

CHAPTER 1

Phenomenology and Psychodynamics of Transpersonal Experience

We begin with the development of phenomenologies and descriptive psychologies of mystical experience. The historical and cultural context for these concerns starts in the nineteenth century, where there appears a strong interest in a naturalistic philosophical understanding (Schleiermacher, Nietzsche) and social science (Tylor) of mystical and religious experience. All the great pioneers in the history of the social sciences, from James and Jung, early developmentalists like Hall and Baldwin, to Weber and Durkheim, were similarly preoccupied at the turn of the twentieth century with trying to define a spontaneous core of religiosity—and this as a fundamental task for the emerging human sciences. What we have, then, is a developing interest in the idea that there might be, quite apart from dogma and social custom, a felt experiential core to religion. This would be a cross-cultural universal of humanity, reappearing in every society and every era as the direct sense of something sacred or holy. Dogma would come in later, draped over this potentially renewable experiential core and sometimes almost erasing it.

A key to these approaches is that this experiential core, whatever else it may involve, is a thoroughly human phenomenon and open to investigation as such. After all, this was the opening era of the new human sciences and the naturalistic phenomenology that was their accompaniment, and pursued by psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists, not theologians. If there is an experiential core to religious experience as a human phenomenon, this allows putting to one side, or “bracketing,” the more traditional metaphysical questions of truth or falsity, as well as all those debates of science *versus* religion.

Alternatively, these questions can be asked over again in a radically new, pragmatic spirit. We can then ask of this human phenomenon, what is the function of religious or mystical experience? What is it like? What does it do? These questions became especially significant if, with William James, Carl Jung, or Max Weber, we also see that this experiential core is fundamental to any sense of overall significance or purpose in human life. So what we are studying here is the ground of a potentially fragile sense that our lives have an overall meaning.

The continuing relevance of this issue comes not only from the periodic resurgences of evangelical and “new age” spirituality, but also from various questionnaires showing that between 30 and 50 percent of adults in North American society claim to have had a classical mystical-like experience (Spilka et al. 1985)—with rates almost as high for related phenomena like out-of-body experience, near-death experience, lucid dreams, and other “altered states of consciousness.” While all these states show minor cross-cultural differences, there is a still more striking overlap, and they can be experienced entirely independent of prior knowledge or suggestion (Hunt 2000). So we are dealing with something that potentially one out of two people eventually undergoes and comes to regard as among their more personally significant life experiences.

Of course, it is also true that the human science of an experiential core of spirituality can approach that core either reductionistically or from a more holistic point of view. Sigmund Freud, and the sociologist Emile Durkheim, took the more reductionistic approach. For them, an experiential core, while admittedly a powerful force in human life, is a kind of illusion, and derives from something more fundamental. Freud, in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), sees mystical experience as a regression to the state of mind of the newborn infant, to what he regarded as the “oceanic feeling” of a primary undifferentiated narcissism. This leaves a God image as the projection of an early all-powerful parent relation. For Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), such primordial feelings are the unwitting projection of the actual energy of the social group itself, the directly sensed basis of its cohesion, projected onto an all encompassing supernatural realm. Meanwhile, neuro-cognitivists from Hebb (1980) to Persinger (1987) have posited epileptoid physiological discharge as the ultimate explanation.

On the other hand, there are the figures to be considered below in more detail, including William James, Jung, Weber and Troeltsch, Rudolf Otto, and Martin Heidegger, who saw in this experiential core a higher cognitive and feeling capacity. James termed it

“noetic”—a potential development open to adulthood and the very opposite of something regressive or primitive. That debate runs all through the history of the human sciences of mystical experience, and I have addressed it at much length elsewhere (Hunt 1984, 1985, 1995a, 2000). So it is to these more positive understandings of an experiential source of spirituality, and its relevance to a series of this-worldly or naturalistic mysticisms appearing and disappearing over the past 150 years, that we now turn.

Descriptive Phenomenologies

The foundation of a phenomenology or radical naturalistic description of spiritual experience begins, at least in its more personal and deeply felt forms, with Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche, in his major writings of the 1880s, beginning with *The Joyful Wisdom* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, provides the first sustained argument for a radically relativistic, even nihilistic, understanding of human knowledge: “God is dead”; there are no conceptual absolutes; no ground under humanity, no fixed conceptual reality. Nietzsche’s proposed solution is the overman, the creative person of the future. This new form of creativity, which Nietzsche partly imagines and partly tries to attain in his own life, will have the strength and capacity to say yes to life and yes to the universe—in the very face of its ostensible meaninglessness.

At times in his writings, as in *Zarathustra* and *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche envisions this yea-saying as possible because his creative person of the future will be in a new kind of direct contact with the same capacity for ecstasy and rapture that had been the traditional core of religious experience and personal sainthood. But the creative person of the future, and Nietzsche is obviously in part envisioning this past century, will understand this ecstatic experiential core as a human phenomenon. It is the human intensification of the life force within us, and not something supernatural to be projected onto a metaphysical or political absolute. In the notes collected posthumously as *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche actually calls for the development of a natural physiology of ecstasy, again as something human and biological. Presumably he would have found the experimental mysticism of psychedelic drug research of the 1960s especially interesting.

