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Higher Self – Spark of the Mind – Summit of the Soul: Early History of an Important Concept of Transpersonal Psychology in the West

Harald Walach

The Higher Self is a concept introduced by Roberto Assagioli, the founder of psychosynthesis, into transpersonal psychology. This notion is explained and linked up with the Western mystical tradition. Here, coming from antiquity and specifically from the neo-Platonic tradition, a similar concept has been developed which became known as the spark of the soul, or summit of the mind. This history is sketched and the meaning of the term illustrated. During the middle ages it was developed into a psychology of mysticism by Thomas Gallus, popularized by Bonaventure, and radicalized by the Carthusian writer Hugh of Balma. Spark of the soul signifies an "organ of the mystical experience." It is argued that the split introduced into history between outer and inner experience has lain dormant ever since the 13th century, with inner experience relegated to the private and mystical realm. By introducing this concept, transpersonal psychology reconnects with this tradition and has to be aware of the legacy: to achieve the theoretical, and if possible scientific, integration of both types of experience by drawing on the experiential nature of this concept and fostering good research.

Historians and theoreticians of science have repeatedly noted that the progress of a scientific discipline is not simply a cumulative process of increasing knowledge along the lines of accepted methodology, but that this progress is achieved by both working within given frameworks of accepted presuppositions and by discussing and debating the very foundations (Kuhn, 1955; Laudan, 1977; Oeser, 1979a; Oeser, 1979b; Fleck, 1980; Toulmin, 1985; Collingwood, 1998). Psychology, as a scientific discipline, is comparatively young with a history of roughly 150 years; the first blinded psychological experiment dating back to Peirce's and Jastrow's attempt to find out about the smallest perceptible sense difference in 1883 (Kaptchuk, 1998). It is understandable, therefore, that insiders and outsiders alike deplore a kind of "preparadigmatic" state of psychology as a whole, with many different research paradigms in Kuhn's sense (Kuhn, 1977) competing for priority. It is only in some disciplines within psychology, like in experimental or applied psychology, that a comparatively unitary canon of methods and accepted standards of problem solving seems to have been accepted by the whole community. One could make a case that a systems theoretical perspective with an associated emergentist type of ontology is the most useful paradigm for psy-

chological research nowadays (Bunge, 1980; Bunge & Ardila, 1987). While this might be acceptable for some branches of psychology, this suggestion does not seem to depict the whole situation, and certainly not within clinical psychology, where even the consensus on what methods to base scientific evidence on is debated (Chambless, Sanderson, Shoham, et al, 1995; Seligman, 1995; Weinberger, 1995; Wachter & Messer, 1997; Messer & Woodfolk, 1998).

Clinical psychology seems to be very much in a preparadigmatic stage, where many rivaling theories exist, which not only suggest different modes of action contradictory to those of competing theories, but also rest on theoretical presuppositions excluding each other. And yet they seem to be effective to some degree independent of their theoretical underpinnings and irrespective of the fact that they are using seemingly opposite interventions (Goldfried, 1987; Beitman, Goldfried, & Norcross, 1989; Glass, Victor, & Arnkoff, 1993; Castonguay & Goldfried, 1994; Fensterheim & Raw, 1996). It is mostly within the context of clinical psychology, and most notably through its humanistic psychological expressions, that a new movement arose at the end of the 60s, which called itself "Transpersonal Psychology" (Sutich, 1969, 1976). The impulse to found yet another movement

within the already widely disparate field of clinical psychology, seems to have been the realization that there were realities and experiences pointing beyond the personal self (Maslow, 1969, 1970; Sutich, 1973), such as: the experience that individual purpose is always an act of transcending the individual self and relating with a “transpersonal” value (Frankl, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975), the historical awareness that religious and spiritual needs have always been and likely will remain part of human life and therefore should be part and parcel of any scientific endeavour to understand human psychology (Wilber, 1974, 1975, 1979, 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1985c, 1985d), and last but not least the realization that spiritual experiences within the framework of spiritual traditions are both important and possibly irreducible elements of human experience (Goleman, 1972, 1975; Fadiman & Frager, 1976; Tart, 1976, 1986; Robinson, 1977; Washburn, 1978; Bergin, 1980; Armstrong, 1984; Engler, 1984, Atwood & Maltin, 1991; Thalbourne, 1991; Lukoff, Lu, & Turner, 1992, 1998). It is wrong, however, to suppose that Transpersonal Psychology is a unitary school. It is rather a loose connection of many movements and groups whose common denominator probably is the emphasis on and interest in experiences which are termed “spiritual,” “mystical,” or “religious,” without clear definitions of these terms (Lukoff, 1985; Thalbourne, 1991; Thalbourne & Delin, 1994; Turner, Lukoff, Barnhouse, & Lu, 1995; Thalbourne & Delin, 1998).

