

# The contribution of Western Esotericism to transpersonal psychology\*

## Abstract

*In this article I argue that transpersonal psychology has a close relationship with Western Esotericism, represented by the contemporary 'modern occult revival'. I present an overview of a few key transpersonal psychologists and how their ideas display the characteristics of Western Esotericism as defined by Antoine Faivre. I then discuss whether this approach is appropriate, the implications of associating Western Esotericism with transpersonal psychology, and the potential for a re-synthesis of these two traditions.*

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## Characteristics of Esotericism

A number of authors have written on the Eastern roots of transpersonal psychology, often with an emphasis on Buddhism (e.g. Goleman, 1981; Engler 1993; Scotton 1996; Scotton & Hiatt 1996). Fewer writers have focused on Western Esoteric influences (exceptions are Zalman, 1996; Seims & Whomsley, 2009). Additionally, where Eastern concepts and practices have been adopted in the West, they have often been subject to a Western reinterpretation, for example via Theosophy (Sinnott, 1972) and Fourth Way (Webb, 1980, pp.525–531). Therefore, this article focuses on the contribution of Western Esotericism to transpersonal psychology, especially that of the modern occult revival (late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century), and the relationship between the two.

In brief, Western Esotericism includes the beliefs and practices centred around magic, astrology, and alchemy from the ancient period up to the modern day. Antoine Faivre (Faivre & Needleman, 1992) has described six aspects of Western Esotericism; four essential and two non-essential. The first four are: *correspondences* between the microcosm and the macrocosm; *living nature*, that the world or universe is alive or ensouled; *imagination and intermediaries*, the use of the imagination to access states or levels between ourselves and the divine; and *the experience of transmutation*, the psychospiritual process of transformation resulting from these practices. The non-essential characteristics are: *concordance*, the doctrine that all spiritual traditions originate from a single primordial wisdom tradition; and *transmission*, the ways in which this tradition is passed down between initiates or adepts. An overview of the history, doctrines and personalities of the modern occult revival can be gained from Goodrick-Clarke (2008), Faivre and Needleman (1992), and Webb (1976) amongst others. Good introductions to magic, alchemy and astrology can be gained from Seligmann (1948), Eliade (1956), and Kenton (1974) respectively.

When considering definitions of transpersonal psychology some parallels to Faivre's characteristics seem apparent. Lajoie and Shapiro's definition (1992) reflects the aspects of transformation and imagination, or altered states of consciousness:

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‘Transpersonal psychology is concerned with the study of humanity’s highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness.’ I take it that Faivre’s reference to imagination relates to states of consciousness, as he makes reference to Corbin’s (1964) concept of the *mundus imaginalis* that is perceivable only by ‘the organ of imagination.’ Corbin differentiates this from the everyday sense of the term ‘imaginary’ and altered states of consciousness can be inferred from his comment that:

Upon it depends, for them [mystical theosophers], both the validity of visionary accounts that perceive and relate “events in Heaven” and the validity of dreams, symbolic rituals, the reality of places formed by intense meditation, the reality of inspired imaginative visions, cosmogonies, theogonies, and thus, in the first place, the truth of the *spiritual sense* perceived in the imaginative data of prophetic revelations. (Corbin, 1964)

Walsh & Vaughan’s (1993) definition of transpersonal psychology suggests correspondences and living nature: ‘Transpersonal experiences may be defined as experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche, and cosmos.’ However, these similarities go much deeper.

