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## Perspectives in Spirituality: Introduction to Special Topic Section

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## Perspectives in Spirituality: Introduction to Special Topic Section

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From a transpersonal perspective, science and spiritual traditions together point toward a different container within which to hold the processes of scholarly inquiry—not one that reduces spiritual experience to biological epiphenomena, as modernism does; not one that trivializes it into a wholly subjective and relativistic construct in the spirit of postmodernism; not one that settles for a traditionalist epistemology simply because modernism and postmodernism give little substance to human meaning-making processes. Rather, the transpersonal project reaches for a philosophy, for ways of knowing, for research methodologies that walk the razor's edge between the objectivity of science and the inner phenomena of human experience, including spirituality.

From the start such an undertaking is fraught with obvious challenges, for how is it possible to grasp the essential nature of, say, a spiritual tradition without being immersed in it, and if one is immersed in it, how is it possible to do scholarship that does not simply represent a traditional and parochial view. If someone immersed in such a path subsequently assumes an objective stance, has that person now stepped outside of the tradition and into another tradition—that of science?

The relevance of the underlying issue reaches beyond the topic of spirituality, for qualitative research, now widely used in marketing, politics, and some branches of psychology, presents a parallel challenge: how to understand subjective experience through the

application of purportedly objective methods. In fact, there is something quite paradoxical about qualitative research: If I have an experience and write it down, my report is subjective; if I have an experience and report it to a researcher who is studying this phenomenon, my report now becomes objective data. The mere act of communicating my experiential report to a person with an appropriate graduate degree appears to have a transformative effect on its nature. At the very least, this example points to the complexity of the issues that still surround the study of spirituality and other phenomena of experience.

In response to these unresolved issues, the offerings in the special topic section on Perspectives in Spirituality offer an appropriately wide variety of approaches. The first piece, by David King and Teresa DeCicco of Trent University in Canada's Ontario province, is entitled, A Viable Model and Self-Report Measure of Spiritual Intelligence. It begins with an intriguing four-factor analysis of spiritual intelligence: it proposes that this capacity is made up of critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. Based on these aspects, a self-report measure of spiritual intelligence has been devised, refined, and validated, offering yet another valuable research tool for transpersonal scholarship.

Next in line is Douglas MacDonald's tightly argued paper, Identity and Spirituality: Conventional and Transpersonal Perspectives. He begins with a literature

review of scientific interest in the relationship between spirituality and identity, including a review of his own five-factor model of spirituality. This model defines spirituality as comprised of spiritual beliefs, spiritual experiences, a resilient sense of meaning and purpose, belief in the possibility of parapsychological phenomena, and beliefs/behaviors consistent with trust in the existence of a higher power. These five factors offer a model that is broader than, but compatible with, King and DeCicco's four factors of spiritual intelligence. Specifically, their factors of transcendental awareness and conscious state expansion relate closely to MacDonald's factor of spiritual experience, and their factors related to critical existential thinking and personal meaning production can be linked to his resilient sense of meaning and purpose. Note that the three remaining factors of MacDonald's definition of spirituality pertain primarily to belief, rather than to any engaged cognitive process; in this way, MacDonald's piece subtly bolsters the likelihood that King and DeCicco have captured the primary intelligence-related aspects of spirituality.

While the topic of spirituality has historically been minimized by modernist science, Harris Friedman, departing Co-editor of this journal, offers a critical view of the countervailing risk of viewing exotic religious and spiritual traditions in an overly-romantic light. His paper, entitled, *Xenophilia as a Cultural Trap: Bridging the Gap between Transpersonal Psychology and Religious/Spiritual Traditions*, specifically critiques a recent article that extolled the unique psychological insights of Buddhism. In response to this, Friedman shares from his own journey that began with a romantic view of Buddhism and ended with a more sober assessment of it as a tradition that, like every other, deserves to be examined in a critical manner.

A contrasting point is offered by Papalii Failautusi Avegalio, in a piece entitled, *Reconciling Modern Knowledge with Ancient Wisdom*. Avegalio is a Samoan Islander who holds the traditional title of Papalii as well as a Western higher-education degree. As such, he has an unusually deep cross-cultural experience. He shares how he lived for many years in a dilemma, caught between his own cultural values and his scientific education, and how the writings of one Samoan man, Tui Atua, opened him to a renewed understanding of traditional Samoan culture. Through him, Avegalio found a way to understand that the indigenous people of Samoa had their own form of science, a way of learning complex skills such as open-ocean navigation without a compass or astrolabe, from

and with the natural world in a relationship of reciprocity, respect, love, service, and courtesy. Thus, though traditions cannot be accepted uncritically, as Friedman points out, a thorough understanding of them requires that critique is ever balanced with respect.

The next paper exemplifies this balance between critical yet respectful scholarship; Christopher Cott and Adam Rock's paper, entitled, *Towards a Transpersonal Psychology of Daoism: Definitions, Past Research, and Future Directions*, contributes to a foundation for examining the Daoist tradition through a transpersonal lens. The first part of the paper offers an introduction to both living Daoist traditions and extant collections of Daoist literature. The subsequent review of the treatment of Daoist materials within analytic and humanistic psychology and through empirical research is necessarily brief, for this vast and rich tradition has barely been explored within the context of any branch of Western psychology. On this basis, Cott and Rock lay out principles and proposals for the future study of Daoism within transpersonal psychology, a venture that promises to be highly fruitful.

If spirituality is to be engaged critically by transpersonal studies, it must also be engaged experientially. Chad Johnson's report, *Reflections on a Silent Meditation Retreat: A Beginner's Perspective*, provides a crisp and refreshingly transparent account of his experiences on a seven-day vipassana retreat. These few pages course with his pain, his exhilaration, his conceit at his new-found skill and its transformation into generosity, communicated in honest yet graceful words.

The section concludes with Jorge N. Ferrer's inspiring paper, *The Plurality of Religions and the Spirit of Pluralism: A Participatory Vision of the Future of Religion*. He asks, How can the value of one religious tradition be upheld without diminishing the value of other traditions? Ferrer discusses ecumenical, soteriological, postmodern, and metaphysical approaches to this issue, then proposes that a participatory pluralism based on participatory philosophy may be able to hold religious diversity in a non-reductionistic spirit. He then offers four different possible scenarios for the future of religion: a shared global religion, the mutual transformation of traditions as they interact, the emergence of a limited set of spiritual values or principles shared by all religious traditions, and the development of spirituality without religion. Ferrer calls for a thousand (spiritual) flowers to bloom, yet at the same time acknowledges the need for a *critical* pluralism. This fact being acknowledged, the

paper offers no more than cautious preliminaries on ways to construct an appropriately participatory standpoint from which to exercise critical analysis within a pluralistic system.

With this, the introduction ends back where it started: How can the transpersonal approach construct approaches to inquiry that are deeply informed by experience yet carefully examined through critical analysis. For that matter, any critical approach necessarily has a particular philosophical location, and its lens will reflect the values and limitations of that situatedness. How can such an analysis be applied broadly across various traditions without simply being one more relativistic perspective with its own covert prejudices? The transpersonal field will be grappling with these issues for years to come. Yet such deep-seated questions do not prevent on-going exploration in many forms, a process that the contributors to this special section exemplify and embody.

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