

## Introduction

These are times of transition in culture and consciousness. Changes are taking place in the most fundamental of human activities that we will call “knowing.” Not just what counts as “knowledge” but the ways in which something comes to be “known” are called into question. The truths of modern science and, for many, religion as well, are no longer seen as absolute but rather as relative to their context of language, culture, and epistemic assumptions. The methodologies of the sciences and the humanities are under constant scrutiny and revision. In postmodernity, knowing has been greatly humbled by its self-acknowledged limits.

Sensitivity to the plurality of perspectives on all truths is the postmodern legacy that has been embraced by a significant number of scientists, most intellectuals, and, increasingly, the general population. Whether expressed in crass relativism (“any opinion is as good as another”) or in sophisticated deconstructionist arguments, the influence of cultural and linguistic context is widely recognized. Indeed, it appears that much of human consciousness is transitioning through a significant epistemic shift: our “knowing” is becoming increasingly aware of its own processes.

The hazards of this epistemic shift are very much in evidence today. Psychological disturbances that suggest premature opening to modes of experience that fall outside the more familiar rational orientation appear to be on the rise. There is widespread uncertainty and confusion about what counts as “knowing.” The extremes of cynicism (“nothing counts”) and naive susceptibility to anything that is impactful (“everything counts equally”) run rampant. So does self-absorption in the form of psychological preoccupation with self-esteem and intellectual discourse that turns upon itself in futile, self-reflexive closed-loop “talk about talk.” In such “talk” the forms of knowing do not change and the activity of thinking holds onto them tightly.

The self-reflexive, snake biting its own tail discourse is, however, not the only alternative for knowing to become self-aware. Instead of trying to grab hold of itself, knowing can hold its forms lightly and perhaps let go of them altogether, thus allowing the self-awareness of knowing to transform its own process. Glimpses of this occur frequently in everyday life. Many people have had the experience of a sudden insight, often preceded by an impasse in their thinking. Just before the “aha!” moment, the structures of thinking dissolve, out of which “knowing” then emerges afresh. Moments of insight illustrate the peculiar nature of knowing, namely that its self-awareness catalyzes change in its own process. This “self-awareness” should not be mistaken for “self-consciousness” (e.g., when a person’s spontaneity is arrested by self-consciousness that reifies a “self”). Nor should it be mistaken for a conceptual analysis. Rather, the activity of knowing, such as a flash of intuition, knows itself in this very activity. This transparency or self-knowing is at the same time a self-transcending process whereby knowing liberates itself from its own ground, eventually (often almost immediately) to create new grounds. In this way, knowing that knows itself is a constantly changing activity.

Many transpersonal theorists believe that an accelerated change is currently taking place. For these theorists, the monolithic rationality of modern science is breaking down, and there is a growing recognition of alternative modes of human knowing. The direction of this process, or whether it even has a particular direction, is not clear. Some see it as being evolutionary and as manifesting distinct transitional stages in a progressive integration of knowing through self-awareness. But among those who take the evolutionary view, there is considerable disagreement about how the stages should be conceived. Others question the usefulness of linear developmental schemes of any kind. Whatever their position on the evolutionary hypothesis, however, most transpersonalists seem to agree that we are witnessing a genuine opening in the horizons of knowing. We are increasingly sensitized to the differences in perspective that reflect the varieties of ethnic groups and subcultures within the larger cultural matrix, even as we move toward globalized culture. And it appears that in some cases the awareness of multiple perspectives has the effect of loosening the hold of any particular perspective (though in other cases it has the opposite effect—witness the raise of ethnic and religious fundamentalism). “Perspective” itself then becomes more tenuous, more fluid, less binding on the knowing that operates within its confines. The consequent undermining of perspectival truth has no doubt contributed to the general loss of faith in the traditional ways of rational knowing—those of science and religion. At the same time, it appears to have allowed more expression of alternative, nonrational modes of knowing. Thus we not only have multiple perspectives on knowing, but ap-

parently multiple modes of knowing. Some of these modes may involve simultaneous awareness of several perspectives, others perhaps do not involve perspectives at all.