### **References to Esotericism by transpersonal psychologists**

There is a significant number of direct and indirect references to Western Esotericism in the transpersonal literature. There are references to individuals, ideas, and concepts, from various Western Esoteric traditions. The association of Roberto Assagioli, founder of psychosynthesis, with Alice Bailey is well known (Daniels, 2005, p.20). Alice Bailey was a former Theosophist who formed the Lucis Trust and produced voluminous writings on esoteric spirituality channelled from an ascended Master known as ‘The Tibetan’ (Bailey, 1951). Perhaps less well known are other references to prominent esotericists. Assagioli (2004) refers to Eliphas Levi, the pseudonym of Alphonse Louis Constant, a 19<sup>th</sup> century ex-Catholic priest turned occultist who wrote extensively on magic. Assagioli also refers to P.D. Ouspensky (Assagioli, 1973, p.237; Assagioli, 1965, pp.14 & 87), pupil of G.I. Gurdjieff, and an authority on the Fourth Way. William James, another early inspiration for transpersonal psychology, was a member of Madame Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society (Taylor, 1996, p.24), which has as its three main objectives: the universal brotherhood of man, the comparative study of religion, and the investigation of the powers latent within man (Blavatsky, 1889), all three being similar to the transpersonal ethos. Other transpersonal psychologists, for example, James Hillman occasionally make direct references to esoteric authorities such as Marsilio Ficino (Hillman, 1975, p.161 & p.202), the Renaissance magician and translator of the *Corpus Hermetica* (Voss, 2006); and Paracelsus (Hillman, 1975, p.105), the doctor, homeopath and alchemist (Goodrick-Clarke, 1999). These two figures both hail from the Renaissance period during which esoteric ideas flourished as Neo-Platonism, Hermeticism, magic, astrology and alchemy were combined. The significance of this fascinating period has not been lost on transpersonal psychologists. Brian Lancaster, in his work combining consciousness studies with Jewish mysticism, has drawn a parallel between the

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Renaissance and current consciousness research (Lancaster, 2004, pp.52-55). Eugene Taylor (1999) stated that transpersonal psychology ‘...is the most recent American representative of a visionary tradition with roots that extend back to the shadow culture of Western rational thought — from the Greek mystery schools, neo-Platonism, and the hermetic tradition, to the Kabbalah, Sufism, and on to the 18<sup>th</sup> century English and German mystics.’ Jorge Ferrer (2002, p.6) and Michael Daniels (2005, p.22) also recognize various esoteric traditions as precedents of transpersonal psychology.

C.G. Jung and his studies on alchemy (1953) synchronicity (1972) and the paranormal (1977) can be linked to esoteric interests in alchemy, magic and occult phenomena. Gerhard Wehr (1992) argues that Jung’s interest in these topics, and the transformative nature of depth psychology, intimately associate him with Western Esotericism. Followers of Jung, such as Mindell (1990, p.16) and Hillman also use the symbolism of alchemy. Hillman (1975, p.90) tells us that alchemy ‘...was the depth psychology of an earlier age.’ In addition, many of the mandalas and other artwork, that both esotericists and Jungians are so fond of, can be found in the work of transpersonal psychologists. Wilber’s (2000, p.67) concept of the ‘All Quadrant, All Levels’ (AQAL) model could be understood as a modern version of a universal glyph or pneumotechnic. Jorge Ferrer actually describes it as a ‘modern mandala’ (Ferrer, 2002). Wilber et al (2008) describe it as ‘a theory of everything’ and say, ‘AQAL is a map of consciousness, the kosmos, and human development, at every level and in every dimension that presents itself’ (p.9). This is akin to such esoteric symbolic systems as Giulio Camillo’s memory theatre (also referred to by Hillman, 1975, p.199), John Dee’s hieroglyphic monad (1564), or the Kabbalistic Tree Of Life (Fortune, 1935). Hillman (1975, pp.91–99) makes direct reference to this ‘art of memory’, which was documented by Frances Yates (1966), and also repeats the oft quoted phrase beloved of esotericists, ‘Know Thyself’ (1975, p.93). However, apart from these direct references, does transpersonal psychology itself meet Faivre’s characteristics of Western Esotericism?

### Correspondences

There are the traditional correspondences between colours, plants, animals, planets; but also between sacred texts and historical events. An obvious example of the former is given by Hillman (1975, p.102) where he discusses archetypes. He links Saturn with depression, Dionysus with hysteria, Pan with the instincts, and discusses the relationship between Eros (love) and psyche (mind). He explores the different aspects of love as represented by the Greek myths (1975, p.184). Wilber also speaks of correspondences in a manner reminiscent of modern magic. In explaining ‘holons’ he assigns colours to them (Wilber, 2000, pp.48–49) that replicate the assignation of colours to the Kabbalistic Tree Of Life; the King and Queen Scales as they are known in magic (Butler, 1959, pp.80–85). Butler describes the use of these correspondences in modern magic and says: ‘Thus, an operation of Venus will need a temple-form coloured in green and its complementaries, whilst an operation of Luna will call for a temple in mauve and silver, and the complementaries thereto’ (Butler, 1959).