A question, however, and one Nietzsche may not be alone in foundering over, is whether, given the phenomenology of these

experiences as coming from a place that *feels* utterly objective and all encompassing, it is finally possible to experience them as somehow also “ourselves”—at least without a dangerous and destabilizing grandiosity. If, as we will see later, the fully felt impact of these states automatically and inherently points to some sensed “wholly other,” then it may not even be possible to make full contact with this experiential core and still understand it as an expression of our own human mind and being. Quite apart from the question as to whether any such naturalistic understanding, however emergently and holistically stated, may itself be subtly reductionistic, is it even possible for the person or group actually undergoing these states? Indeed, the phenomenology of these experiences is always beyond language, beyond ordinary conceptualization, as Nietzsche also saw.

Nietzsche has had a tremendous and often tacit influence on twentieth-century approaches to this issue—one that will reappear in the personal crises of Heidegger, Jung, Maslow, Crowley, and Gurdjieff. From Nietzsche we can trace two major lines of descent, one specifically phenomenological and the other more within psychology. The phenomenological side needs consideration first because it provides the vocabulary to describe these experiences empirically, while rigorously setting aside all questions of metaphysical truth or illusion.

A major development of Nietzsche’s questioning on the human capacity for a sense of transcendence appears with Martin Heidegger, beginning with his lectures in the 1920s (Van Buren 1994) and culminating in his final more mystical writings after World War II (*The Question of Being, Time and Being*). Heidegger began as a student of Edmund Husserl, and Husserl, as the originator of philosophical phenomenology, was calling for a new qualitative science of consciousness. Consciousness was the necessary medium and context for all human inquiry, and phenomenology would be based on its direct description—bracketing or putting aside all assumptions of a theoretical or commonsense sort, and describing the resulting structure of experience as it is immediately given. One of the projects that comes out of Husserlian phenomenology was the attempt at a phenomenology of the felt core of the religious. Both Heidegger and Rudolph Otto, who is considered below, were encouraged by Husserl in this attempt at a radical description of the felt sense of the sacred and its foundation in human life.

For Heidegger, very much like William James, the core of mystical experience is cognitive or noetic. It is not merely an emotional or affective discharge, but always and of necessity *about* some-

thing, and what it is about, although ineffable, is something ultimately abstract—the felt meaning of existence or Being itself. In his master work *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger sees the source of the human possibility for a sense of felt transcendence, that is, to sense a “something” that encompasses and grounds us, in our unique capacity to be aware of the openness of time—the temporality of human existence. Human beings have an open sense of a future ahead as inherently unknown and unknowable, except that it ends in the non being we term “death.” Yet, if we are really strict about it, we do not know death at all in any first person sense. At most we have *near* death experiences. For Heidegger then, it is this openness or unknownness of the future ahead, felt initially within the existential anxiety it can evoke, that is the immediate source of what he calls the sense of being or presence. This sense of sheer “isness” is akin to what James (1912) termed the “thatness” of “pure experience.” It is the basis of direct mystical or religious experience, and the source of its inner possibility.

It would be the underlying felt sense of Being that the various traditional religions represent, and as inevitably obscure, with doctrines of God, Void, Brahman, or Tao, as well as the abstract categories of Western metaphysics. Within all of these concepts and dogmas, if appropriately deconstructed or “liquified,” Heidegger locates this potential for attunement to the sheer immediacy and nowness of Being. The felt core of all spiritual experience, then, is in our human capacity for awe and wonder at the sheer facticity of things—an awe and wonder that anything is at all, however occasionally we may come to experience this without the cultural support of spiritual traditions. Again, Being as presencing is not a concept but a potential felt sense or “primordial experience.” For Heidegger, we in the modern West have lost our access to this immediate sense of isness through the secularization and decline of both traditional Christianity and classical metaphysics—a view also variously reflected in Nietzsche, Weber, Jung, and Otto. Heidegger’s own enterprise was to be the recovery of this experience of beingness, directly within nature and art and more indirectly through the re-opening of its underlying felt sense within the frozen concepts of speculative metaphysics and theology.

Heidegger’s highly abstract phenomenology of the primordial experience of Being offers a broader context for the more specific experiential dimensions located by Rudolf Otto in his 1917 book translated into English as *The Idea of the Holy*. Otto coins a special term for this felt sense of the sacred, which he calls the *numinous*. This

special usage is intended to separate a central felt core from religious conceptualization or dogma, which he refers to as the “schematization” of the numinous. Cognitive schematization of this felt sense allows us the representation of something both ineffable and all encompassing, but at the price of freezing its openness and immediate impact. Otto’s description of the more specific dimensions of the numinous, below, is derived predominantly from Judeo-Christian religious writings and mysticism, but he also includes the Indian Vedic tradition, which he developed further in an influential work comparing Meister Eckhart and the Indian mystic Sankara (Otto 1932). Otto’s terminology was later used by the American psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) to represent the more overtly uncanny and negative experiences of psychotic onset, by Jung in his phenomenology of positive spiritual development and its potential vicissitudes, and it indirectly informed some of Heidegger’s own later analyses (*Basic Questions of Philosophy*).

