, science, or athletics conveys to others a powerful sense of presence (close to charisma as the outer face of self realization) also means that his or her work reflects at least some facet of essence (will, strength, compassion, intelligence). This fits well with Maslow's (1971) view of figures like Abraham Lincoln (with no sign of higher states of consciousness) as self actualized, and allows us to see Winston Churchill or Muhammad Ali (in his later fights) as manifesting an essential strength and will that is as full of "spiritual" presence (literally inspiring) as some yogic states — which are, in turn, as potentially onesided in their manifestation of human wholeness. This is consistent with the fact that fully realized manifestations of political leadership and athletic prowess (two of Gardner's symbolic frames) can be associated with peak and flow experiences which can be indistinguishable in their inner phenomenology from numinous experience in religious mysticism. We could say that any "great" human achievement in any sphere has, by definition, a spiritual implication and impact.

We can then add some further dimensions to our previous discussion. Not only can we distinguish spiritual or essential self realization from other lines of development, but we can find a form of spirituality in any "frame," no matter how onesided, if it is still grounded in and evocative of felt presence. We can also see that the alteration in Erikson's life stages between instrumental and more existential eras (Logan, 1986) suggests that adolescence,

midlife, and old age offer natural points of presentational shift. Therein we have some chance to "metabolize" our more outward developments and achievements in terms of the various aspects of essence from which they have almost inevitably become alienated, and to attain whatever degree of balance may be possible among those essential aspects. Here Churchill and Jung can be equally separated from more typical life courses that have lost their connectedness to presence altogether, yet each is equally onesided in their respective realizations of essential will versus essential awareness. Any later approximation to wholeness in the old age of such figures will accordingly look quite different. Such integration will depend on which symbolic frames have been separated from original wholeness, which have remained connected to presence, and what balance and later renewal of paths untaken can still be attained.

Transpersonal Experiences in Childhood

If we wish to avoid a misleading regression model of abstract higher states, what then do we make of reported experiences of "white light" realizations, lucid dreams, out-of-body experiences, and near-death experiences in early childhood or experiences of merging with "negative infinity" in night terrors?

> I was under a year old — unable to walk or talk. I was crawling on the floor and sat up to listen to a record . . . . I went into a trance . . . . I became aware of an absolute totality and the magnificence of the ordering power — also a complete oneness. I was God and Totality in that instant . . . . As I came out of the trance, I was acutely aware of myself as an isolated part of the total that I had just been aware of. This trance is probably the greatest single experience of my life. [47 year old female] (Armstrong, 1984, p. 12)

> As a baby I remember crawling around inquisitively with an incredible sense of joy, light, and freedom in the middle of my head that was bathed in energies moving freely down from above, up, around and down through my body and my heart. It was an expanding sphere of joy from the heart. And I was a radiant form, a source of energy, bliss, and light . . . . I was the same as everyone and everything, except it became clear that others were unaware of the thing itself. [Da Freejohn] (Armstrong, 1985, p. 12)

Of course, such accounts may have become imbued in retrospect with the understandings of later childhood and adulthood. Contemporaneous reports of childhood near-death experience (Irwin, 1989) do sound more concrete and childlike than adult versions, although tunnel and light constants are cited. Nonetheless, these childhood experiences seem to involve *processes* of cognition which themselves rest on capacities for abstract self reference and translation across the most basic structures of the different sensory modalities. These experiences would be appearing before the child's actual cognitive skills have gone beyond the limitations of egocentricity and the slow, early unfolding of the capacity for cross modal translation that Geschwind (1965) uses to explain symbolic thought. Infants might have the capacity for more simple,

uni-dimensional synesthesias based on their common responses to cross sensory physiognomies (Wagner, Winner, Cicchetti, and Gardner, 1981), but they should not have the capacity for the complex, multi-dimensional or geometric synesthesias involving the entire body image that seem to be entailed by mystical experience and out-of-body states. If such states, appearing before age five, are precocious, we need some notion of their "mechanism."