Psychosynthesis

One of the early members of the transpersonal movement and original coeditor of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* was the Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974), who developed a psychological model of personality and clinical change which he called “psychosynthesis” (Assagioli, 1934, 1969, 1974, 1986, 1988, 1991). While many theoreticians and practitioners of transpersonal psychology have heavily relied on impulses from Eastern philosophies and traditions, psychosynthesis is one of the “Western” types of transpersonal psychologies, although Assagioli seems to have derived many of his concepts and strategies also from theosophy and, therefore, from Eastern sources as well (Besmer, 1973; Schuller, 1988). Originally one of the early advocates of psychoanalysis in Italy (Assagioli, 1911), he quickly developed a psychological concept of his own. Thereby, he used the depth-psychological terminology introduced by Freud and developed by Jung and differentiated it. His main thrust was to discriminate

between what he called lower and higher unconscious and to introduce the concept of the Higher Self (Figure 1). The lower unconscious can roughly be compared to what Freud intended with this notion: past and unconscious experiences, drives and impulses, our bio-psychological past, as it were. The higher unconscious, in contrast, was a notion to differentiate “higher” impulses from the lower unconscious and to describe them: esthetic values, inspiration and intuition, “higher” drives like altruistic impulses or artistic inspiration, and also a kind of repository of future developmental possibilities. One could even say that the higher unconscious was something like an Aristotelian final cause or entelechy for human development. In that Assagioli tried to differentiate the Jungian notion of collective unconscious into the part which comprises the impulses towards development and wholeness from that which stands for disintegrative forces (Assagioli, 1974). Complexes of experiences he called sub-personalities. This is a notion akin to Jung’s concept of “complex,” meaning an emotional, motivational and action oriented quasi-independent part of the personality, usually associated with repeated experiences or social roles. It would be very interesting to study this concept in relation to modern schema-theoretic approaches (Ciompi, 1991; Lundh, 1995; Stein & Markus, 1996; Rusting, 1998), because very likely the concept of a schema would cover what Assagioli meant by subpersonalities. Assagioli pointed towards the importance of the human will as a resource for integration and development, and thereby, incidentally, foreshadowed an important modern movement within self-regulation theory (Kuhl, 1996, 1998, 1999). But most important of all is his concept of Higher Self. Assagioli underlined that the process of integration and synthesis which human development represents is neither a random nor a simple cumulative process, but one which seems to be mediated, supervised or even fostered by something like a transpersonal attractor, to use a modern metaphoric language. This centre, which both acts as the inner guideline and impulse—as well as a regulating and attracting goal, he called Higher Self.

Assagioli usually was very scant with bibliographic details of his sources. Therefore, for an outsider, his psychology looks as if he had invented all the concepts himself. Some emphasize the esoteric and theosophic heritage (Schuller, 1988). It is my aim here to show that the notion of Higher Self has a long tradition in the West which can be located mainly within the Platonic, neo-Platonic and mystical traditions. While these traditions have lost their importance within sci-

ence, it is now within transpersonal psychology and by the mediation of Assagioli's psychosynthesis that one of the most interesting concepts of this tradition starts to surface again. I want to sketch out this tradition and thereby connect the seemingly unconnected modern practice and terminology with the tradition, and thus point to its importance and possible explanatory power. The journey will lead us from the predecessors of the notion in antiquity to the first formulation of a transpersonal type of psychology by mystical writers of the middle ages to the modern concept. Since this history is extremely complicated and complex, I will only point out the more important turns and steps.

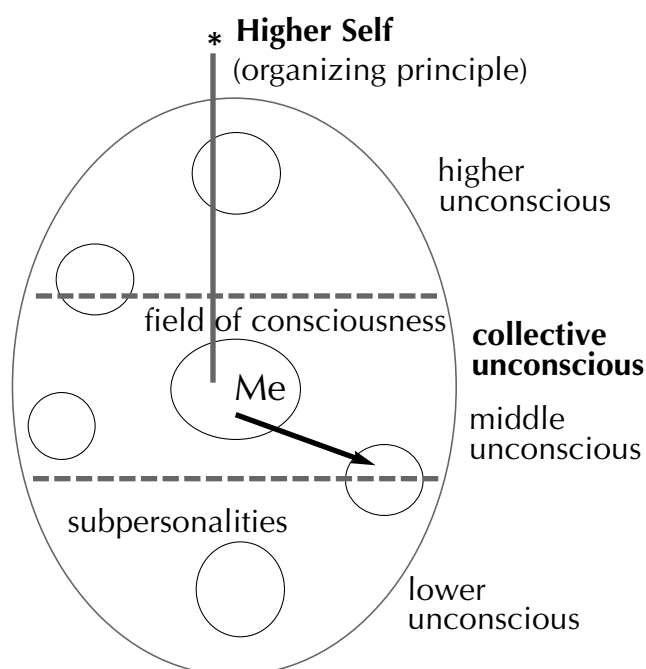


Figure 1. Assagioli's Personality Model.

It will remain a task on its own to be accomplished in a separate paper to follow the history of Assagioli's sources through modern psychology and from the theosophical tradition. Likely sources will have to include the writings of Blavatsky and Bailey, Yoga psychology, William James, who first seemed to have mentioned a concept like "spiritual self" in the modern scientific tradition, and Jewish Kabbalist sources. All those direct sources of Assagioli's will not be the topic of this paper. Rather I wish to draw the attention of readers to the mystical tradition and its likely influence on the modern shape of the concept of Higher Self as expressed by Assagioli and other writers.