Otto’s first dimension or aspect of the numinous he calls “creature feeling.” This is the felt sense of total dependency or helplessness in the face of an experience that feels potentially so powerful and outside everyday life that it is more like “it has you” rather than “you have it”—an aspect first described by Schleiermacher (1821). Often in the writings of the mystics, especially in the first dawning of their experiences, and as well in modern secular people who may not even see their experiences as specifically religious, we find descriptions of a deeply felt humility, sense of finiteness, radical incompleteness, or personal unworthiness—a hollowness of one’s life or one’s sense of self. This sense of creature feeling becomes schematized in theology by concepts like sin, fate, karma, all of which from Otto’s point of view are historical and cultural attempts to capture and express this more spontaneous and primary felt aspect. We will see below how this creature feeling is reflected in the still more specific phenomenologies of Laski (1961) and Almaas (1988) as feelings of inherent existential inadequacy, felt deficits, or “holes” in one’s personal being.

Otto then divides his account between two further aspects, each with still more specific subdivisions. The first aspect he calls the sense of the *tremendum*, again using the Latin to distance his phenomenology from our more usual conceptual associations. *Tremendum* describes the felt power or energy aspect of the numinous, and it has three subdivisions. First, there is the emotion of awe—an overwhelming sense of amazement, strangeness, or uncanniness, which can range between bliss and horror. The numinous includes an aes-

thetics of the demonic as well as the angelic. When this dimension is schematized in various religious traditions, we find ideas of the incomprehensibility and mystery of God, which is also central to the attitude of “not knowing” in many mystical traditions.

Second within the *tremendum*, there is a sense of being in contact with something overpowering, massive, and august. When this becomes schematized, it tends to appear as ideas of the omnipotence of God. Here, Almaas will speak of an essential spiritual will and strength. Finally within this division, there is the sense of urgency and excitement. This becomes schematized in notions of an absolute force and energy. Already we can see that some mystical experiences may involve more creature feeling, while others will be primarily centered on awe, or force and energy, etc. This potential for differential unfolding will become important for understanding one-sided and partial developments of the numinous in contemporary spirituality.

The third major aspect of the numinous Otto terms the sense of *mysterium*. This is the more cognitive, or what James (1902) called noetic, sense of an Absolute—whether as God, Void, Brahman, Tao, or in Heidegger’s sense, Being itself. It is first subdivided into a sense of fascination and wonder, usually entailed by the sense of inherent goodness and perfection, or occasionally total evil, felt in these states. In its positive side it is associated with feelings of love and compassion, which again may be dominant in some spiritual experiences and not others. Otto describes the second dimension of *mysterium* as the sense of something “wholly other.” This is the experience of the object of mystical experience as ineffable and utterly outside language and conceptualization. It is this sense that has pushed mystics, East and West, to a language of paradox and in the extreme towards a view of the Absolute as a pure nothingness or emptiness, since anything more definite must falsify to some degree. Meister Eckhart came to experience “the godhead” as a nothingness and shining emptiness, and so was regarded as a heretic by the medieval Church. The Buddhist void, as the paradoxically full emptiness that is simultaneously the sense of everything, is perhaps the fullest schematization of this dimension. For Almaas, following Plotinus, the predominance of this sense marks the more “formless” dimensions of spiritual realization, also central to the later Heidegger.

Not only can some of these dimensions be felt and developed without the others, but some of the resulting experiences, while clearly part of Otto’s phenomenology of a numinous core of human spirituality, may fall well outside our modern, already secularized and narrowed sense of what is “religious.” The numinous is not only

the primary but the broader category, including a range of experience that more traditional cultures have often seen as involving the sacred, such as creative ecstasy, intense sexuality, and ritualized physical pain and torture. Today a sensed numinosity also appears in the response of some scientists to the universe itself, as well as in peak experiences in athletics, drugs, and thrill seeking. If the numinous is at the center of a sense of overall purpose and meaning in human life, reconnecting to that core in our “new age” may also entail varying degrees of potential imbalance and even danger.

A still further level of specification of Otto’s numinous is found in a remarkable book by Marghanita Laski entitled *Ecstasy* (1961). She offers probably the most complete phenomenology of these experiences prior to Almaas (chapter 2), culling through accounts of ecstasy and aesthetic states from average people and from classical mystical experience to locate common dimensions. Reminiscent of Otto on creature feeling, she describes an initial dimension of loss—the sense of a falling away of the ordinary sense of time, desires and values, and sense of self or individuality. When these senses of felt limitation are experienced with intensity, Laski speaks of “desolation experiences.” These include strong feelings of loneliness and abandonment, loss of felt meaning or significance in everyday reality, and a sense of personal futility, deficiency, inadequacy, or sin. Heidegger described this dimension of loss in terms of the inherent or existential limitations in human life that we ordinarily avoid but occasionally must face. Laski’s second dimension, the more positive side of these experiences, involves that sense of deficiency or loss now replaced or “filled” with ecstatic feelings of gain, as the specific sense of answer and resolution to such existential dilemmas. These “gains” refer to the classic claims about mystical experience, with its felt sense of unity or oneness in all things, eternity, freedom and release, certain knowledge, love, and a sense of new life and/or of a new or reborn self.