I have argued at length elsewhere (Hunt, 1984, 1985, 1989a) that such experiences of mergence into oneness and totality are based on an abstract synesthesia between the body image and light. Light is the most basic quale of vision and so the most inclusive possible metaphor for totality, source, and the open nonrepresentability of consciousness itself. The dissolving or disappearing of self into this totality would be what one would expect if the body image became as open and undefined as empty space — in service of a felt meaning of an all encompassing significance. If felt meaning in general rests on cross modal, synesthetic fusions (Gendlin, 1978), the full realization of light as metaphor for totality will entail exactly the kinesthetic dissolving described in classical mysticism. It seems safe enough to see this as an abstraction from the properties of the senses in the service of a cross modal felt meaning, rather than as a regression to some nondifferentiated perceptual status of the infant. We know from recent studies of infant perceptual capacities (Bower, 1977) that we are born into a differentiated and stable visual world full of perceptual constancies and not diffuse light. The abstracted image of light per se would come later, presumably in the service of imagistic intelligence.

More geometric synesthesias between visual imagery and muscular and sensory aspects of the body image would be involved in chakra activation experiences and Jung's closely related accounts of mandala imagery (Hunt, 1985). Similarly, the out-of-body experience would entail a complex synesthesia between sensations of bodily lightness/levitation and a visual image of how the fully differentiated body image would appear from a different perspective within the spatial array (Hunt, 1985; Irwin, 1985). Prototypical out-of-body experience amounts to an accurate "taking the role of the other" (and concrete reversibility) in spatial imagery and so should be far beyond the capacity of any child who could not perform Piaget's task of picturing a plaster-of-paris mountain from different perspectives (Borke, 1975).

If we now ask about the first developmental manifestations of cross modal translation and taking the role of the other, we see how far the infant (and presumably young child) is from Freud's oceanic feeling and its actual reorganization of space and body image. The first manifestation of the human symbolic capacity would be found in the facial mirroring games of young infants and neonates (Meltzoff and Moore, 1989; Winnicott, 1971). These would seem to entail a cross modal translation capacity, because the infant

can only feel, but not see, its own face, while it can only see the face of the mothering one. Yet it can make its facial expression isomorphic with that of the mothering one and delight if its own expression is reflected back in turn. A proto form of taking the role of the other toward oneself is also involved in such mirroring exchanges, since, as Winnicott (1971) suggests, the infant may not "realize" it as such but it is its own face that it sees in the mirroring face of the mother and the mother's face that it sends back. Cross modal translations, and thus the potential for simple synesthesias, begin in ordinary development with the concrete structures of the face, and certainly not with light or with the fully differentiated body image.

Accordingly, we can ask if there is an infant version of mystical experience, since it is certainly not white light experience or the out-of-body pattern. Here we get some help from Stern's (1984) forceful critique of the psychoanalytic tendency to assume that the development of mirroring between the mother and young child (through about one and a half years) is typically *felt* by the child as a state of fusion with the mother. Nonetheless, if we return to the notion that all symbolization has both a presentational and representational side, then, although mirroring normally feeds the development of multiple symbolic skills, *moments* of presentational shift might well produce such fusion or mergence experiences as *special* states. Here would be the stage appropriate "mysticism" of infancy (with dread experiences as its negative proto-psychotic counterpart). Some infants might return to such states more than others, depending on temperamental bias and presentational precocity.

We can now attempt a more specific account of how it might be that white light and out-of-body experiences could occur on a precocious basis as early as two years of age, as claimed in some accounts (anecdotal reports to H. Hunt; Armstrong, 1985). It makes sense that the capacity for cross modal translations normally unfolds slowly and in terms of the symbolic skills that it animates and which in turn push it to further levels of differentiation and abstraction. However, once activated by facial mirroring games, it might be possible that direct and more abstract synesthetic patterns could be decoupled from the cognitive–affective skills to which they are normally subservient and be driven ahead in terms of their own experiential possibilities. Some mixture, varying by individual, of imagistic precocity and/or trauma and vulnerability to stress might aid in such a decoupling of cross modal felt meanings from outward skills and favour their release as experiential states.

