

Editorial - Issue 3/2011

This third edition of the Journal of Spirituality and Transcendental Psychology can almost entirely be titled as: What is true spirituality and what is one of those side roads that we need to regard as products of a confused or eccentric mind? The Academic Texts section is accordingly prefaced by a contribution of the Catholic theologian Nikolaos Garagounis about three extraordinary women of the Middle Ages. Although all three were inter-related and not more than one generation away from each other, each of them took her own spiritual or religious-ecclesiastical way. One can sympathize with the fascination that the author has had in discovering that their three vitae reflect an unimaginable range of possibilities of religious development in medieval women: Agnes of Bohemia, the saint, which fits easily to the Catholic image of holiness; Guglielma, also called Wilhelmine, her sister and a select heretic, and Kunigunde, which fits completely into the role we expect of a medieval woman.

The article of the theologian, historian, and psychologist, Bernhard Wegener, about the history of the angel figure shows the various historical conceptions of these non-terrestrial beings not only in the Judeo-Christian, but also Islamic context. Angels are beings that are known in many cultures, but assume quite different shapes, form hierarchies and have various ascribed attributes and functions. For theologians, who are influenced by the school of demystification of Christianity by Bultmann and Barth, they do not exist in any way other than in the imagination of individuals and groups. Thereby, this article raises implicitly the question of how the subjective perception of angels is to evaluate if it, even today, occurs to somebody. The boundaries of imagination, psychosis and mystical experience are always there on the topic, where different opinions prevail on the nature of a transcendent reality and its perceptibility by people living in the earthly world. The fact that the shape of angels has undergone a historical development cannot exclude the possibility that they represent a translation of the unfathomable, actually experienced by subjects until today, in our cultural and human idiom. It should be very hard for any epistemology – even the Kantian one – to contradict that the existence of angels can be postulated as safe or unsafe as the existence of any other perceptible object (including trees, animals and other humans). However, one has to consider this, too: angels as possibly real beings from another world can surely only become a part of our perceptual world in a form imaginable for our way of experiencing and, as such, cannot be recognizable as thing-in-itself like any other "thing-for-us".

Consequently, cultural differences and processes of forming the image of angels on the one hand do not contradict the subjective reality of angels' appearances through talented people on the other hand, this making the pathologization of angel visions or auditions questionable. On the other hand, the perception of beings from other worlds is not

automatically a sign of mental integrity. This "pseudo-esoteric" reverse should be avoided, too. The third article of the Academic Texts section is dedicated to this distinction between mental disorder and mysticism. The author and publisher here tries to create a secure intellectual foundation from which the differentiation of psychosis and mysticism in practice (and in the second, later part of the essay) then appears possible.

In the section *Meditationes*, which shall get a free style essayistic character, there are two contributions of the editor, the first dealing with the relationship of spirituality with social responsibility – a theme that to the author seemed important because of the fact that in spiritual communities (and I mean: in all spiritual communities in East and West, not only in the pseudo-esoteric scene!) constantly exists the danger of a possible confusion of self-realization with narcissistic self-reflection and self-centred search for egoistic happiness. The second essay resumes the question of the relationship between psychology and mysticism, and this time asks about the relation of spiritual teachers with psychotherapy and the way in which psychotherapy and spiritual teachings connect with each other fruitfully.

Interconnections between psychology and mysticism unfold in the remaining articles of the journal, too, firstly regarding the topic of Yoga. The need for a science of spirituality is that connects intersubjectivity and transcendence becomes clear when we speak of "Yoga" today. Yoga is the Indian term for an ancient science of the spirit. But the way in which this science arrives here in the West is often quite different from the old roots. This is as true for some of the receptions of Yoga in Western academic circles as for the even more deteriorated popular use of "yoga" for gymnastic distortions. The former becomes apparent when a book on Yoga by a German indologist (e.g., Elvira Friedrich, *Yoga, München: Diederichs, 1997*) is compared with another one of an Indian Yoga master (e.g., Paramahansa Hariharananda, *Kriya Yoga, München: Diederichs, 2000*) published by the same publisher and finally with the introductory work on Hinduism by Vanamali Gunturu (*Hinduismus, München: Diederichs, 2000*). The book by Friedrich may be based on scientific understanding, but in some parts it is incorrect from the perspective of an Indian yogi.¹ The same may be true for the book of the Indian Swami Hariharananda in the perspective of Western science.² Only the book of a real border-crosser like Germany-