Wilber describes the colours of the holons in a way that echoes this magical theory of invoking the influences of the planets or Kabbalistic Sephiroth: ‘Moreover, each wave can itself be activated or reactivated as life circumstances warrant. In emergency

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situations, we can activate red power drives; in response to chaos, we might need to activate blue order; in looking for a new job, we might need orange achievement drives; in marriage and with friends, close green bonding' (Wilber, 2000, p.51). Wilber's choice of colours here is not arbitrary but follows the traditional esoteric correspondences. Red is the colour of the planet Mars and the Sephiroth of Geburah on the Tree of Life, which is associated with energy, war, and conflict. Blue is the colour traditionally assigned to Jupiter and the Sephiroth of Chesed, and is associated with justice, law and order. Orange is the colour of Mercury and Hod whose qualities include those of intellect, study, and work. Green is the colour of Venus and Netzach and denotes love, relationships and friendship (Butler, 1959, p.81).

Wilber's 'All Quadrant, All Level' (AQAL) model could be seen as a restatement of the Hermetic dictum 'as above, so below', in its attempt to incorporate the Great Chain of Being reaching from 'matter to body to mind to soul to spirit' with all four aspects of the world, subjective, objective, cultural, and inter-objective (Wilber, 2000, pp.67–68). This macrocosm/microcosm relationship can also be discerned in Arnold Mindell's suggestion that putting one's self in order, puts the world in order. Mindell (1990, p.114) gives an example whereby during the Arab-Israeli Six Days War he identified two opposing forces within himself symbolised externally by the conflict. On reconciling these two forces, by a curious case of synchronicity, a peace treaty was also signed between the two sides in the Middle East. Abraham Maslow restated the macrocosm/microcosm relationship in a more down-to-earth way:

Not only is man PART of nature, and it part of him, but also he must be at least minimally isomorphic with nature (similar to it) in order to be viable in it. It has evolved him. His communion with what transcends him therefore need not be defined as non-natural or supernatural. It may be seen as a "biological" experience.' (Maslow, 1971, p.332)

Some transpersonal psychologists have used another form of correspondence, whereby psychospiritual development recapitulates physical development. Wilber (1979) extrapolates his Spectrum of Consciousness from the work of child developmental psychologists, such as Piaget, and Grof (1988) argues that psychological issues in adulthood can be traced back to perinatal experience.

A third form of correspondences can be identified in the holistic perspective on science, in particular quantum physics (Capra, 1976). Another interesting example of this kind of correspondence is given by Brian Lancaster when arguing for a congruence between the concept of 'unification' from Jewish mysticism and re-entrant processing in the scientific search for the neural correlates of consciousness, 'What the neurones are doing at one level – binding parts into a meaningful whole – the soul, according to this scheme, achieves on the higher plane of emanation' (Lancaster, 2004, p.15).

### **Living Nature**

The idea that nature is alive or ensouled is well known from Renaissance thought as the *anima Mundi* and beautifully depicted by Robert Fludd (Godwin, 1979, p.23). In today's ecologically aware society it is no surprise that transpersonal psychologists have perpetuated this idea. Indeed, Hillman (1975, p.3) comments that it is a lack of

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contact with this aspect of the world that causes problems, ‘Some people in desperation have turned to witchcraft, magic and occultism, to drugs and madness, anything to rekindle imagination and find a world ensouled.’ James Lovelock’s (1979) ‘Gaia Hypothesis’ is referred to directly by Mindell (1990, p.110). He argues that one should process one’s own ‘psychic waste’ to avoid polluting the planet’s ‘psychic ecology’ (1990, p.10). His own belief is that people are the ‘eyes and ears for the universe’ and are therefore channels through which the universal spirit can evolve (1990, p.51). When working in the ‘world channel’, Mindell explains, paranormal phenomena and synchronicities are to be expected (1990, p.134).