On the more pathological side of presentational states, it is of interest that recovering autistic and schizophrenic children (Tustin, 1986) and young children reporting night terror attacks (*pavor nocturnis*) can describe seemingly "abstract" experiences of a sort of inverted mysticism of dissolving, "falling forever" (Winnicott, 1971), or disappearing into a black space that feels infi-

nite. The psychoanalyst Donald Meltzer (see Meltzer, Bremner, Hoxter, Weddell, and Wittenberg, 1975) has suggested that psychogenic autism and related disorders are based on a defensive dissociation or separation of the senses — an inhibition of cross modal translations underlying felt meanings that are beyond the endurance of these hypersensitive and potentially precocious children. Rather than suffer meanings beyond their ability to "hold" or "contain," they would defend against symbolization itself. Short of such an extreme eventuality, one could imagine that such pressures could also release more compensatory and healing experiences that would be developmental antecedents of the higher states of advanced meditative practice.

Some hint of the existence of both the positively precocious and conflict driven paths into early transpersonal experience may be found in the results of a study (Hunt, Gervais, Shearing–Johns, and Travis, 1992) on questionnaire reports from adults of childhood and adolescent occurrences of lucid dreams, archetypal dreams, nightmares, night terrors, out-of-body experience, and mystical experience. Based on advertisements in the local newspaper and throughout Brock University, Hunt et al. compared eight subjects with various experiences beginning around age four or five, another group of twelve with most experiences beginning in early adolescence, and a control group of twenty two subjects with little or no such experiences at any time in their lives to date.

In this first nonanecdotal study of the full range of early transpersonal development, the childhood group was significantly lower on current measures of neuroticism and higher on visual–spatial skills (block designs) than the control group. Since the early occurrence of out-of-body and mystical experience and lucid and archetypal dreams was not related to childhood nightmares and night terrors, we may have in our childhood group indications consistent with a cognitive precocity model, relatively free from intervening trauma and conflict. Their adult scores on block designs may indicate either the early presence of the cognitive skills needed to contain and direct these experiences or their developmental stimulation by these same states.

On the other hand, higher levels of adolescent nightmares and night terrors, possible indicators of trauma or vulnerability in sense of self, were also associated with the appearance in adolescence of high levels of out-of-body and mystical experience. This was the primary factor in a factor analysis of the overall questionnaire items. While overall out-of-body and mysticism reports from childhood were correlated with superior performance on blocks and embedded figures, combining groups, high levels of childhood night terrors were negatively correlated with these visual–spatial capacities. This confirms previous work (Spadafora and Hunt, 1990) indicating that positive transpersonal experiences would be associated with high visual spatial abilities and negative forms with low performance on the same dimensions —

again indicating that spatial capacity may form part of the developmental bedrock for higher states of consciousness.

We have some evidence here of two contrasting developmental paths into transpersonal development — one linked to visual–spatial capacity (precocious or not) and the relative absence of major indicators of childhood and adult conflict and trauma, and the other inseparable from high levels of early and continuing dread and panic states, and in turn somewhat linked to poor visual–spatial capacity. It makes sense to think that high levels of transpersonal experience in the latter subjects, especially in adolescence, are an attempt to contain and transform early trauma and/or early vulnerability in sense of self.

Further evidence of a positive precocity factor came from a comparison of the same questionnaire on early experiences from introductory psychology students from Maharishi International University and a control group from Brock University. The former subjects are all practitioners of Transcendental Meditation and showed significantly more transpersonal experiences and less nightmares/night terrors than the controls. Indeed, the first and most powerful factor in the factor analysis of the MIU responses involved high levels of all the childhood transpersonal experiences, with no loadings for the nightmares and night terrors that were predominant in the controls. It is not surprising that persons with such a developmental start might elect to pursue a meditative practice.

Clearly, neither the romantic model of transpersonal states as a purely positive presentational capacity *nor* the psychiatric model of narcissistic vulnerability is correct as it stands. Both paths exist (which is probably why each theory has seemed so compelling to its adherents). Their prominence will vary considerably, however, depending on the subjects and samples chosen for study.

Certainly, precocious and/or early traumatic activation of the cross modal translation "mechanics" of higher states of consciousness does not mean such experiences could have the same moral or metaphysical significance as spontaneous adult higher states or the difficult to achieve progressive realizations of meditative practice. "Consciousness savants" may be rather like mathematical prodigies in some ways. Just as the latter need not integrate their isolated skills into a later more general logical/scientific/mathematical capacity, precocious higher states would not embody moral capacities and implications not yet achieved in interpersonal and self development. In other words, transpersonal experiences could only embody autonomy, will, identity, intimacy, generativity, or wisdom to the extent that these are already part of the moral capacity of the person at the time of the experience. Indeed, developmental precocity in any frame or meta-frame can go with vulnerabilities and imbalances in general development that will exacerbate narcissistic/self

pathology to one degree or another — so as actually to prevent the later stages of growth so strikingly anticipated. A well known exception here would of course be Jung (1961) who had, however, to suffer near psychotic agonies and ecstasies in mid life before his later spiritual realizations could complete the development foreshadowed in his powerful but ambivalent childhood dreams and visions.