But what is this knowing that reveals itself in the process of knowing becoming aware of itself? What are the varieties of modes through which it manifests? Current transpersonal literature contains broad characterizations of “postconventional” or “transrational” consciousness (e.g., Walsh, Washburn, Wilber), largely drawn from mystical literature. Some detailed empirical studies are also available on the developmental shifts toward the “postconventional” (e.g., Kegan, Loevinger, Cook-Greuter). What is lacking, however, are first-hand investigations of the phenomena of this type of knowing. Given that all descriptions are, by necessity, conventional, first-hand familiarity with what is taken to be “postconventional” seems crucial. Such familiarity, and the opening up of conventional perspectives that comes with it, provides a better chance of negotiating the inevitable marriage of the conventional and postconventional in a descriptive endeavor. The challenge of this marriage is that, on one hand, all descriptions depend on conventional understanding and are bound to the forms of language and culture in which such understanding occurs. On the other hand, postconventional knowing is not—at least not completely—bound to such forms. Descriptions inspired by first-hand familiarity tend to have a dialectical transparency (of knowing knowing itself) that facilitates the emergence of postconventional knowing. On the other hand, descriptions obtained from secondary sources are more likely to encourage the reduction of this knowing to the conventional forms through which it is understood.

The secret of a successful marriage is the mutual recognition of the irreducibility of either party to the other. That is, neither has the “truth” for both, but the truth evolves in their relationship. The descriptions and maps of postconventional knowing, then, can never have the final word. They are, of necessity, unfinished and partial. It is important to appreciate the difference between unfinished and partial and to recognize that conventional maps and descriptions are limited in both of these ways. Because they are unfinished, they are best kept maximally inclusive, open and evolving. Wilber’s evolutionary theory is a good example of this. But because they are necessarily partial and offer a particular angle or perspective, they need to be complemented by alternative perspectives. Thus we are suggesting that the approach best suited for the descriptive endeavor and mapmaking for postconventional knowing may indeed be multiperspectival.

In the domains of conventional knowing, such as is typical of the natural and social sciences, the existence of multiple perspectives signifies an unstable, “revolutionary” phase, as Kuhn named it, that is a way station to an integration of these perspectives by a new, more accommodating perspective.

However, with the shift from conventional to postconventional, the integration is not conceptual, thus does not call for a more accommodating perspective but for a mode of knowing that is not perspectival, or at least to some degree not bound to particular perspectives. Thus in postconventional knowing, the capacity to simultaneously hold multiple perspectives may be a way station to an “aperspectival” mode of knowing that increasingly depends on an awareness that accommodates all perspectives without affirming or taking up a position in any of them. The project of this book takes place in this way station, and we believe that the nature of this project is such that the existence of multiple perspectives may be more appropriate for it than a single perspective, however open and accommodating it might be. The lesson from multiple perspectives is not that truth is ultimately relative or unknowable but rather that any perspectives we take on should be held onto lightly, with no more attachment to them than one has to a used pair of disposable contact lenses.

But if the criteria for postconventional knowing cannot be found in conventional descriptions and maps, how then is this knowing “known”? In conceiving the project of this book, we were acutely aware of the difficulty inherent in trying to address the kind of knowing that is not “known” through conventional forms and methods and that may not even be available to all people at all times. Frankly, we do not know (in conventional terms) what this knowing actually is, or who knows and who does not know about it. With this topic, there is a great danger of talking about what one does not know, and of not even knowing that one does not know. External, consensually validated standards may offer some guidelines and criteria, but not the knowing itself. For its revelation, we have nothing else to fall back on but the interior view of this knowing. A dialogue among those who access the interior view is essential for the ongoing revisioning of the external standards that the changing manifestations of knowing call for. Such a dialogue can also facilitate access to, and encourage people to trust and give voice to, their own knowing. We hope that this book will contribute to these aims.

The authors of the following chapters have come as much as possible from their own authentic knowing, whether through personal narrative or through analysis and conceptualization informed by such knowing. We did not wish to impose a preconceived framework of interpretation. Rather, we challenged the authors to stay as close, and as faithful, to their own knowing as possible and make connections to existing theories and interpretive frameworks, not so much to “find fit” as to clarify or enhance the understanding of the knowing they were exploring. The interpretive perspectives in which the authors embed their knowing are rather divergent. However, we believe that the lack of uniformity is not simply a matter of the newness of the territory being explored but is intrinsic to the territory itself. Even so, certain basic

themes across the chapters seem to emerge such as authenticity—that this is one’s own knowing; immediacy—there is little or no conceptual mediation; connectedness—the boundaries that separate and create the sense of an isolated self seem to dissolve; and transformative capacity—the knower is changed by the knowing and at the same time, openness to change in one’s sense of identity opens one to the knowing.