Finally, and most originally, she adds a dimension describing the cognitive forms taken by these feelings of gain in terms of the “quasi physical sensations” of ecstatic experience. Quasi physical sensations range from a clearly metaphorical usage, as in someone saying they felt an “upsurge of faith,” to something more directly imagistic and even hallucinatory, as in someone describing a literal sense of floating or levitation—with a midrange of something more ephemeral and subtle. Laski distinguishes a number of such quasi sensory words or phrases that are used to describe what seem to be the metaphoric bases of ecstatic states—the imagistic roots of the

cognitive or noetic component of mystical experience. Specifically, Laski locates six dimensions of primary metaphor or physiognomy: 1) “up” words, describing floating sensations, buoyancy, lightness, and levitation, 2) “inside” words or phrases, as in “an enormous bubble swelling inside one’s chest,” 3) “luminosity,” fire, and heat words, as in flashing, brilliant lights or “burning with love,” 4) “darkness” words, as in “a shining velvety darkness” or accounts of an infinite black emptiness into which the person might dissolve, 5) “enlargement” words, as in a sense of expanding, or even bursting, and finally, 6) the use of what she calls “liquidity” or “flow” words, as in bubbling, melting, dissolving, and flowing.

There are many examples of the ways that these quasi physical dimensions are not only used to represent the nonverbal realizations of numinous experience but seem to be directly embodied as part of the felt meanings of the state itself. This first account is from Richard Bucke’s early collection in *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901). He was a close friend to Walt Whitman, and this is his own experience, described in the third person:

He found himself wrapped around as it were by a flame-colored cloud. For an instant he thought of fire, . . . the next he knew that the light was within himself. Directly afterwards came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness, accompanied immediately by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. He saw and knew the foundation principle of the world as what we call love and that the happiness of everyone is in the long run absolutely certain. (Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 8)

The second example is from one of my own subjects, a young woman describing a meditation session in an experimental study:

I was unaware of which parts of my body were where. It was as if it was all mixed up. It was as if it didn’t matter which part was where, as if I was floating. It felt extremely good, floating and moving very calmly, nothing mattered at all. Physiologically I felt a tingling all over. I stopped thinking and started floating. That is, I did feel the pressure of the chair—it was an “inner” floating, like I was a shell with all these things floating around inside. It felt good. There was a feeling of a rolling—not me, but in my body, a feeling of not knowing where my body ended and began, a rolling feeling. I

can't get hold of it. I don't know the words. It was just a sense of being a blob, rather than having legs or arms. It seemed to last a long time. At the end I was floating and then I had an intense feeling of exploding. It was an extremely strong feeling, as though I let go and exploded. Then I floated a bit more and 'came down.' It was a climactic point, like a nonlocalized orgasm . . . but there was a more detached feeling than in sex. There was just awe.

The prominence of quasi-physical metaphors and physiognomies in such accounts is consistent with the view that these states are in part based on the felt embodiment of abstract images of light, color, force, expansion, and spaciousness, in contrast to the more concrete metaphors, for instance, of ordinary dream content. The cognitive psychologists Lakoff and Johnson (1999) and Arnheim (1969) have attempted to show that abstract thought, verbal and nonverbal, is impossible without the use of such abstract "image schemas." I have argued at length elsewhere (Hunt 1995a) that these states of consciousness can be regarded as forms of heightened self-awareness based not on the applied symbolic operations of everyday consciousness but on the forms of consciousness itself. These became visible via an embodying of synesthetic metaphors derived from the more abstract properties of nature, which are more suitable to represent the basic features of our experience than is ordinary pragmatic language.

We could say that this is why there can be such a thing as "nature mysticism," with the contemplation of light, wind, fire, and flowing water, the heights and depths of ravines and mountains, etc., inducing ecstatic states in those suitably open to their kinesthetic embodiment and resonance. Emerson, Thoreau, Jung, and Heidegger all precede the above cognitivists in the view that our capacity for deeper self-awareness rests on our ability to sense our consciousness as a "stream" and our passions as "fiery," or Being itself as the shining forth of "light." Accordingly, all mysticism is ultimately rooted in a kind of nature mysticism—whether its luminous, expansive spaces, infinite energies, and dissolving blacknesses are "triggered" by perceptions from "without," as Otto and Laski both describe, or emerge spontaneously from abstract imagery "within."

The two preceding accounts illustrate what Laski calls "intensity ecstasy," its most prototypical and common form. With more development, intensity ecstasy will tend to separate more into the three forms of classical mysticism: knowledge, love and compassion, or strength, will, and power. Intensity ecstasies also fall between two

contrasting poles of numinous experience. The first pole involves realizations of felt presence that seem more personal, and related to what Maslow (1962) saw as the “I am” experience at the core of his accounts of peak experience. Rather than losing oneself in a sense of something vast and encompassing, there is instead a felt enhancement of individuality, and sometimes of personalness, but purified and renewed, with deep feelings of joy and self-acceptance. Sometimes people will describe this as a sense of “becoming who one really is,” as the realization of an inner, true self.