Higher States of Consciousness, Self Pathology, and the Themes of Early Mother–Infant Relations

If "higher states" are higher, abstract forms of realization, why then do they embody nurturing–holding–containing themes from the first months of life and, for Almaas (1988), the autonomy–separation issues of the second year? Why do they engender struggles so reminiscent of the psychoanalysis of narcissistic pathology? Here we need to remind ourselves of two basic considerations — one about the nature of presentational meanings, the other about development.

First, presentational shift moves in a direction opposite from that of trying to articulate an incipient, inchoate felt meaning. Instead, a full experiential immersion in the properties of sensory media is directly sensed as emergent felt meaning. In meditation, the medium of expression becomes the inner structures of consciousness itself. The more basic the patterns thereby "metabolized" as subjective state, the more total will be the resultant feeling of "isness" or being. Accounts of near-death experience, for instance, show an ultra-rapid presentational "metabolizing" of previous life experiences and cognitive patterns. The out-of-body perspective exteriorizes the intensified self reference involved, while the commonly described tunnel structure emerges as a synesthesia between the circular visual field and the sensed hollowness of the actual body image (see Hunt, 1985). The synesthetic release of chronic muscle contractions/chakras within the body image would evoke the rapid super-imposition of life review imagery, ending with the sensed observer dissolving into a deeper abstract space that is sensed as the source that "gives" and "contains" all experience.

The second principle we need to invoke is the way in which development entails an internalization of earlier patterns of experience and behavior, so that they become the automatized, unconscious structures that will support subsequent, nonautomatized, levels of behaviour. A standard example of such internalization is Vygotsky's (1962) treatment of the child's "egocentric speech" — in which children around three years of age speak about their activities constantly and to no one in particular. Vygotsky suggests that the ostensible disappearance of egocentric speech is actually an internalization that makes possible verbal thought as an inner speech in which our thoughts

take the form of an implicit verbal dialogue with a nonspecific, abstracted interlocutor.

Now the deepest internalized pattern or structure of symbolization would have to be based on the mirroring dyad between infant and mother, since this is the infant's first behavioral manifestation of the symbolic capacity. For both Winnicott (1971) and Kohut (1977) this "dialogue" between "contained" (the infant's expressions and states) and "container" (the mother's attitude of holding, allowing, giving) becomes the template within which all later levels of symbolization unfold. W.R. Bion (1962) utilized the exigencies of the mother–infant dyad to map the varieties of adult thought disorder on the similar assumption that advanced symbolization must use the basic patterns of mother–infant relating as its dialogic/mirroring core. Accordingly, serious miscarriages of early relating must reappear as disturbances or imbalances within any symbolically abstract process, as well as energizing such cultural activity as a form of self healing.

The maximum absorption in the properties of consciousness as a presentational medium accordingly ends with the direct experience of a holding–containing–mirroring form — now felt as such and independent of any specific interpersonal context. This holding situation does not reappear because such transpersonal states are regressions but because its structure has been internalized as the matrix for all symbolization. The presentational shift of meditation means that all structures based on previously internalized behaviour will be experienced directly as vehicles or metaphors of abstract felt meaning. Thus, consciousness eventually experiences itself as an all encompassing source that compassionately allows everything to appear or emerge in its own right. This is not a regression but an abstract development, because the basic template of human experience must be abstracted and transmuted into presentational metaphors of an encompassing metaphysical absolute — being, void, God, primal self. That totality is felt to allow everything to appear, just as Winnicott's mothering one contains and allows the infant's experience by reflecting it back as dialogically recognized and so, in human terms at least, allowing it "to be."