Roots in Antiquity

The first written trace of the idea that there is

some higher, spiritual nature within man we can see in the fragment B119 (around 500 BC) of Heraklitos (Weber, 1976), which reads: ETHOS ANTHROPO DAIMON. This can, as most texts by Heraklitos, be understood in different ways and needs interpretation. But one possible and probably sensible reading and translation would be: "home for man is the god(ly)". The Greek word "ETHOS" signifies "home," "hearth," "the innermost of the house". The fragment, then, can be understood in the sense: The god(ly) is home to man, meaning surrounding, holding man, but also in the centre of man, central to his innermost personality there is something godly. Heidegger, in his famous "letter on humanism" has pointed toward this fragment in this sense (Heidegger, 1967, p. 301ff).

We next explicitly meet the idea of some inner God or godlike inner voice in the famous Platonic dialogue, "The Apology of Socrates" (Plato, 1964). Socrates, who because of that in the end is sentenced to death for "introducing new gods," confirms that he experiences an inner voice that is sometimes warning him against doing things, but never advises him in the positive to do something.

Endre von Ivanka (1964), who has traced the history of this concept, has pointed out that apart from the Platonic and neo-Platonic traditions of the concept of Spark of the Soul, there also is a Stoic root to it, namely the Stoic teaching of the universal fire as the source of everything and the trace of this fire in everything as a fiery, cosmic seed.

Plato, of course, with his teaching that the soul stems from the realm of ideas from where it comes into the body, bringing a trace of the ideal worlds of immutable ideas and of the Beauty and Good with it into the human being, laid the foundation for the later teaching of an immortal soul or rather, an immortal part within the soul. Plato developed a model of the soul in which one part of the soul was striving towards the good, which later was merged with Stoic and other ideas.

Even Aristotle, who otherwise was more inclined towards biology and natural philosophy and tried to eschew some of the pitfalls of Platonic thinking, in his "De anima - on the soul" (Aristoteles, 1983) explicitly said that the highest part of the soul, the agent intellect, the active part of the intellect, came from "outside-THYRATHEN," which literally reads as "from outside through the door." Although his "de anima" was a work rather of natural philosophy, which tried to understand and outline the natural workings of the soul, he pointed to this super- or trans-natural part of the soul. Since one other work of Aristotle, which is

thought to have contained the more esoteric aspect of his psychology, is lost, we can only speculate what he really meant by the saying, the “active intellect” comes from outside. But it is a well accepted fact meanwhile that the followers of Aristotle and those who still had access to the rest of his works, as well as his Islamic interpreters, interpreted him in the sense that this active part of the intellect was a spiritual and immortal part of the soul (Merlan, 1963).

The next step was made within the neo-Platonic tradition of those Platonists, who revived the Academy and its teaching after nearly 500 years. The founder of this neo-Platonist movement was Plotinos (204-270 AD) (Plotin, 1966). The hallmark of his teaching is, in modern terminology, a consequent idealist ontology which starts from the insight or experience that pure consciousness is primary. Plotinos called the principal source of everything “the One,” which he conceived to be all and everything in one, beyond every limitation, out of which everything emanates in four stages: first the NOUS, the intellect, which is pure intelligibility and reservoir of the world of ideas in the Platonic sense. From the intellect emanates the world soul which gives life to everything. And from this, at last, emanates the material world. However, there is an imprint of the divine One in every single soul, as it were, a trace of the One which is at the same time mark of and spurn to the One. It is the impulse within the soul to return, turn round to the One again and, in mystical contemplation, seek reunion with the One (Beierwaltes, Balthasar, & Haas, 1974). This model, of course, is akin to Eastern cosmologies, and very likely was inspired by contacts between the Greek culture and the East (O’Meara, 1982). Plotinos himself is said to have had contacts with Eastern sages while traveling in Egypt (see the Biography of Plotinos by his disciple and follower Porphyrios, which is printed in the first volume of the Loeb edition of Plotinos’ works). A few quotes from Plotinos may illustrate his ideas:

For the soul is many things, and all things, both the things above and the things below down to the limits of all life, and we are each one of us an intelligible universe, making contact with this lowerworld by the powers of the soul below, but with the intelligible world by its powers above; and we remain with all the rest of our intelligible part above, but by its ultimate fringe we are tied to the world below... (Enn III. 4, 3.21 ff).