For Ferrer the concept of an ensouled world could be detected in his concept of *participation*: ‘...participatory also refers to the fundamental ontological predicament of human beings in relation to spiritual energies and realities. Human beings are – whether they know it or not – always participating in the self-disclosure of Spirit by virtue of their very existence’ (Ferrer, 2002, p.121). Amongst other aspects of participatory events Ferrer also mentions, ‘an indeterminate and dynamic spiritual power of inexhaustible creativity’ (2002, p.123). The meaning of this is unclear to me but it could be suggestive of living nature. He adds that ‘transpersonal events can also occur in the locus of collective identities, such as the ones that can emerge from archetypal, phylogenetic, ancestral, racial, or cultural morphic fields’ (2002, p.120). Biologist Rupert Sheldrake (1981; 2012) coined the term ‘morphic field’ in his ‘hypothesis of causative formation’ that provides a non-materialist, Neo-Platonist style, explanation for the structure and behaviour of plants and animals. This top-down perspective is echoed by Hillman, albeit in a different way: ‘Man exists in the midst of psyche; it is not the other way around. Therefore, soul is not confined by man, and there is much of psyche that extends beyond the nature of man’ (1975, p.173). He points out that, in philosophy, psyche can refer to a world soul or universal principle, not just an individual, and that psyche always comes first: ‘It is not my individuation, but the daimon’s; not my fate that matters to the Gods, but how I care for the psychic persons entrusted to my stewardship during my life’ (1975, p.175). The daimon that Hillman is referring to is the collective influence of the archetypes, which of necessity always transcend and precede any human endeavour, be it science, religion, art, or psychology.

In a slightly different way Wilber speaks of Spirit and emphasises both its transcendent and immanent nature: ‘Spirit is thus both the very highest wave (purely transcendental) and the ever-present ground of all the waves (purely immanent), going beyond All, embracing All’ (2000, p.8). This Spirit is not merely an all-pervading and static thing, but an active, dynamic force that Wilber calls ‘Spirit-in-action’, an evolutionary current that runs through the entire Kosmos and every human cell (2000, pp.153 & 194). Wilber also mentions the morphic field and integrates it with his concept of a grand holarchy, the ultimate ground of which is this selfsame Spirit (2000, p.47). Finally, he adds that authentic spirituality can provide direct experience of this Spirit as a ‘living Reality’ (2000, p.136). Scholar of esotericism, Arthur Versluis (2002), has suggested adding to Faivre’s characteristics: cosmological gnosis and metaphysical gnosis. The former is experiential insight into the cosmos, and the latter into the transcendental realms. It may be such gnosis that Wilber seems to be suggesting here.

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## Imagination and Intermediaries

There are three aspects to this characteristic. The first is that mediation between man and the divine, microcosm and macrocosm, is often via a hierarchy of stages or beings. The most explicit example of this in the domain of transpersonal psychology comes from Wilber and his Spectrum of Consciousness (Wilber, 1975). Wilber argues that the levels along this spectrum can be accessed by different states of consciousness (Wilber, 2000). Grof et al (2008) also make reference to a similar idea, 'In non-ordinary states, we can travel on that continuum, from the mind-body to God, and experience ourselves as anything in between. So in some sense, all those aspects of the world are part of us.' Grof (1988) accepts Wilber's model and says,

In the holotropic mode of consciousness, it is possible to reach, in addition, all the remaining aspects of existence. These include not only access to one's biological, psychological, social, racial, and spiritual history and the past, present, and future of the entire phenomenal world, but access to many other levels and domains of reality described by the great mystical traditions of the world.' (p.39)