If there are actual traumatic residues from these early phases of symbiosis and incipient autonomy, with resulting "self pathology," then meditation on "pure consciousness" must exacerbate these traumas and felt deficiencies, making sustained awareness of voidness and/or unified field more difficult to obtain and bear. The patterns that are to be transmuted into abstract felt meanings have then been inadequately experienced in the first place and so cannot as easily "contain" these powerful states. Winnicott (1964) was struck, for instance, by the way in which Jung's early childhood visions seem to both reflect and attempt to resolve the marital conflicts of his parents. Similarly, one of our eight early childhood transpersonal experiencers con-

ceptualized her out-of-body and mystical states in terms of her sense of having been exiled into her body, with a resultant longing for a freedom or openness that she associated with death. She herself related these feelings to having been abandoned by her mother at eight months. We could speculate that her later powerful transpersonal experiences were both shaped by and attempted to contain and metabolize this pervasive sense of deficit. A certain degree of visual–spatial organization may be needed so that such transpersonal experiences — as indicators of nonverbal symbolization — could be self healing and reconcile such early trauma rather than just repeat it in another form.

Finally, even if there are no such residues from early development, analogues of self/narcissistic pathology (metapathologies of inflation, withdrawal, and loss of meaning) will be created to the extent that the witness attitude of meditation may be temporarily unable to contain and calmly accept the powerful transpersonal states it releases. Just as the troubled infant's excitations, panics, and stupors may or may not be continuously contained and held by the mothering one, the observing self of long term meditation will at times be derailed and overwhelmed by its progressively more diffuse and intense realizations.

Conclusions

It is possible to reconcile the view of higher states of consciousness as an abstract development of self reference (Alexander, Wilber), with the view that such experiences necessarily re-engage the themes of the first two years of interpersonal development (Washburn, Almaas), if we conclude that meditative practice (and spontaneous self actualization) is first and foremost the full development of our presentational symbolic capacity. Thereby, a witnessing consciousness comes to observe its own developed forms as the immediate medium for presentational felt meanings — the more diffuse the patterns thereby synthesized (space, bodily presence, holding), the more all-inclusive the felt significance.

The capacity to experience each life situation as an emanation of such totality — as exemplifying "being" — is a developmental line of growth. It has its own vulnerabilities and precocities. It can be derailed. Almaas (1986) states that the child's capacities to fully "be" and to sense merging love, autonomy, will, joy, etc. are generally lost through the failure for such wholeness to be reflected back by equally whole and "present" adults. The return to these early themes in adult transpersonal development, which entails the progressive abstraction of the forms of consciousness itself as presentational felt meanings, is part of the renewal and extension of that developmental line and not a regression.

Although self referential presentational meaning is a fundamental potential of the human mind and appears cross culturally as its own line of development in the various mysticisms and shamanisms, it is not the only such fundamental potential of mind, nor the inevitable formal or logical end of psychological development. In this regard, meditative realization is perhaps best seen, in terms of Gardner's multiple frames of mind, as the abstract unfolding of one meta-frame. "Consciousness," along with the mathematical–logical structures of syntax and manipulative motoric effectance, would be variously balanced among the artistic, verbal, scientific, logical, interpersonal, political, and technological intelligences. Indeed, long term exclusive pursuit of the meditative path can block the fullest possible differentiation of other frames and meta-frames, as surely as their intensive pursuit can in turn detract from full meditative self realization.

That said, the meditative path centers on processes and realizations that can appear more spontaneously as a natural growth potential at the end of life — as depicted in Erikson's account of the retrospective integration of life experiences following the inevitable curtailment of previous "doings" in old age, and in the more rapid, potentially more abstract synthesis of near-death experiences. In both instances we see a synthesis of major life experiences and the dawning presentational felt meaning of an entire life. That some form of higher state of consciousness may be the natural and optimal endpoint of people's lives, does not per se make such development logically or formally more advanced than other possible developments of the mind. However, the inevitable inhibition of the more practical or applied intelligences inherent to the end of life favours a shift from these other lines of development to the line of presentational self reference, and this allows a further important and final development therein.

This multi-linear developmental model of transpersonal experience accordingly allows us to insist on the considerable developmental achievement involved in the realization of higher states, while avoiding the error of making one line of cognitive–affective development the norm by which all others are to be evaluated. Perhaps, after a hundred years of debate about whether mystical experience is the point of all human life or an illusory *cul de sac*, we can finally surmount both of these hallowed attitudes of conceptual egocentricity.

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