...but there is a higher part (of the soul) which the transitory pleasures do not please, and its

life is comfortable (Enn IV 8, 8.23)

Often I have woken up out of the body to my self and have entered into myself, going out from all other things; I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part; I have actually lived the best life and come to identity with the divine; and set firm in it I have come to that supreme actuality... (Enn IV 8, 8.1f)

These quotes illustrate Plotinos’ psychology pretty clearly: He saw the soul as “containing” two parts, a higher and lower part. The higher part, he thought, was like a mark of the divine, a trace of the One, which was experienced by the individual as a desire to reunite with the One. This was possible, Plotinos taught, by contemplation, by receding the faculties and powers of the soul from the outside world and turning inwards until, in total stillness, this divine part of the soul reunites with the One. This was one of the main sources of the contemplative traditions in the West, and is, of course, very much akin to Eastern practices of meditation like Yoga or Zen. Plotinos, so his biographer Porphyrios tells us and as Plotinos testified himself, had quite a few experiences like that which left in him the desire to be totally gone from this world and reunited. Therefore he was ashamed of his body, which to him seemed like a hindrance. This, incidentally, is the source for much of later aversions against the body, which is attributed to Christianity, but seems to derive from the neo-Platonist tradition.

The idea of a special part of the soul was finally introduced by Proclus, one of Plotinos’ followers and the systematizer of Plotinos’ ideas (Beierwaltes, 1965). In his “Ten doubts on providence” (Proklos, 1953, 1977), he says:

For in us also there is inherent a certain occult vestige of the One, which is more divine than our intellect, and in which the soul, perfecting and establishing herself, becomes divine, and lives, as far as is possible for this to be accomplished by her, a divine life. (1953, p. 70)

Proclus was important insofar as he probably was the teacher of a Syrian monk who was known in later centuries as Pseudo-Dionysios (Ps.-Dionysios), the Areopagite. Saint Paul, in the Acts of the Apostles, is said to have preached to the Athenians and to have converted one Dionysios, a philosopher from the Areopague. Using this alias name, this anonymous monk of the 5th century could secure himself highest

authority since his writings were long thought to have been inspired by the Apostle himself. Saint Thomas Aquinas, for example, quoted Ps.-Dionysios more often than Saint Augustine. Thus, this neo-Platonic tradition made its way into the Christian middle ages, neo-Platonism baptized, as it were.

The teachings of Ps.-Dionysios the Areopagite (Ps.-Dionysius Areopagita, 1949, 1957, 1987), endowed with Apostolic authority, have been highly influential in the middle ages. The main theme of his book "Mystical Theology," was centred around the immense greatness of God, his absolute otherness and difference and the impossibility to know him. In this teaching the neo-Platonic One is identified as God, or God as he is conceived in the Judaic-Christian tradition is identified with the neo-Platonic One. And man's endeavour, of course, must be to seek reunion with God, "in ignorance," beyond rational thinking and knowing. Ps.-Dionysius takes up the teachings of Proclus and also speaks of a higher part of the soul, which is the faculty of union of man with God.

Development During the Middle Ages

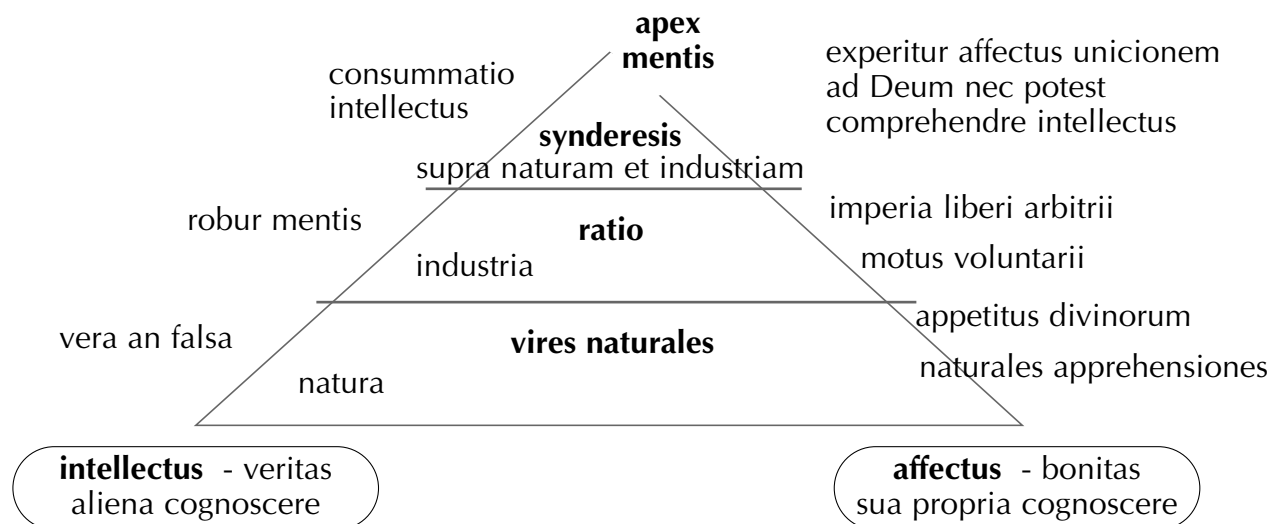
Somewhere along the line during the Dark Ages this neo-Platonic idea of a special part of the soul as the trace of the One, or the image of God in Christian terminology, seems to have melted together with the Stoic teaching of the "seeds of the eternal fire" to form what became known as "scintilla synderesis," the spark of the synderesis. Synderesis is a complicated term, and it is still unclear, what it really meant and what its true etymology is. For the philosophers of the middle ages it primarily was a moral concept. It signalled a part of

the human soul, which was untouched and untouchable by human sin. Philosophers of the 12th century, like Phillip the Chancellor, or later on Adam de la Hale, used the term "synderesis" to signify the fact that even the worst of sinners always had a door open towards the good, that he always could convert himself and turn to God, since there was a place within him which remained untouched by all the evil he brought on himself by his sins (Lottin, 1942, 1948). This was the place where God spoke through the true voice of consciousness, the "synderesis," a place free of sin even in the sinner, and thus granting freedom of conversion at any time. In this moral sense this term seems to have been used for quite a long time, even by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century.