Laski’s term here is “Adamic ecstasy,” since the more orthodoxly religious will often state that they feel as though they are in the condition of Adam and Eve before the fall—with a kind of innocence, purity, and newness in their feeling of themselves as persons. Others may use words like noble savage or innocent child, primal man or primal woman, or, most commonly, true self. Almaas in this context speaks of a realization of “essential self,” and of “personal essence” for its more personally contactful aspect. There is the sense that the ego has been re-formed and purified, that one is personally redeemed in some fundamental way. Here again is an example from Bucke:

I went out in a happy tranquil mood to look at the flowers. . . . The pleasure I felt deepened into rapture. . . . There was and is still a very decided and peculiar feeling across the brow above the eyes, as of a tension gone, a feeling of more room. . . . Another effect is that of being *centered* or of being *a center*. . . . The consciousness of completeness and permanence in myself is one with the completeness and permanence of nature. . . . I often ponder on it and wonder what has happened—what change can have taken place to so poise and individualize me. (Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, 272)

At the other pole, again with intensity ecstasies in the middle, there are the more impersonal and classical mystical experiences of a dissolving or disappearing of the sense of self into a felt oneness or totality, whether that is termed God, void, or the infinite. For Laski this is “withdrawal ecstasy,” for Almaas the “boundless dimensions.” In its transcendence of individuality and dissolution of self, it is almost the very opposite of the experience of “personal essence,” and is, of course, the special preoccupation of the Buddhist, Yogic, and Vedic meditational paths. Here is a compendium description from several different Western subjects engaged in such deep meditational practices:

These subjects describe a sense of transcendence beyond the normal boundaries of self in terms such as “the duality between subject and object was overcome,” “forgetting about my individuality . . . forgetting who I was,” and “I didn’t even know that I was a human being . . . there was complete merging where one loses body consciousness . . . there was no personality left.” A different sense of reality, involving an expansion in the sense of space and/or time is combined with a sense of calm, serenity, and stillness: “A field of awareness that is cosmic . . . there was no sense of limitation, there was awareness, endless, boundless, oceanic.” “Although there is nothing, now I am experiencing that nothing as enormous . . . like out of all space . . . the longer I can stay in it . . . the more I see how *vast* it is . . . There’s no form, it’s blackness, and what I find is that it’s getting bigger.” (Gifford-May and Thompson, “*Deep states*” of meditation, 124–27)

We will see below how for Almaas these experiences of formlessness, while the ultimate goal of mystical and meditational movements, may not initially be fully safe for contemporary Western seekers, given our uncertain issues around self-esteem, unless one has first experienced a more personal kind of presence. The formless dimensions may be too dislocating without the strengthening and renewal of a basic sense of self that is at the core of peak experience and Adamic ecstasy.

Personal Development, Psychodynamics, and Metapathology

The main contribution on the psychology side of the post-Nietzschian interest in numinous experience, now formalized within contemporary transpersonal psychology, has been to the relation of these experiences to personality and character. Although William James, in his seminal *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), was not directly influenced by Nietzsche, both Jung and Maslow understood what they were doing as very much within a Nietzschean heritage. In the *Varieties*, James presents his own phenomenology of mystical experience as an abstract felt meaning, with features of ineffability, noetic character, and felt unity, but he concentrates on its potentially positive effects on character. While James concedes the thin line between some religious experiences and psychosis, he demonstrates how the potentially positive effects of mystical states can

include an enhancement of compassion and personal autonomy, which he terms “strength of soul.” He also describes feelings of personal freedom and spontaneity, and an increased capacity for empathy.

William James had a direct influence on Carl Jung (Shamdasani 1995), who in his early *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* was developing his own psychology of what he called the individuation of Self, involving progressive numinous or “archetypal” experiences considered as a natural process of personal growth. Jungian individuation tended to begin in midlife and beyond, but it could also start earlier in adolescence in spiritual virtuosos. It begins as the person comes more and more to contemplate the inevitability of their own death—as also with Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Jung believed he was observing in his clients a spontaneous version of what the great mystics have described, which he sought to guide and balance by techniques of “active imagination” that encourage a dialogue between the ordinary ego and the imageries thereby unleashed. If archetypal experiences do not overwhelm or overly inflate the person, which Jung saw as an invariable risk given their potential intensity, then they gradually move toward a greater integration and balance of personality—of the inner identities of male and female, the “shadow” side of evil, the high and the low.

Beginning in the 1950s, Abraham Maslow covered a very similar ground, which he saw as the potential for a midlife “self actualization,” a spontaneous unfolding similar to the classical mysticisms, and guided by “peak experiences,” which Maslow described in ways similar to Laski’s Adamic ecstasy. Maslow’s work initiated what is now called transpersonal psychology, of which Ken Wilber (1995) is the best known contemporary representative. For Maslow self-actualization is a selective potentiality related to creativity. It can also be understood in terms of more recent research in the basic personality trait of imaginative absorption or openness to experience (Hunt 2000). Self actualization involves a shift away from what Maslow somewhat pejoratively calls the “deficit motivations” of basic self-esteem, family involvements, interpersonal needs, and worldly success, toward “being values.” These being values of the second half of life are indeed very similar to Erik Erikson’s view of the developmental task of old age as seeking the maximum wisdom and integrity possible in the face of potential despair (Erikson et al. 1986). For both Erikson and Maslow this development is marked by an increased acceptance and detachment, orientation to the here and now, nurturance and compassion, and an increased openness and spontaneity. Self-actualization for Maslow is a natural or inherent growth potential that is most directly

cultivated in the mystical religions, but can appear in all societies in the second half of life.