The second aspect, is that the imagination, or altered states of consciousness, can be used to access these different levels of being. Assagioli (1965) teaches a variety of visualisation exercises with the goal of contacting different aspects of one's being, including the Higher Self. In discussing transpersonal inspiration he mentions the importance of the imagination and says, 'That the imagination has a close relationship with the intuition is evidenced by the fact that intuitions often do not present themselves to the consciousness in an abstract, simple, and "pure" way, but rather in the guise of images' (Assagioli, undated). His 'exercise on the blossoming of a rose' is one such example and is intended to lead towards inner transformation. The rose has a special relevance in Western Esotericism being a symbol of Rosicrucianism, to which Assagioli actually refers (1969). Here it is associated with the cross and the myth of Christian Rosenkreutz (Yates, 1972), the rose-cross possibly implying self-sacrifice and transformation. Techniques of visualisation, described as 'the vision quest' are also advocated by Mindell (1990, pp.116–119), and others such as Walsh (2008), Wilber (2008) and Jung (Chodorow, 1997). These seem to parallel the pathworking adventures undertaken and described in detail by members of the *Golden Dawn* (King, 1971, pp.95–101; Owen, 2004) although Mindell himself relates them to native American practices.

Hillman (1975, p.X) sees the imagination as one of the important aspects of soul, '...by "soul" I mean the imaginative possibility in our natures, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream, image, and *fantasy* – that mode which recognizes all realities as primarily symbolic or metaphorical.' He links fantasy with Jung's archetypes, and archetypes to the process of 'soul-making':

Because our psychic stuff is images, image-making is a *via regia*, a royal road to soul-making. The making of soul-stuff calls for dreaming, fantasizing, imagining. To live psychologically means to imagine things; to be in touch with soul means to live in sensuous connection with fantasy. To be in soul is to experience the fantasy in all realities and the basic reality of fantasy.' (1975, p.23)

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The third aspect is encountering the symbols or beings, the intermediaries, through the imagination. Hillman discusses this when explaining mythic consciousness, 'To mythic consciousness, the persons of the imagination are real' (1975, p.17). This happens by a process of 'personifying' whereby the archetypes can spontaneously exist as psychic presences (1975, pp.12–13), a concept similar to the Hermetic idea of animating statues with spirits (Walker, 1958). Hillman describes his psychology as polytheistic '...the inherent dissociability of the psyche and the location of consciousness in multiple figures and centres' and refers to the 'gods' and the afflictions associated with them (1975, p.26). These archetypes, or gods, can manifest in dreams, emotions, symptoms, behaviour, preferences, or thoughts. Mindell suggests the much same but talks about channels instead, 'Process is information which comes to you in specific ways or channels such as seeing, hearing, moving, feeling, relationships, and the world' (Mindell, 1990, p.17).

### **Experience of Transmutation**

Daniels (2005) points out that the difference between transpersonal psychology and the psychology of religion, is the former's focus on transformation, a characteristic shared by Western Esotericism. Incidentally, it could be that many people who are drawn to these alternatives do so because they provide a more direct, personal and experiential form of spirituality than can be found in the more orthodox religions. As mentioned above, Versluis suggested adding cosmological and metaphysical gnosis to Faivre's six characteristics to emphasise the role and importance of experience. However, in practice *all* of Faivre's characteristics have an experiential dimension (Rush, 2008). In her participatory study of magic and modern Paganism Susan Greenwood (2000) states, 'The common uniting link between all the diverse magical practices is the connection to the otherworld and otherworldly beings as a form of communication that can effect some form of transformatory experience' (p.28). She observes that psychotherapy is implicit in magic as the individual must be in a state of psychological balance before contacting the otherworld. This is followed by a loss of self and the acquisition of a magical identity (p.121). It is interesting to compare this with psychosynthesis whereby the aspects of the Lower Self must be balanced before attempting spiritual psychosynthesis; contact with the Higher Self (Assagioli, 1965). It seems to me that transpersonal psychology has a number of names for the experience of transmutation: Maslow's *self-actualisation* and *peak experiences*, Jung's *individuation*, Ferrer's *participatory knowing*, Hillman's *soul-making*, Assagioli's *psychosynthesis*, and Mindell's *waking-up* are all suggestive, even if not actually the same process.