But in parallel to this moral usage another one turned up out of the slumber of the dark ages in the mystical tradition. The main psychological text of the middle ages, the "Liber de spiritu et anima - The book of the spirit and the soul," which is attributed to the Cistercian author, Alcher of Clairvaux, but was known in the middle ages as a text of St. Augustine's, mentions the fact that in the contemplative-mystical experience the soul is taken out of its normal state, and that there is an "occult power" within the soul, but without naming this power (Pseudo-Augustinus & Alcher von Clairveaux, 1996, Cap. XXIV, p. 797). It was Thomas Gallus or Thomas of St. Victor, also known as Thomas of Vercelli or Commentator Vercellensis, who reintroduced the concept of the "scintilla synderesis" as a mystical notion.

Thomas Gallus (1219 - 1247) is mentioned as a canon of St. Victor in Paris and university teacher in

Figure 2. Scheme of Thomas Gallus' psychology.



1219. At some stage he was transferred to the abbey of Vercelli in Piedmont, where he lived and studied (Barbet, 1990). His work, apart from his monastic and ecclesiastic duties, mainly consisted in reading, commenting and interpreting the works of Ps.-Dionysios the Areopagite. By doing this, he achieved two things, which made him important for posterity: He translated the meaning of the Greek terms which were close to the pagan, neo-Platonic tradition, into the Western, Augustinian terminology and made this strain of contemplative tradition more accessible to the West. And he developed a psychology which could incorporate these teachings. The main part of this psychology, which he outlined in his commentary on Isaiah, is lost. But he wrote a summary himself in one of his commentaries which has survived and has been edited (Thomas Gallus, 1936). In that summary he aligns the inner structure of the soul with Ps.-Dionysios' teaching of the celestial hierarchies, and posits 3*3 faculties of the soul, according to the 3*3 hierarchies of angels. It is schematically reconstructed in Figure 2.

There are two major faculties: intellect (*intellectus*), and affect (*affectus*). While the intellect is concerned with the outside world and truth (*veritas, aliena cognoscere*)—at the lower level with sensory truth, at a higher level with propositional and intellectual truth, the affect is concerned with goodness and the soul's own states (*bonitas, suo propria cognoscere*)— at a lower level with the subjective and sensual goodness, at a higher level with the intellectually and morally good. The first level of the soul, compartments 1-3 as it were, consist of the natural faculties of the soul (*vires naturales*). They work naturally, subconsciously in modern parlance (*natura*). There we find the natural, sensual apprehensions (*naturales apprehensiones*), and the simple discernment of basic truths and falsity (*vera an falsa*). But at the border toward the next level, denoted as the rational faculty (*ratio*), the affect already comes out of its natural slumber, as it were, and experiences a desire for the divine (*appetitus divinatorum*). This second level, compartments 4-6, is activated by the will and by effort of energy (*industria*), and is the central power of the mind (*robur mentis*). One could also interpret this as the conscious level of our human rational faculties. The highest part of the affect here are the commands of the free will (*imperia liberi arbitrii*). Note that in former psychologies some 50 or 100 years earlier, this free will would have been a part of the *synderesis*. Here in Thomas Gallus, we find a whole compartment above the rational powers of the soul which he calls *synderesis*. These are the compartments 7-9 so to speak. This is activated by

grace only; it is beyond human nature and active effort (*supra naturam et industriam*), and in it the highest faculties of the human soul are perfected (*consummatio intellectus*).

Of this upper triad of the soul, the *synderesis*, only the very highest, which corresponds to the highest hierarchy of angels, the Seraphim, is called the “apex mentis - summit of the mind”, or at other places “*scintilla synderesis* - spark of the *synderesis*”, or “*principalis affectio* - principal affection.” This is the “organ” of the contemplative, unitive experience of ecstatic oneness of the soul with God, which is beyond any operation of the mind. This *scintilla synderesis* belongs solely to the affect, and thereby is concerned with the highest good of the soul, with God alone. In his commentary on the “Mystic Theology” (which, by the way, is extremely rare; a copy is obtainable by interlibrary loan from the university library in Mainz, Germany) of Ps.-Dionysios the Areopagite (Thomas Gallus, 1934, p. 14), he says:

In this book he (i.e. Dionysius) hands down.. a more profound way of knowing God... Pagan philosophers...thought the highest cognitive power was found in the intellect, when there is another power that exceeds the intellect no less than the intellect exceeds reason and the reason exceeds imagination. This power is the principal affectio, which is the spark of the *synderesis* and which alone can be united to the Holy Spirit.