My own contribution to the cognitive-developmental side of such a “spiritual intelligence,” as the higher unfolding of what Howard Gardner (1983) identifies as the intra-personal frame of symbolic intelligence, has been to suggest that self-actualization involves a shift toward what Piaget termed the “formal operations” of thought—specifically in the sphere of feeling and the “affective schemata” (Hunt 1995a, 1995b, 2000). Piaget (1962) had concluded that formal operations could not be attained in affect or in the images of feeling, because, unlike the stability offered by the external world for the intellectual or logical schemata, there was no point of fixed and necessary accommodation to push the development of emotional intelligence. Piaget missed, however, the analogous role of concentrative meditation, the proximity of death, and/or the passionate concern for a sense of meaning and purpose in life, in providing just such a fixed point for the abstract development of affect, however difficult and selective that may be. Spontaneous imagistic metaphors of light, flow, expansion, and spaciousness that are themselves abstract and mediate ecstatic states attest to this further development of our self-reflective capacity, corresponding to the more existential and encompassing concerns of later adulthood.

Erikson (1962) had suggested that those who become religious-mystical virtuosos earlier in adulthood have precociously engaged the more inherently spiritual issues of the integrity-despair crisis of older age. For Erikson such earlier spirituality casts forward developmentally toward a view of the totality, value, and meaning of a person’s life. Adolescent issues of personal identity are thereby transformed into a general existential or human identity, and residues of the trust-mistrust issues of early childhood into a more abstract dimension of faith. Edwin Starbuck (1899), influenced by James, had earlier concluded that the adolescent conversion experiences he collected constitute an accelerated maturation, or process of “unselfing,” not normally completed until at least midlife. Such experiences lead to the foundation of a “new center” of the self, overcoming ordinary egocentricism and oriented to issues of “universal being and . . . oneness with the larger life outside” (1899:147).

Certainly for Maslow self-actualization is a higher cognitive and emotional stage, only appearing after the earlier deficit conflicts of such importance to classical psychoanalysis have been resolved. In his view, psychoanalysis, and he only knew the Freudian form as it had developed up to the 1950s, was perfectly suited to dealing with

such lower “oedipal” childhood conflicts. Whereas self-actualization described a positive mental health largely opposed to the concerns of psychoanalysis. Of course, it is true that Freud saw mystical experience as a primitive regressive state, a return to early infancy. This Maslow rejects, and rightly so, given the indicators of abstract metaphoric cognition in the very fabric of ecstatic states.

Yet for Maslow, and for much of what is now called transpersonal psychology, this opposition to psychoanalysis as something “lower” has also tended to de-emphasize the inherent role of suffering in spiritual development, which had been so clear to James and Jung. Indeed, the phenomenologies of Otto and Laski, as also the classical descriptions of Christian mysticism by Underhill (1955), are full of descriptions of deep, even overwhelming conflict and emotional pain in these states, both in their early and later more subtle stages. Yet Maslow, and more recently Wilber, tend to view the presence of intense suffering and dynamic conflict in accounts of spiritual development as showing unresolved holdovers from earlier stages of childhood that have not been fully assimilated—for Wilber (1984) necessitating a cessation of meditative and spiritual practice until these issues can be addressed by more traditional psychotherapy.

Anticipating the currently emerging sense that transpersonal psychology needs to include psychodynamic conflict as inherent to any higher self-actualization, Maslow himself, near the end of his life, in his *Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1971), identified what he called spiritual illnesses or “metapathologies” (James had earlier termed them “theopathies”) that emerge in the lives of people going through this self-actualization process and which can distort or derail it. He finally conceded, as perhaps also more consistent with what we will see of his own life (chapter 6), that the unfolding of Being-values was not a conflict-free transcendence.

Manifestations of metapathology during spiritual development include feelings and attitudes of narcissistic grandiosity, since the power and beauty of such states can easily lead to a falsely inflated sense of identity. Or, the detachment from everyday reality inherent to these experiences can turn into a more destructive social withdrawal, loss of feeling, and apathy. Finally, there can be intense states of despair, deficiency, and emptiness, often referred to in classical mysticism as a “dark night of the soul” and seen as a vulnerability within the more “formless” phases of spiritual development. As we will see in the life histories to follow, the dark night can also come in many shades of grey as well, all painful in their felt loss of meaning, purpose, and direction. Wilber (1984) later developed a specific

classification of subtle pathologies associated with the formless levels of mystical experience, but he also kept them completely separate from “lower” psychodynamic conflicts.