¹ Just some examples: The Sanskrit word *pranava* (according to Monier-Williams' Dictionary: "the sacred sound", meaning according to the dictionary and some Indian commentators. However, the mantra *OM*) is treated by Friedrich as a proper name ("As object of meditation, the word *pranava* is suitable", 114; my translation). The term *samadhi* (the highest stage of meditation, literally, *connection*) is translated with "suppressive concentration" (!). In the same violent style we learn that the mental confusion due to sensory impressions the yogi "removes by suppressing them" [!] (129; my translation). About the *siddhis* (miraculous powers) she writes: "There is little doubt that they are not really materialising forces" (143; my translation); and especially about the ability to recognize previous incarnations: "There is no reason that this should have a biographical character" (145; you wonder: for whom, besides the author, is there no reason for this? Yoga at least is convinced that reincarnations exist, connected with personal consciousness and thus also the possibility of remembering those).

² The book by Swami Hariharananda Giri does not argue in an academic style, although it "simulates" such an argument, but uses the Indian alike with the Sufi and Christian traditions in order to – com-

based Indian scholar Vanamali Gunturu defies both biases and manages to combine accurately Western rationality and Eastern spirituality.

And there are reasons for this: The legitimate concern of Western science is to test the old traditions systematically by hermeneutic-critical methods and (for anyone who has mastered these methods) intersubjectively comprehensible, logical stringent. Within its own paradigm, evidence-based, neutral to evaluation, and (quasi-)objective research is the only legitimate form of search for truth. But the same is true from an inside perspective of the yoga *shastra*, the ancient science (sic!) of Yoga, basing its intersubjectively comprehensible test on other methods, i.e., the introspective self-experiment of the yogi. Therefore, the traditional spiritual science is not interested in fact but in experience, not in historical accuracy, but in the spiritual result. Most notably, it is characterized by a different paradigmatic preconception: it is founded on the axiom of transcendence. In other words, it views the extraordinary, miraculous, the perceptibility of the transcendent as possible, and bases its entire approach on this condition.

The results of both approaches are therefore very different from the outset. That does not mean that one of them must be wrong. On the contrary, a historical-critical research in religious studies and in theology can very well connect with the supernatural, the spiritual experience, could be consist in the historical and philological correctness of a textual analysis according to the model of Western science as well as the spiritual perspective when both would rely on each other. Intersubjectivity (because objectivity is never attainable anyway), orientation on facts and accuracy can be combined excellently with the non-reductive recognition of transcendental experiences. That is the concern of this journal. Out of this concern two articles in this issue deal with Yoga: The field report of the editor about Kriya Yoga (in category "The practice test"), and Vanamali Gunturus contribution to the article series "The Spirituality Check" about the "real" Yoga. Here, Gunturu explains what Yoga means in a traditional Indian understanding of the word.

The issue concludes with two reviews, the first about the book by Ulrike Schrott about her own experiences as practitioner of a Mantra-Yoga variant, which is especially adapted to the needs of Westerners: Transcendental Meditation. In her fascinating account of the spiritual and worldly experiences in dealing with the guru and her own inner being, questions about psychology and spiritual experience are raised particularly vividly. In the second review of George Milzners plea for a new perspective on psychosis as an exceptional experience, we encounter another approach to the topic: psychopathology and spirituality are thus connected via the bridge of altered state of consciousness and yet separated by their controllability.

E. W. Harnack
Editor

pletely ahistorical and very bold – support its claims, which are not even presented stringently – from the perspective of Western rational thought thus being a rational disaster!