Ferrer criticises transpersonal psychology for its tendency towards 'experientialism', the focus on individual subjective experience, and instead advocates a participatory vision (2002) saying that, '...transpersonal studies should not be dissociated from the spiritual quest, but rather be in the service of the spiritual transformation of self, relationships, and world' (p.126). The experience of transmutation, in Ferrer's scheme, seems allied with 'participatory knowing.' This a mode of being that includes somatic, emotional, intuitive ways of knowing, not just the intellectual. It includes transformation of both the self and the world and is, in fact, necessary for participative knowing; third-person objectivist views are not enough (2002, p.123). Whilst saying that all mystical experiences cannot be reduced to participative knowing, Ferrer states,

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‘...I believe that most genuine spiritual paths involve a gradual transformation from narrow self-centeredness towards a fuller participation in the Mystery of Existence’ (2002, p.145). What he means by ‘the Mystery of Existence’ is unclear but may be an echo of an holistically integrated and therefore ensouled world.

For Hillman, the experience of transmutation can be found in his concept of ‘soul-making.’ As discussed above, Hillman’s view of the psyche is a polytheistic one and the managing of this ‘massa confusa in the soul’ can take place via four different modes of soul-making. These are: Eros, love; dialectics, intellectual discipline; mania, madness; and Thanatos, death (Hillman, 1975, p.111). Pathologizing is an important stage in soul-making and Hillman, following Jung, makes reference to the process of dissolution and decay, *nigredo*, in alchemy (p.109). Hillman says, ‘...this movement of consciousness into psychological reality is experienced at first as pathological; things fall apart as the one becomes many’ (p.35), which is reminiscent of occultist Eliphas Levi’s diagram of Baphomet gesturing towards earth and heaven and adorned with the words ‘solve et coagula’ (Levi, 1896).

In Wilber’s model transmutation occurs as the self ascends the hierarchy of being, from ‘ego-centric to ethnocentric to worldcentric to theocentric.’ An ascension that takes one up the Spectrum of Consciousness from ‘subconscious to self-conscious to superconsciousness.’ For Wilber, ‘Authentic spirituality...is about transforming your consciousness’ (Wilber, 2000). In making this journey the self will experience a series of important milestones, or ‘fulcrums’. The similarity here between the grade system of the Golden Dawn, with its initiation rituals and experiences pertaining to each grade (or Sephiroth on the Tree of Life), is apparent. In describing his stages of spirituality Wilber refers to Evelyn Underhill’s work on Christian mysticism (2000, p.133). Underhill herself was a member of the Stella Matutina, an offshoot of the Golden Dawn, and may have been influenced by the same esoteric sources. Wilber does emphasise that it is not the experience itself that is important, but transforming the insight gained into a lasting component of consciousness; in converting ‘states into traits’ (2000, p.15).

Finally, Mindell’s views about personal transformation and those of G.I. Gurdjieff seem similar. Mindell identifies two processes: primary and secondary. The primary process is our normal, everyday ego that, although most people do not realise, is entirely automatic, the *Doer* (Mindell, 1990, p.21). The secondary process is like a second personality within, the *Reactor*, that often conflicts with the primary process. These processes are separated from each other by ‘edges’ and it is by discovering these edges and exploring them through different ‘channels’, that we can transform ourselves (p.71), often during ‘peak experiences’ (p.125). The part that observes these two processes is the meta-communicator but it is not usually awake. Much of this seems to be restating Gurdjieff’s (Ouspensky, 1949) theories about people being automatic machines that are asleep and need to wake up, multiple-selves, and the ‘buffers’ that keep these different selves unaware of each other. Gurdjieff (Ouspensky, 1949) also taught that the self consists of three centres: the moving centre, feeling centre and thinking centre, an idea that is similar to Ferrer’s (2005, p.121) ‘participatory knowing’ that involves somatic, emotional, intellectual and intuitive modes of knowing.

