

## **Editorial:**

### **Why Do We Need a Science of the Spiritual?**

The *Journal for Spirituality and Transcendental Psychology* is dedicated to the exploration of spirituality. What is meant by the study of spirituality and why do we need a scientific approach to such a personal topic? As anyone can observe in his or her environment, the interested members of the public of the contemporary population divide into religiously committed persons with or without a spiritual practice, in spiritual but anti-religious seekers, secondly, and staunch materialists as a third party. The communication difficulties between them reveal a great desideratum: Can we prove the existence and relevance of transcendence or not? For today, many people take - whether rightly or wrongly - the view that they can not believe anything that is incompatible with their reason. By this they mean first and foremost the traditional ideas of the Abrahamic religions, being assumed from a mythological age, but also all the assumptions of spirits or gods in other cultures. Depending on their personal point of view they derive the conclusion that something transcendent would either be impossible, and all such ideas were nonsense (decidedly materialism), or that they are indeed spiritual, because you can experience spirituality, but not religiously, because religion was just a political system of power and spirituality even opposed it. The third group tries, however - as I believe: in vain - to save their own religion from the attacks of spiritual and materialistic groups by a hard-line attitude without considering their arguments.

So if a person faces the question of the validity and existence of the transcendent (that is, if they ever confronted themselves to it, and did not repress and forgot this existential question of humanity), they have to face automatically and unconditionally the question of experiential reality of transcendence, because only this question provides a common basis of discussion for all three parties (the spiritual-seekers, the religious believers and the materialism-believers), leading to a dialogue and discussion as well as, ultimately, even to the demonstration of one of these positions' correctness. Only those who are approaching the spiritual experience with the methods of contemporary research in a convincing way, can convince the other party, if not their own position is in need of revision. Among the rules of fair scientific discourse, it should be clear that such an exploration of the transcendent on the ground of ideological neutrality means that the respective ideological axioms themselves must compete, but not the one (the materialism axiom: the assumption that only the material, sensual world exists) can declare the other (the transcendence axiom: the assumption of the existence and everyday relevance of

transcendence) to be illegitimate. And thus research under the transcendence axiom is just as necessary as research under the opposite, that is the materialism axiom. This research is the application of what is referred to here as transcendental psychology (cf. Harnack 2011).

It is of enormous relevance to the progress of humanity to deal scientifically with their most essential issues and not just metaphysical-speculatively: Does God exist? Is there a life after death? Is our destiny determined by a higher power? - questions that we already can answer in part by empirical research (see near death experiences), but we *could* answer the most part, if we would start to work with these questions, thus investing our effort and commitment to them rather than in the construction of new technical devices and the strengthening of our industrial production. But what about that spiritual people who already know that there is the transcendent, because they have experienced it, or the religious person who believes the same thing, because he trusts in her religion? Why do they need the setback in a science that many (such as the followers of the American thinker Ken Wilber) see as a step backwards to the level of intellectual, not the spiritual mind, as an inadequate, because spirituality impossible enterprise? Do they need a science of spirituality at all?

The answer is obvious if we consider the confusion that prevails everywhere on this term. Its empirical core, the direct spiritual experience, for many people today represents the only genuine spirituality. Because people appreciate their spiritual experience and stick to this evaluation, they often do not tolerate a rational reflection of their experience and ward off any such attempts. Theoretical models explaining and classifying such experiences, in their eyes, are irrelevant and useless. Because people, however, are build in a way that does not allow them to manage without any rational classification and evaluation (as long as they have not reached the highest attainable levels of the union with the divine), these people also must evaluate their own spiritual experiences and so, as a result, there is a mess of diverse individual consideration. Therefore there are people who think they have reached the highest enlightenment just because of a single moment of a feeling of universal unity, or who call themselves "enlightened" because they think they have seen the Divine itself in a very poignant vision. There are people who could intuitively read the minds of others for a couple of times, a phenomenon known as telepathy, which for long socks off no more tears of a parapsychologist. But because our society considers such phenomena as a taboo subject, those who experience them have just two modes of explanation - namely to be crazy or something very special -, and it is natural that they tend to prefer the one option to be something special. The result is what C. G. Jung has called an Ego-inflation, which can lead to excessive self-overestimation, and actually even to madness.