Maslow himself had stopped reading psychoanalysis fairly early in his career, so his understanding was largely based on Freud’s almost exclusive preoccupation with the middle, “oedipal” years of childhood. During the very years Maslow was developing his psychology of self-actualization and Being values, psychoanalysis itself was undergoing its major creative expansion. In particular, in the 1950s and 60s the British object-relations theorists D.W. Winnicott, W.R. D. Fairbairn, and W. R. Bion, all strongly influenced by Melanie Klein, and in the 1970s Heinz Kohut’s self-psychology, all expanded classical psychoanalysis to deal with the character problems related to narcissism, schizoid personality, and borderline personality. These were increasingly the problems presented by psychotherapeutic clients and are widely regarded as endemic in our postmodern culture of alienation and valuative crisis. Presenting issues include grandiosity, withdrawal, feelings of deep deficiency in sense of self, and/or feelings of futility and meaninglessness in life—which for these psychoanalysts were to be conceptualized in terms of the pre-oedipal patterns of relationship with the mothering one in the first two or three years of life.

It is especially interesting that the broadly narcissistic and schizoid dilemmas of contemporary clients in psychotherapy are so reminiscent of Maslow’s descriptions of metapathologies: false grandiosity, isolation, despair over felt deficiency and low self-esteem, and feelings of futility and emptiness. Clearly the clients of the object-relations analysts were often paralyzed in terms of capacities for work and relationship. They are very different people than Maslow’s self-actualizers, who are often older and have been largely successful in these more specific developmental concerns. But the emotions and inner themes are very similar.

Meanwhile, for Winnicott (1963a) and his follower Masud R. Khan (1974, 1979), there is already an existential and spiritual dimension in many narcissistic character difficulties, so that feelings of unreality and futility, defensive grandiosity, isolation and detachment, and a tendency to split experience between idealization and paranoid suspiciousness are linked to a longing for a kind of oblivion and nothingness—and for a total dependency that no ordinary human person or therapist could meet. As Jung had earlier said, only a god could satisfy such passion. Khan described a search for special “happenings” in such clients that are felt to be poten-

tially healing and redeeming, and can involve destructive sexual perversions and encounters, overuse of drugs or alcohol, and dangerous thrill seeking—all in the hope that something transformative will happen and give the sense of meaning so lacking in their lives. Indeed, this almost sounds like a lower or inferior mysticism, which had been earlier suggested by James in regard to alcoholism. These clients are looking for a radical renewal of some kind, with the sense that this would rest on some all-powerful, transformative experience or state. Again, these clients are not the people Maslow was studying, but the themes and vulnerabilities overlap.

Maslow and Wilber appear to have been over-optimistic in their separation of the transpersonal and psychodynamic, and that is also the conclusion of a growing number of contemporary transpersonal psychologists, who acknowledge an overlap between the pursuit of a spiritual path and the psychodynamic conflicts that will, at various points, be specifically stirred up by that very quest (Rothberg 1996; Feuerstein 1990). In particular, Jack Engler (1984) has described how many Western meditation practitioners often seem to mistake their own self-pathology and narcissistic difficulties for the higher states of consciousness being sought in the Eastern traditions. Since from the perspective of object-relations psychoanalysis, there are very few people in contemporary Western culture with a stable and healthy sense of self-esteem, most of us being pretty insecure, then a person deeply committed to a yoga practice might easily mistake their own rather ordinary defensive grandiosity for the higher Self or *purusha* being sought—whereas they are actually blocked from inner realization by such a false sense of themselves. Or, a very withdrawn, private person, with strong feelings of deficiency and inadequacy, may encounter Buddhist practices based on the notion that the self is an empty voidness, with no reality or core, and so confuse Buddhist emptiness, with its paradoxical fullness, spontaneity, and humility, with their own sense of deficient emptiness.

Along these lines, psychoanalyst and meditator Mark Epstein (1998) has pointed out that any search for states that are intuitively sensed as “higher” and “perfect” must stir up feelings of one’s own inadequacy and falseness by sheer contrast alone. These painful feelings, akin to Maslow’s metapathologies, will be especially exacerbated where earlier development has left a more extreme vulnerability in regard to basic self-esteem and sense of identity. Epstein concludes that for many advanced meditators, and those undergoing spontaneous processes of self-actualization, the only path to fuller realization may require accepting the feelings of deficient emptiness and futility that

also underlie the more extreme narcissistic disorders. We will see below how Almaas makes such links between psychodynamics and the transpersonal into a systematic principle of spiritual practice.

It is this ordinary sense of self and self-esteem that traditional societies seem to have been able to instill in their children far better than the modern west, with our specific valuation of independence and autonomy that many parents begin to impose on even very young toddlers and infants in ways, curiously enough, that they would immediately understand as traumatizing and distorting if applied to puppies or kittens. So we arrive at the view, happily less prevalent today, that spending the night alone in the dark in one's very own room as soon as possible after birth, however obviously distressing, will somehow build character. "Crying it out" will help babies attain the later independence they are supposed to have, and the stupors that supervene periodically (Ribble 1943) will be needed rest for all. It is of interest that most traditional peoples, who are never separate from a mothering presence until three or four, have looked with horror on western childbearing practices with the very young. Perhaps it is not accidental that it is our culture that invented psychotherapy, whose theories of psychodynamics have come increasingly to concentrate on the first three or four years of life and its role in establishing a basic sense of self. Whatever else, chronic vulnerabilities in self-esteem, with an increasingly rampant compensatory narcissism, will surely exacerbate the thematically related metapathologies of spiritual development.