This is the first explicit mentioning of a specific faculty of the soul, whose sole purpose and aim is the unification with God, a faculty or organ for the mystical experience, as it were.

With Thomas Gallus, the neo-Platonic teaching of a trace of the One has combined with various strands of Christian teaching, with the moral concept of consciousness, to form an explicit psychological notion of the “*scintilla synderesis*,” spark of the soul or principal affection, which is the highest part of the soul. In this specific place in the soul a human being is divine, as it were, and is able to unite with God him/herself, and by doing this, gains experiential, mystical knowledge of God. Here the “spark of the soul” has made its entry into the teaching of the West.

Thomas Gallus was not a minor writer. He was well regarded by posterity and widely read, whence his title of honour “commentator Vercellensis - the commentator from Vercelli.” The middle ages only tributed such nicknames and titles of honour to well-known and important writers. Thus it is understand-

able that his teachings were taken up by others and handed down.

Saint Bonaventure, the Franciscan friar, general, and professor of theology was one of them (Gilson, 1929). In his book "Itinerarium mentis in Deum - The mind's itinerary to God" he described the mystical ascent (Bonaventura, 1961). This ascent is conceived according to his— more Augustinian—psychology. And every faculty of the soul has a certain role to fulfill in this. He says:

These six steps of the ascent to God are according to six hierarchically ordered faculties of the soul, ... the senses, the imagination, the rational faculties, the intellect, the understanding, and the summit of the soul or the spark of the synderesis (apex mentis seu synderesis scintilla). (Bonaventura, 1961, I.6, p. 59f.)

It is within this latter spark of the soul, which he also calls apex affectus, summit of the affect, that the mystical experience takes place:

In this step, if it is to be perfect, all intellectual activities have to be given up. And the apex of the affect is totally taken over and transformed into God. This process, however, is mystical and most secret. Nobody understands it, unless he receives it, and he does not receive it, unless he desires it, and he does not desire it, unless the fire of the holy spirit ignites him in his very centre. (Bonaventura, 1961, VII. 4, p. 150)

Thus, in Bonaventure the neo-Platonic-Dionysian theme of an imprint of the One or an organ for the mystical experience has been combined with the more traditional Augustinian psychology familiar at the schools of theology and has been firmly established in what became one of the key texts of the Western Christian mystical traditions. Bonaventure has taken up the notion introduced by Thomas Gallus of a summit or spark of the soul, and being one of the major authors of the Franciscan community and a widely read theological teacher, popularized it.

In parallel, another author was possibly even more influential than St. Bonaventure in familiarizing the spiritual readership with the concept of a higher part of the soul: the Carthusian author, Hugh of Balma (Walach, 1994; Walach, 1996). Hugh of Balma is usually known only to specialists due to missing editions and literally missing access to his writings, except in old and rare prints until very recently. There is now available a recent English (Martin, 1997b) and German translation (Walach, 1994), as well as a criti-

cal edition of his text (Hugo de Balma, 1995). Opinions about the author, his biography, his motives and the basic thrust of his teachings vary widely. While the official, accepted version is that he was a Carthusian prior, Walach (1994) has argued that he probably was a Franciscan friar opposing St. Bonaventure and who had to retreat into the charterhouse for personal safety and ecclesiastical peace. These details, however, do not concern the main impact of his teaching. This was taken up extensively about 100 years after his presumed active period, which can be dated round about the years of 1260-1270. His teaching was highly influential, his work was translated into many languages, and printed in many editions, such that he can really be called one of the fathers of Western mysticism. He very likely was the main source for the contemplative text, "The Cloud of Unknowing" (Anonymous, 1981), which also is inspired by Carthusian spirituality. He influenced the 14th and 15th century movement of lay devotion, the so called devotio moderna, and thereby was seminal for the later contemplative or mystical tradition. His influence on Meister Eckhart remains to be traced, but the fact that Eckhart was in Paris in 1276/7 and in 1312 makes a connection a possibility.

One can make a point that, up to Hugh of Balma, mystical and classical theology, pre-modern science and mystical speculation, outer and inner experience were one. This is also evidenced by Thomas Gallus' psychology, where the faculty of intellect, which is concerned with the outer world, and the faculty of affect, which is concerned with the soul's own inner states, which in fact is inner experience, are still together. It was Hugh of Balma who radicalized this teaching. His basic message is simple: Only in the total withdrawal of the soul from every outward orientation, only in radical extinction of thinking, and only in concentrating all the soul's powers into the affect, thus aiming only at the mystical union with all desire and all power and in ardent love, can true knowledge of God, true peace and freedom be gained, and, as a kind of side effect, true knowledge of many other things. He severely attacks all school teaching and academic wisdom, university teachers and theologians for having relinquished the true path towards insight and knowledge, the mystical path, as taught by Ps.-Dionysios and Thomas Gallus, which leads to a unification with God in the scintilla synderesis, and which is the only aim and bliss of the soul.