The chapters roughly fall into three groups. There is much overlap among the groups, and their boundaries are not sharply defined, but they provide our rationale for ordering the sequence of the chapters that follow. The first six chapters (Puhakka, Hart, Nelson, Welwood, Hanna, Khan) approach transpersonal knowing directly by exploring its essential features and the transformational processes involved in shifting to such knowing. The next three chapters (Rothberg, Washburn, Ferrer) examine developmental conditions and epistemological issues relevant to transpersonal knowing. The last group of chapters explore specific contexts that provide openings to transpersonal knowing, such as in empathic encounters between persons (Hart), sexual experiences (Wade), and service (Deikman).

*An Invitation to Authentic Knowing* begins this collection. Kaisa Puhakka defines “authentic knowing” as “knowing by and for oneself.” Such knowing makes direct contact with the known and nourishes a sense of well-being. Depending on the depth of contact and clarity of discernment in a moment of knowing, the usual self-experience and intentional (subject-object) structure of consciousness become more transparent and fluid or may dissolve altogether. Puhakka inquires into the nature of authentic knowing as well as some cultural and psychological defenses against it. She then explores the shift from intentionally structured consciousness to direct knowing or awareness and offers a brief experiential journey through this shift. Finally, she suggests that bliss, perfection, and love are not the exclusive qualities of mystical experience but are, in more or less subtle ways, present in any moment of knowing.

*Inspiration as Transpersonal Knowing* by Tobin Hart describes inspiration as an epistemic event that provides psychological and spiritual sustenance, not only to great artists and mystics, but that is available to nearly everyone. Inspiration occurs as a particular shift in awareness and is characterized by contact and connection, opening, clarity, and energy. The constellation of these characteristics define inspiration and suggest a means for cultivating and inviting this shift. This epistemic event offers a powerful complement to the narrow rationality of the empirical sciences and to normal waking consciousness. In addition, most contemporary mental health complaints are characterized by a constricted epistemic style that is described as the opposite of inspiration. Inspiration may provide a direct antidote to many of these difficulties.

*Mystical Experience and Radical Deconstruction: Through the Ontological Looking Glass* by Peter L. Nelson addresses the nature of transpersonal knowing as engendered through mystical experience. Starting with the kinds of claims made by mystics throughout the centuries, the author brings a phenomenological lens to the examination of these assertions by means of an exploration of his own mystical experience. Although mystical experience is often considered to be the *sine qua non* of spiritual experiencing and is believed to lead to a unique epistemic frame from which ultimate reality is known, Nelson raises some important questions about the epistemics of this process. To accomplish this task he examines the psychophenomenological mechanism through which spiritual knowing arises and then re-frames this process with the aid of William James's radical empiricism and the critical process known as deconstruction. In concluding, the suggestion is that spiritual knowing and the ongoing process of deconstructing our epistemic frames are one and the same.

In *Reflection and Presence: The Dialectic of Awakening* John Welwood reminds us that conceptual reflection allows cognitive analysis and understanding of what is going on and why. But he suggests that a further step on the path of self-knowledge involves learning to *be with* our experience in an even more direct and penetrating way, which he calls *unconditional presence*. Here the focus is not so much on what we are experiencing as on how we are with it. Welwood asks: What kind of preliminary practices or inner work are most relevant and useful for modern people as a groundwork for nondual realization? What special conditions may be necessary to nurture and sustain nondual presence outside of retreat situations? And how can this spacious, relaxed quality of presence be integrated into everyday functioning? He explores the uses and limitations of psychological reflection in spiritual practice, suggesting that it can serve as a stepping-stone both toward and "back" from nondual presence—as a bridge, in other words, that can begin to unlock deeper qualities of being and help to integrate them more fully into everyday life.

*Dissolving the Center: Streamlining the Mind and Dismantling the Self* by Fred J. Hanna presents the author's experiences and observations in the course of over thirty years of his exploration of consciousness. Hanna describes progressive changes at the center of consciousness brought about or facilitated by his meditative practices and transcendent experiences. At the focus of his description are three major stages and several substages of psychospiritual development that he calls "precentered," "centered," and "decentered." His first-hand reports shed light on various insights that occur as a result of dismantling the mind and self. One aspect of his description concerns the removal of mental phenomena that hinder and obstruct the natural occurrence of transcendence.

*Illuminative Presence* by Zia Inayat Khan highlights the epistemology of the illuminative philosophy (founded by Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, d. 1191) as a compelling discursive reconstruction of mystical experience. The illuminative philosophy identifies reality with apparency, a perspective that affirms both sensory and suprasensory perceptions. The most important contribution of illuminative epistemology is the theory of knowledge by presence, which distinguishes between representational, predicative knowledge and presential, intuitive knowledge. Presential knowing is nothing more or less than an immediate, essential encounter between subject and object. This epistemic mode, which constitutes the self and underlies all knowledge, is intensified and expanded in mystical awareness.