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## Concordance

Concordance is the agreement between different spiritual traditions regarding doctrines and experiences. Perhaps the clearest esoteric characteristic exhibited by transpersonal psychology is its association with Perennialism. Perennialism sees all traditions as containing a part of the one, true, primordial wisdom tradition. This is not the same claim that there are universal psychological processes that result in a 'common core' to spiritual experiences. It seems to me that the latter tends to be based on empirical analysis of such experiences (Hardy, 1979; d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999; Persinger, 1987), whilst the former depends on *a priori* metaphysical doctrine. Some authors, such as Wilber (2000), make direct reference to Perennialism, whilst Ferrer (2002) has heavily criticised transpersonal psychology for its reliance upon it. Wilber has also been criticised for his dogmatic Perennialism by Wouter Hanegraaff who points out that *Spectrum of Consciousness* was rejected by a large number of publishers until accepted by a Theosophical Publishing house, he states: 'Wilber approaches the psychology of religion and the analysis of religion and culture from a decidedly "spiritual" perspective, based on specific mystical beliefs; and his books are not published by prestigious University Presses but by theosophical or otherwise esoterically-oriented publishing houses' (Hanegraaff, 2002). Some of the parallels between Wilber's work and Theosophical concepts, including Perennialism, have been explored by Visser (undated). Others, for example Maslow (1964) and Grof (1988), tend to accept uncritically the presuppositions of Perennialism, such as a universal mysticism inherent in religious experience and the hierarchical 'Great Chain of Being'. Even where Perennialism is not stated explicitly, concordance can often be identified. Jung's understanding of alchemy is very much his own, modern re-interpretation, not necessarily that of the alchemists whose work inspired him (Lachman, 2010, p.157). There is certainly disagreement over the validity of Perennialist views as often concordance results in adaptation, and subjection of, pre-existing beliefs and experiences into another paradigm (Scholem, 1946; Wang, 2001).

## Transmission

In Western Esotericism transmission refers to how esoteric knowledge is passed on. For example, initiation ceremonies, grade systems of spiritual attainment, the authenticity of truly 'contacted' occult schools, secret societies and magical orders, and the authority of leaders. In some aspects of transpersonal psychology this characteristic manifests in similar ways, for example the therapist can be seen as a guru or teacher (Mindell, 1990, p.133; Hillman, 1975, pp.70–72). There are also numerous transpersonal organisations that teach and regulate transpersonal subjects. Hillman (1975, p.20) comments, 'Depth psychology is today's form of traditional mythology, the great carrier of the oral tradition, the telling of tall tales.' However, according to Faivre's definition transmission should also include the possibility of knowledge and guidance coming from other entities such as inner guides, the Higher Self, the unconscious, or collective unconscious. Perhaps, this aspect of transmission leads us back into the debate about first-person versus third-person approaches to consciousness.

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## Conclusion

The argument I am making is that transpersonal psychology is a modern manifestation, and continuation of, Western Esotericism. There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn about this relationship.

Firstly, the application of Faivre's characteristics to transpersonal psychology can be criticised. It could be argued that these characteristics are simply too broad in scope. Many different theories could fit into them that are not, on the face of it, esoteric in nature. Also, whilst it seems possible to identify many esoteric characteristics in transpersonal psychology as a whole, individual transpersonal theories do not exhibit all of the essential characteristics. Ferrer, for example, seems to emphasise *living nature* but criticises Perennialism. Wilber, on the other hand, emphasises Perennialism and says less about *living nature*. Therefore, characterising Western Esotericism, or transpersonal psychology, in this way can give a false sense of coherence. Different esoteric doctrines can contradict each other, just as different transpersonal models can also be incompatible. It seems to me that it is by focusing narrowly on universalist assumptions, at the expense of unique differences, that such monolithic theories rest. Additionally, Faivre's are not the only characteristics of Western Esotericism. Versluis has added two further characteristics that emphasise the role of experience, and Riffard (cited in Versluis, 2002) suggests others including: authorial impersonality, an opposition of esoteric to exoteric, the concept of the 'subtle' which mediates between spirit and matter, the correspondences, the esoteric significance of numbers, the 'occult sciences', the 'occult arts', and initiation.