Here is a textual example from Hugh's lengthy tract, "Viae Sion lugent - The ways to Zion mourn", which was also known as "Mystical Theology" or as

“De triplici via ad sapientiam - The Threefold Way to Wisdom”:

The other type of knowing is more eminent than the other two: it consists in the most ardent unifying love, which in reality makes the spirit able, without any mediating agent, to rise ardently and glowingly with surging strivings to his beloved. This type of knowledge was handed down in the “Mystical Theology” (of Pseudo-Dionysius). It rises up in the summit of the affective power. About this rising it is said that it happens without knowledge, or rather by not-knowing. By letting go of any activity of imagination, of the rational faculty, of the mind and of the understanding, we are able to feel already now, in the present moment, by virtue of the unification of the glowing, ardent love that, what the mind is incapable of grasping. (Walach, 1994, p. 265)

This text, then, is one of the major manifestos, if not the most important one, of mystical thought in the West. It was ascribed to Bonaventure and thereby became widely known and eminently important. More than 100 text witnesses are extant, an enormous number, testifying to its wide distribution. Its influence is still not completely traced and established, but certainly goes as far as the Spanish mystics (Pablo Maroto, 1965) of the 16th and 17th century, like Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order and of the meditative-experiential tradition of the spiritual exercises (Beyer, 1956).

It is in Hugh of Balma that the academic tradition of the West branches into an “exoteric,” academic, theological and scientific branch, which looks at everything from the outside, for which experience is experience of something (else), be it nature, world or God, and in an “esoteric,” counter-academic, mystical branch, for which experience is eminently experience of oneself, as nature, as world, as God. Since the latter half of the 13th century, the mystical tradition has drifted away from orthodox teaching, and was more or less driven out of universities and schools. Experience has started to become experience of outer things. Inner experience or mystical experience has been delegated to lay piety and private worship.

The psychology of these mystical writers, however, has culminated in a notion, which has henceforth remained present in the West: the notion of a higher part of the soul, variably named summit of the mind, spark of the soul, principal affect, spark of the syndere-

sis. Meister Eckhart, the Dominican friar and preacher has taken this notion up and popularized it in the vernacular in his sermons, mostly to Dominican sisters, which were written down and copied widely. Here he also calls this central part of the soul spark of the soul, little fortress of the soul, God within. And from there it made its way into the teaching of other mystics, like Tauler or Seuse, or into the circles of lay people (Ruh, 1993). A concept was born, albeit mainly outside academical traditions, which signifies that, within the human mind, there is a part which is like a “better” part of a divine nature, and therefore can be the place and the means of the mystical experience of union with God. It is conceived as the very centre or summit of the soul.

It certainly would be interesting to sketch further this history in the West and in later times. And it would be even more interesting to draw the parallels with and underline differences to Eastern traditions, which would certainly be possible, but is outside the scope of this paper. These hints may suffice for a first approach.

This concept has mainly disappeared from the academic agenda ever since Hugh of Balma, who likely tried to influence academic opinion, failed. It has since lived and survived in the circles of pious groups, in monasteries and in the writings and teachings of mystical writers. It seems to be an interesting fact that, within transpersonal psychology, especially within psychosynthesis, this concept returns.

Higher Self: The Heritage and the Future Agenda

It is within psychosynthesis as described by Assagioli that the concept of a Higher Self makes its quasi-official reappearance on the agenda of modern psychology. It seems evident that what Assagioli had in mind by this notion is probably very similar to what was expressed in the tradition by the terms “spark of the soul,” “summit of the mind,” “spark of the synderesis.” While the mystical tradition used the term more in the context of the mystical experience of union with God, Assagioli assigns more mundane tasks to the Higher Self, as we saw. In his psychology—which, by the way, he did not see as a fixed system but as a suggestion open to and in demand of further exploration—the Higher Self is an active centre, activating and thereby pulling the individual toward his or her development. Whitehead’s beautiful metaphor of “God luring” entities towards him, comes to mind here. The Higher Self of Assagioli has a psychological function: unification, and spiritual development of the psyche. During the middle ages, this was identical to

deification: becoming God-like or union with God. The historical distance from the middle ages can be traced in the fact that nowadays we also recognize psychological needs more readily. We acknowledge that sometimes psychological problems have to be solved before or after spiritual experiences, and that the power of such a mystical experience can be severely hampered by psychological malfunctioning of the rest of the person. Granted that a modern psychological stance has something to add and to offer to the purely mystical or spiritual position, the essence of what is meant by the Higher Self or the spark of the soul in the middle ages seems to be the same:

Both signify the highest part of the soul, basically untouched by psychological suffering, sound and available as a resource, in modern parlance. We feel reminded of Viktor E. Frankl's dictum that the spirit is never ill, only the soul.

Both attribute to this part an active role in the unification of the personality. While for Assagioli, this is a kind of ever present synthesizing and motivating activity, for the mystical writers of the middle ages this was the innate spurn to embark on the spiritual quest, to let oneself be drawn by the call of God. Apart from the different and clerical language this is couched in, it describes the same basic experience.

Both traditions see the experience of this innermost part, our godlike nature, Christ-nature or Buddha-nature, as the most important and most fulfilling experience, to which everyone is drawn.