*Spiritual Inquiry* by Donald Rothberg explores the contemporary importance of the idea that there are forms of systematic and disciplined inquiry leading to the resolution of spiritual questions. Based on an examination of practices and texts drawn from many cultural and historical periods, he offers a typology of five interrelated modes of spiritual inquiry: systematic contemplation, radical questioning, metaphysical thinking, critical deconstruction, the cultivation of visions and dreams. There seem to be methods with qualities similar to those usually taken to be at the heart of Western concepts of science and inquiry, systematic observation, questioning of core assumptions, and critical analysis. He then, however, questions the premature assimilation of these methods through contemporary Western concepts, considering the complexities of relating these mainly pre-modern approaches to the contemporary natural and human sciences. He asks whether new modes of inquiry, new institutions, and new practices are needed for contemporary spiritual inquiry.

*Transpersonal Cognition in Developmental Perspective* by Michael Washburn begins by distinguishing three basic types of cognition: agentic (ego-initiated, sequential) cognition and two types of intuitive (spontaneous, holistic) cognition: imaginal intuition and mental intuition. Pursuing a developmental perspective, he traces the prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal forms of these three types of cognition. According to Washburn, the transition from prepersonal to personal stages is marked by a disappearance of imaginal intuition (based on concrete symbols), and the transition from personal to transpersonal stages is marked by a reemergence of imaginal intuition on a higher level. He proposes that the development of transpersonal cognition can be understood as a progressive integration of reawakened imaginal intuition with the agentic cognition (especially formal operational thinking) and mental-intuitive cognition (understanding of conceptual meanings and postoperational intuition of higher holistic patterns) of personal stages. Washburn also proposes that the development of transpersonal cognition should be understood as but one dimension of a

more complex process, a process that culminates in a higher union of the ego with the nonego potentials of the deep psyche.

*Transpersonal Knowledge: A Participatory Approach to Transpersonal Phenomena* by Jorge Ferrer introduces an epistemic approach to transpersonal and spiritual phenomena alternative to the contemporary experiential understanding of these events. First, the main conceptual and practical shortcomings of the *experiential approach* that guides contemporary transpersonal studies are identified. Then an outline of his participatory approach is offered, showing how it not only averts these pitfalls but also situates transpersonal theory in greater alignment with spiritual values and ways of life. Central to this epistemic turn is a shift in the understanding of transpersonal phenomena from individual inner experiences to epistemic events in which individual consciousness can participate but that can also occur in relationships, communities, and places.

*Deep Empathy* by Tobin Hart focuses on the specific process of deep empathic knowing, particularly useful in the therapeutic context. A map of the refinement or development of empathy is presented and identifies nine forms of empathic knowing. While empathy is typically understood to emerge from cognitive perspective taking as well as one's feeling capacity, the activity of deep empathy involves a more direct knowing. This involves a loosening of conventional self-other boundaries and subtle shifts in awareness. This chapter explicates such concepts as therapeutic resonance, deep countertransference, alignment, attunement, and intersubjectivity.

*The Love That Dares Not Speak Its Name* by Jenny Wade suggests that sexual experiences can involve transpersonal knowing, often when the partner becomes a focus point of contemplation in an altered state. In such altered states, identification may occur outside normal ego boundaries. Moreover, expansion of ego boundaries characterizes not only the psychologically advanced transpersonal knowing but the more primitive prepersonal as well. Wade describes the intricacies of three broad types knowing. In some love relationships, self-boundaries blur with those of the other, reopening prepersonal bonding (regression) and absorption by the partner. A more advanced state consists of absorption into the beloved, in which the two seem to achieve union. Self is subservient to the we-ness of the experience, but the knower is never entirely gone in this instance, which is usually felt in the ecstatic appreciation of the other and of the union between the two. At the Unity level the objects and relationships and voidness involve the events going forward, but the physical events serve merely as an occasion for the experience and not a particularly important one at that. The lovers are no more important than the spaces in between them and are no different from the other entities surrounding them.



Although service is usually discussed as a moral issue, in *Service as a Way of Knowing*, Arthur Deikman introduces a view of service based on the idea that it enables us to experience the connected aspects of reality—that which we call the spiritual. He draws upon both developmental psychology and the spiritual traditions to clarify the relationship between intention, self, and mode of consciousness. By showing that consciousness serves our basic intention, he clarifies the function of traditional spiritual activities and points to service as a way of knowing aspects of reality closed to ordinary consciousness.

We welcome you to this volume and hope that this material provides not only an opportunity for reflection, but also an invitation to explore first-hand the knowing that is described.