A caveat, before proceeding further with these contemporary psychoanalytic theories of the narcissistic and schizoid dilemmas of modern living and their relation to spirituality: it is important to stress that we do not have to follow object-relations and self-psychology in their focus on the first years of life as by themselves "causing" later adult personality difficulties. Not only have such hypotheses been difficult to test, but themes of exaggerated autonomy, isolation, and mistrust can be reinforced throughout later childhood and through the culture itself. Instead, these theories might better be taken as descriptive Platonic psychologies of the basic forms of human relationship, whose inner dynamics may simply be most easily understood in terms of their first manifestations in development. From this perspective, psychoanalysis is our most developed applied phenomenology of the inner life, couched in terms of deep patterns that are in themselves more important and useful for understanding than the often distracting debates about early childhood "causation."

Despite the best corrective efforts to develop independent dynamic psychologies of adulthood by Jung, Erikson, and existential psychiatry, the influence of Freud has meant that our “topography” for emotional suffering has been cast into the pathologized language of clinical diagnostics and located in terms of potential childhood origins. Yet whatever else the relation between psychopathology and “normality,” the former does exaggerate the latter, and so reveals its less accessible and deeper structures. Suffering that once would have been “schematized” in terms of sin and redemption, is today understood psychologically in terms of its first manifestations in childhood. It is here, once we put aside debates about explanatory science in favor of structural description, that psychoanalysis excels—a point also made by Maslow (1966). Certainly the deepest emotional issues in our lives start somewhere, and the first manifestations of anything can cast an especially clarifying light on its most basic forms.

The use of these psychoanalytic psychologies of early development in all that follows can also be taken in the sense of the Jungian psychologist James Hillman in *The Soul's Code*, namely that patterns of experience in early childhood, including traumatic incidents, may show not so much the “causation” of later character, as the first manifestations or seeds of the individual's destiny and/or basic temperament. Long remembered early events stand out in part because they do highlight the basic patterns of someone's life, often so hard to detect amidst the differentiated complexity of adult experience. Going further, I would suggest that the first manifestation of any basic dimension of experience is “form near,” in contrast to its later, more differentiated expressions—much in the way that pathological exaggerations in adulthood similarly reveal basic forms less directly visible in more balanced living. Along these lines the more extreme early traumata and distortions of such interest to object-relations theory may actually fixate experience at these earlier “form-near” levels and so show them more clearly. Whatever early trauma does or doesn't “cause,” the way it is later recalled may help to reveal the basic patterning of a life.

For Winnicott (1971), Kohut (1977, 1984), and the more detailed developmental psychoanalysis of Margaret Mahler (Mahler et al. 1975), the narcissistic vulnerabilities in sense of self found in modern therapy clients, and we can add, in spiritual metapathologies, do have their first manifestations in deficiencies in the primary caretaking of the first years of life, also intersecting with innate differences in early-infant sensitivities. Winnicott and Kohut place the origin of a sense of self in the complexities and inevitable miscarriages of the “mirroring

relationship” between infant and primary parent. Their concept of “mirroring” is the generic principle behind the infant’s early fascination with having its facial expressions and gestures imitated, and imitating in turn. Very simple forms of mirroring, with opening the mouth and tongue protrusion, are present from birth. I have argued elsewhere (Hunt 1995a) that these constitute the first manifestations of a capacity for the cross-translation of the perceptual modalities that is basic to all human symbolism. The human mind itself first appears in the infant’s matching of its kinesthetic facial expression to the face seen gazing into its own.

For Winnicott (1971) the infant comes to learn who it is, and ultimately what it does and does not feel, through seeing this mirrored back by its primary caretakers. The gradual internalization of this developing relation forms the core of a self-awareness and sense of self, and so determines the degree to which the young child comes to feel fully embodied and in the world—with a sense of feeling real and alive. Winnicott (1964) even calls this the dimension of *being*, in contrast to the more extraverted *use* of a later sense of self. It was this use of self that was also Freud’s predominant concern in his conjoined psychology of middle childhood and the classical psychoneuroses.

Mahler’s concept of “symbiosis” is similar to Winnicott’s mirroring, but couched more in terms of the infant’s hypothetical inner feeling of fusion or oneness with the mother—reflected, when all goes well and no one is in too much of a hurry, in a primary attunement with the mother. For Kohut (1977) this also allows a developing containment or modulation of the extremes of the infant’s arousal and states of tension. Again, it would be the internalization of this symbiotic fusion relation that becomes the core of the sense of self in later childhood. All kinds of awful things may happen afterwards, but they will not shake that core of self-esteem, while without it there may be a vulnerability in sense of self that is potentially life long. We must again add, however, a point largely missed by these analysts, that our highly competitive society, with the most extreme valuation of individual autonomy and separateness of any culture in known human history, might well continue to test and push that inner sense of self in such a way that it could later be destabilized and/or rendered narcissistic whatever its initial foundations.

Winnicott provides this evocative picture of the first manifestations of what would be our life-long capacity for mirroring and “taking the role of the other”:

What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother’s face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is