Therefore, I venture to say that in the Higher Self of psychosynthesis, or rather in this or similar concepts of Transpersonal Psychology, the old concept of "spark of the soul" makes its reappearance. If this is so, this has some important ramifications, since history is not simply a rehearsal of the same piece of music all over again, and there are some tasks which come with it.

As I have tried to show, the mystical tradition has pulled away from the official academic strand of research and teaching. If it is true that within transpersonal psychology some of the legacies of the mystical tradition are present, then one task would obviously be to reconnect this strand of thinking and experiencing with the main stream of the scientific endeavour, in other words to reintroduce the topics of transpersonal psychology within academic main-stream psychology and research. One way would be to point out phenomena which cannot be explained well by the ruling paradigms of academic psychology and which will suggest a concept like the Higher Self as an explanatory construct. To be quite sure: By the rules and standards of academic psychology a concept like that of the Higher

Self is at the first glance utterly unscientific: there is no way of verifying or falsifying it, it seems; there is no clear advantage for such a concept to everyday research and theorizing; and it probably would be cut away by Ockham's razor, which forbids entities beyond necessity.

There are several strands of empirical and theoretical research which recommend itself in that way.

It should be shown beyond doubt that spiritual experiences are quite common, quite natural and a health resource rather than hazard. Although there is some research into that direction, it is by no means enough nor is it good enough. Only if presented in the widely read mainstream journals with high impact and rigorous review will such material be taken seriously.

Historical and theoretical research should establish firm links between concepts of different cultures and times. One guiding principle would be the possibility that basic human experiences and conditions are universal but interpreted differently according to different historical and cultural backgrounds.

Transpersonal therapies should take up the burden of empirical research and evaluation, proving to the scientific community and the public that therapies using transpersonal resources, in imagination, healing, prayer or whatever other type, can be effective, or even more effective than conventional treatment. Specifically, interventions tapping the spiritual resources should be researched and documented well. Assagioli has suggested some imagination exercises for helping the individual growth process. The best known of these is probably the inner journey to the wise man, which is thought to be an imaginative counterpart of contacting one's Higher Self. We need data on the effectiveness of interventions like that, and on the effectiveness of therapies which base their concept more on a spiritual understanding of man, utilizing this as a resource. At present, we know virtually nothing.

Then, of course, there would be the reductive argument which is difficult to counter apart by self-evidence, which is not very convincing to sceptics and critics: What is the criterion that in any experience of Higher Self, of Higher Nature, or Spark of the Soul, one has indeed made contact with a spiritual or transpersonal realm? Why has it to be "trans-" and is not simply something like a strong resource, like self-esteem, or coping skills, or salutogenetic resources? Traditions usually have a pragmatic answer: True experiences transform people and leave them changed such that they are able to do things or perform tasks which they previously were unable to. In the Zen-tradition

there is something like that in the testing for the understanding of a Koan. Something like that would be necessary for a science of spiritual experiences. A catalogue of “traces” which should be detectable in the psychological make-up or in the daily lives or achievements of people with true “experiences” of their higher nature should be worked out. The knowledge of the spiritual traditions can be helpful in this, but eventually will have to undergo empirical tests as well. As yet, these types of validation of experiences, which alone can yield an argument against reductive reasoning, are not public knowledge. Maybe they never will be, nor should be. Maybe some simple surrogate tests could be devised. The rationale is not much different from that of common tests: What can be tested for (intelligence, motor performance, school aptitude), likely exists.

History shows that phenomena, experiences, facts and theories remain unrecognized unless they can be combined with, integrated into and linked up with existing knowledge and paradigms. A successful new paradigm is not a paradigm which suggests: Throw away the old stuff, I'll give you something completely new. In that sense voices coming from the transpersonal camp and demanding a “new” science are not all that helpful, if they cannot at the same time point out, how to really integrate what is “new” with what is there. Quantum mechanics was successful not because it was new, but because it could integrate what was there into a new framework, which explained the same phenomena as well as the old theories plus could make testable predictions and integrate some odd phenomena left unexplained by Newtonian mechanics. In that sense, good theory and good empirical theory testing should be mandatory also for transpersonal psychology, if integration is to happen at all. One way would be to promote research into meditation, both empirically by EEG, fMRI, and quantitative self-report, as well as phenomenologically by studying qualitative reports, and to combine this with existing models as far as possible. It would probably be wise to utilize the modern trend towards neuroscience, neuroimaging and the concepts derived from there, as well as the methodology that comes with it, to introduce the topics of transpersonal psychology into mainstream research.

The Higher Self or Spark of the Soul initially was a concept derived from experience. Plotinos reportedly had quite a few spiritual experiences himself, as probably did the other writers. It was inner experience, subjective in the first place, but linked up with philosophical and traditional terminology, and thus intersubjective in result. We need something similar today, it seems. We need experience in the full sense of the

word, not only as inner experience and not only as outer experience, but as what it originally was: inner and outer experience combined into one mode with two faces. In such a notion of science and experience there would be a place for a concept derived from inner experience like the Higher Self, or the spark of the soul.

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