Secondly, linking transpersonal psychology with Western Esotericism could be an advantage or a disadvantage. Some may see in Western Esotericism the advantage of a more holistic, meaningful, spiritual approach. Others, however, may see Western Esotericism, and by association transpersonal psychology, as an outmoded, superstitious, and magical way of thinking. In criticising Wilber's choice of a Theosophical publisher, Hanegraaff warns us, 'For an author with academic ambitions this is fatal. Wilber is seen by psychologists and religious studies scholars as a New Age author, from whom of course one cannot expect any serious contribution to scholarly debate' (Hanegraaff, 2002). Also, others may be suspicious of esotericism due to its ambiguous relationship with occultism. Hillman (1975, p.3), and Maslow (1964, p.IX), have both expressed negative attitudes towards occultism. Like any other tradition, esotericism does have its darker side and this too could manifest within transpersonal psychology. Neither are immune to the sins of elitism, dogmatism, sectarianism, narcissism and egotism. Perhaps the best that can be hoped for is a transpersonal psychology that draws on both the spiritual insights of Western Esotericism and the psychological methods of empiricism. In this respect it is also important to distinguish between a 'psychology of esotericism' and 'esoteric psychology'. The former, for example, is the application of academic psychology to esoteric beliefs and experiences (e.g. Vyse, 1997; Rosengren, 2000), whereas the latter would be the application of esoteric models to psychology (e.g. Halevi, 1986; Alvarado, 1991). This is not a value judgement, simply a recognition of different starting assumptions.

Thirdly, whilst esotericism may provide a rich source of data, methods and ideas for transpersonal psychology, we must avoid the trap of demythologising and so

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rendering impotent the material it provides. It could be argued that transpersonal psychologists have taken wisdom from the esoteric traditions, East and West, and stripped out the magic, mysticism and religion to create a more secular model for a more scientific audience. The problem with this approach, as recognised by Daniels (2005), is that the magic, mysticism and religion were a fundamental part of the esoteric systems. In fact, Hillman states, 'Psychology so needs mythology that it creates one as it proceeds' and concludes:

Our field needs to build again rich and fantastic psychologies such as classical mythology, the arts of memory and alchemy; such as Jung's, such as the Neo-Platonism that organized and gave culture to the madness of the Renaissance and the Romantics.' (Hillman, 1975).

It is just such a 'rich and fantastic psychology' that Western Esotericism can provide and McDermott (1993) suggests that the Romanticism of people such as Rudolf Steiner would make transpersonal psychology more intelligible, significant and capable of realising greater potential. However, as argued by Friedman (2005), the future progress of transpersonal psychology may well depend upon its adoption of empirical methodologies. Without a through grounding in empirical methodologies we may be in danger of proliferating the fantastic. However, empirical approaches to traditional aspects of Western Esotericism, such as astrology (Friedman, 2002) may prove instructive.

Fourthly, it is common to find transpersonal psychologists drawing on models and techniques from the East, especially Buddhism and Yoga. However, as this essay has hopefully made clear, the West has its own rich source of spirituality that may often be overlooked. Holman (2008) concludes, in agreement with Jung, that, 'a "Western Yoga" was realizable from the Western Tradition'. This is an echo of what occultist Dion Fortune (1935) called Kabbalah, 'the Yoga of the West', and a similar aim is repeated by Wilber in describing Integral Life Practice being designed for people living in the 20th century.

In summary, the association of transpersonal psychology with Western Esotericism is not just a historical one, but also a political and practical one. Whilst many transpersonal authors find inspiration from the East much of this wisdom was received via the esoteric traditions of the West during the modern occult revival. This article has attempted to acknowledge this influence. Finally, the history of esotericism is intimately bound up with the history of science and the meeting ground between science and religion, the mundane and the transcendent. The modern occult revival saw, not only the influx of Eastern wisdom but also the success of scientific endeavour, and it sought to capitalise on both. The challenge now for transpersonal psychology is to continue this tradition and to re-synthesise this spiritual source of wisdom with a practical, psychological empiricism.

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