All those dangerous blind alleys of spiritual experience can be avoided if people had a traditional spiritual practice like the Christian, the Sufi, the yogic, Buddhist, Taoist, and shamanistic path. In such a practice, the valuations of such experiences will be provided on the basis of centuries old knowledge. In Zen, e.g., all spiritual experiences, apart from

those overcoming the dual consciousness, are regarded as preliminary, irrelevant, even obstructive, since the spirit of the practitioner should always be aligned with the experience of emptiness. In the Indian Yoga system experiences are classified differently according to their origin in order to develop out of them further steps of practice, but they will always be considered only as intermediate steps on the path of getting into *Nirvkalpa Samadhi*, the only by itself desirable spiritual experience of the indelible union with the Divine. In Christianity, all spiritual experiences are not really very important in comparison to the fact of love and the constant presence of God. In Sufism, spiritual experiences are sought to bring the love and constant presence of God in the heart of the practitioner. Although they are different in several ways: one can arrange all the experience of the individual into a unified theoretical explanatory model and practical training scheme, in respect to which one has to withdraw one's own evaluation.

But we are a society of narcissists (cf. Lasch 1979). We do not like it if we are to classify our beatific experiences in an unfamiliar system, giving us no chance to indulge ourselves and preserve our narcissistic grandeur. We want everyone to know, how unusual it is what we experience in our meditations. But this leads to the dangerous deteriorations of spirituality, of which we have been warned by the religious traditions for thousands of years. Since we do not want somebody else to direct us and want to bask in our grandiosity, we must devalue religion and claim to be wiser than the collective knowledge of many generations before us. The pseudo-esotericism with its light-versions of spiritual trainings meets the need for quick experiences without reflection, for happenings, events, sightseeing tours on the mental level and markets our narcissistic needs extremely profitable. Thus, this scene continues the materialistic paradigm, and does not overcome it. It promotes what is referred to by Chogyam Trungpa unsurpassable exactly as *spiritual materialism*. There always have been prophets, converting the old into the new, but many of today's prophets pervert the fundamental concept of spirituality itself, becoming truly the enemies of the spiritual, not their advocates, as they say they are.

The denial to recognize the knowledge accumulated within the ancient spiritual and religious traditions leads to dangerous confusions for the society as well as for the spiritually experienced individual about the significance and importance of spiritual experience, i.e. to incorrect valuation or overvaluation. Psychologies not relating to the spiritual traditions and believing they can offer new theories to explain spiritual experience independent of these, as does transpersonal psychology sometimes, are subject to the same problems as the pseudo-esotericism scene, without necessarily being pseudo-esoteric. A psychology of spiritual experience must be build on the knowledge of mankind, may not deny it and not (as in the sketches of Ken Wilber) contrive new systems beyond it, which not really contain an epistemic advance, but just construct new stereotypes for old knowledge which at the same time is not taken seriously and deformed.

In the jumble of different ancient traditions which have become accessible as a result of the cultural globalization of our time, and the mixture of these with trivialised humbug the individual is hardly able to see through. They need guidance which no church representative for "cults", no guru from the East or West, considering only his own yoga to be

the truth, no channeling medium that believes only in itself, can give them. Once they have reached the step to spiritual autonomy. Who or what shall give someone guidance today about the individually appropriate form of spiritual practice? Which of the various theoretical models on the market of spiritual theories make sense and which are non-sense? Which religious claims can be taken as spiritually serious and which must be rejected?

The Indian yogis have considered their practical knowledge of the spiritual as science, which like every science knows inductive hypothesis formation, theory, empirical support, practical application, and further correction through application. The Indian idea of regarding spirituality as an empirical science is unfamiliar to the West, because in the monotheistic religions God as the totally different being in comparison with the human can not merge completely in it. His/Her existence and reality, that is, His/Her effectiveness in human life, cannot be an object of empiricism. The relationship of Christianity (like of the other Abrahamic religions) with spiritual experience therefore is a fundamentally sceptical, or at least restrained one. Both cultures' approaches have their justification and it is pointless to play off one against the other. This also shows that we need a science of spirituality, and so far we cannot say whether the divine can be found only in either improvable faith, or in meditative and spiritual experience on the other hand, or whether the two perspectives are complementary. We need an investigation about these allegations, which examines with modern methods of social sciences the element of truth within spiritual systems by the only reference system that we possess as humans: by the totality of our experience. This includes everything we can call an "experience: the subjective of the inner-psychic world, the intersubjectively verified and even scientific, technical mediated knowledge - nothing should stand outside of a comprehensive image of God. But we need knowledge, not faith, to provide orientation and safety to the spiritual seeking and experiencing persons, and to debunk the flimsy arguments of materialism as ideological premises.

The second edition of the Journal of spirituality and transcendental psychology will be opened by *Bernhard Wegener's cursus* through the history of death rites in the western part of the globe, titled: *The Death of Death*. Death is a phenomenon we cannot get rid of, although we would like to. Whatever we conceive as cults and patterns of explanation, death just dresses in different clothes, but "are these not only tricks to escape from death, striving for the impossible, to extend this life into afterlife"? It remains at the reading of the text the feeling of mystery, with which death haunts us, no matter how one may regard its possible non-existence. In the second article, *Transcendental Semiotics I*, the editor continues his effort to provide a scientific foundation of transcendental psychology. In it, a spiritual semiotics is outlined, which could help to stimulate further research applied to spiritual experiences. The article on *schizotypy* demonstrates how a science based on a spiritual world view can be applied to a psychopathological subject. Schizotypy is considered as a possible result of anti-spiritual social conditions distinguished from less unfortunate developments out of the same initial personal state. In *Discovering*

*Your Own Holiness*, becoming a saint is presented as a human development goal in different spiritual traditions and in transcendental psychology. Unlike in a purely historical perspective, the author is convinced of the necessity of a psychology of everybody's holiness. Under the heading *Meditationes* the above discussed difficulty of talking about spiritual truths will be reconsidered by a meditation *About The Gurus, For Which Everything Is Simple* (unfortunately in German only). The article from the *Spirituality Check* series, this time is focussing on the important concept of *esotericism* and its complement, *pseudo-esotericism*. In the Category *The Reality Test* in this issue we deal with the Tibetan teacher of Bon, Tenzin Wangyal (in German only). The review of *Gerhard Wehr's* latest book, *"Nirgends, Geliebte, wird Welt sein als innen"*, (in German only) concludes this issue.

The editor is especially delighted to present, in this edition, the first members of the Scientific Advisory Board guaranteeing the integrity of the journal's thread:

**Prof. Dr. Jeffrey J. Kripal (Houston, USA)** holds the J. Newton Rayzor Chair in Philosophy and Religious Thought at Rice University, where he is also the Chair of the Department of Religious Studies. He is the co-editor of several books and author of well written monographs on extraordinary subjects like: *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (Chicago, 2011); *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago, 2010); *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago, 2007); *The Serpent's Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion* (Chicago, 2007); *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago, 2001); and *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago, 1995). His present areas of interest include the comparative erotics of mystical literature, American countercultural translations of Asian religious traditions, and the history of Western esotericism from ancient Gnosticism to the New Age.

**Prof. Dr. Sudhir Kakar (Goa, India)** is a highly creative and interdisciplinary thinking economist, cultural scientist and psychoanalyst. He has published 17 books worldwide, which have been translated into 20 languages (including: *The Inner World; Shamans, Mystics and Doctors; Tales of Love, Sex and Danger; Intimate Relations; The Analyst and the Mystic; The Colors of Violence; Culture and Psyche; The Indians: Portrait of a People; Mad and Divine: Spirit and Psyche in the Modern World;* and several works of fiction). The main focus of his research interest is religious and cultural psychology. He is / was, inter alia, Lecturer in General Education at Harvard University, Research Associate at Harvard Business School, Professor of Organizational Behaviour at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, Fellow at the Centre for the Study of World Religions at Harvard (2001-02) , Visiting professor at the University of Chicago (1989-93), McGill (1976-77), Melbourne (1981), Hawaii (1998) and Vienna (1974-75), Member of the Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton and Berlin, and Adjunct Professor of Leadership at INSEAD in Fontainebleau.

**Prof. Dr. Fraser Watts (Cambridge, United Kingdom)** combines religion and science in his own person as in his work: As a psychologist, he is Head of the Psychology and Religion Research Group at the University of Cambridge. He was Head of the Department of Clinical Psychology at King's College Hospital, London, before, and initially focused his research on cognitive psychological issues, then shifted to the psychology of religion. In 1990 he was ordained in the Church of England; from 1991-1992, he was president of the British Psychological Society; 1994 Starbridge Lecturer in the Faculty of Theology in Cambridge. One focus of his research interest lies in spiritual bridge-building and reconciliation between science and Christian faith, as can be seen from the titles of some of his works: *The Psychology of Religious Knowing* (1988), *Science Meets Faith* (1998), *Theology and Psychology* (2002), *Jesus and Psychology* (2007); *Creation: Law and Probability* (2008).

**Dr. Dr. Bernhard Wegener (Berlin, Germany)** holding degrees in history, Protestant theology, Catholic theology, and psychology, he is a border-crosser between several disciplines and loves to regard subjects under different perspectives - in real life like in science. He is the author of more than 120 scientific articles, co-editor of books and former co-editor of a journal; teaching activities in Germany and abroad, with long clinical experience as a psychologist, where he understood his profession also as a form of practical theology. Asked about a self-portrayal for this journal he declares hating self-portrayals and that he does not want to get into communication with interested persons about titles etc. but about contents of thoughts.

E. W. Harnack, Editor

**Literature:**

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Harnack, E. W. (2011): *Fundamentals of a transcendental psychology*. JSTP 1 (1), 64-78

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