In this essay, I want to provide some of the groundwork for an articulation of the philosophical foundations of transpersonal psychology. I will first show the centrality of the theory of a "hierarchical ontology" in transpersonal work, and the need for clarification and examination of the core claims associated with such a theory. Then I will identify some basic objections to a hierarchical ontology associated with three main approaches in contemporary philosophy. Finally, I will suggest the outlines of a response to and resolution of these main objections. My thesis is that these objections are misguided when directed against the most profound aspects of hierarchical ontologies, but that taking the objections seriously can be helpful if the objections are re-interpreted as pointing to typical distortions of transpersonal approaches. Hence, it is important to appropriate insights into such distortions while transcending the typically reductionistic conclusions and limited frameworks associated with such objections, thus expressing transpersonal insights more clearly in a fully contemporary manner.

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Although theoretical frameworks in transpersonal psychology range from adaptations of the doctrines of classical religious traditions to use of one or more of many modern psychological theories, there has always been a great attraction to theories claiming to articulate what is usually called the "perennial" philosophy or psychology—what Huston Smith calls the "primordial tradition.  For here, we seem to have theories able to identify at least the general contours of ontological, epistemological, and ethical approaches and structures for which we might make and defend universalist claims, thereby overcoming the particularity of a given tradition or psychological theory. Commonly, representatives of the perennial philosophy make at least two basic universalist claims, first that such a perennialist theory can successfully express the "underlying structure" of different transpersonal approaches from a wide range of cultures and epochs, and second that such a theory is indeed "valid" and can be shown in different ways to be valid, or at least to point to what is valid. Given such a general theory, transpersonal psychology would then presumably develop the theory and its details more fully. Indeed, some have taken the work of Ken Wilber to provide at least the beginnings of such a comprehensive theory.

At the core of the perennial philosophy, according to the work of Schuon (e.g., 1984), Smith (1976, 1982), Nasr (1981), and Wilber (1980, 1983, 1984b), is a claim about the hierarchical nature of both the world and the self. Reality, "what there is" (i.e., the subject matter of "ontology"), is "tiered" or "layered" both in its outer and inner manifestations; there are different "levels" of both world and self, and these exemplify different grades of being, power, and value. (We might note that the etymological meaning of "hierarchy" is "sacred [hieros] order [arche]"; the word originally had to do with ranks or orders of holy beings, especially angels.) "Higher" levels of the hierarchy are more "real," more causally effective, and reveal more "good" than lower levels. Although the exact nature of these logical or causal relations between the different levels is not always clearly articulated, many hierarchical ontologists, in fact, adopt, in terms of movement "upward" (i.e., development, evolution) something like the logical principle of what developmental psychologists in the Piagetian tradition call "hierarchization," or what Hegel calls Aufhebung (generally translated as "sublation"). According to this principle, a higher level somehow "integrates" the achievements of lower levels, overcomes its systematic structural problems, and differentiates a new structure which shifts identity to the higher level.

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of movement "downward" (i.e., "emanation," involution), there is commonly a notion of "vertical causation"; a higher level somehow brings into being or "causes" a lower level.

Huston Smith (1976) proposes a four-fold distinction of ontological levels as the simplest model able to do justice to the perennial philosophy.s (To be sure, Smith [1982, p. 40] admits, as does Wilber, who in his latest work [1984b] proposes ten levels, that the number of distinctions one makes may be primarily a pragmatic question.) Smith's model, which I will use for the purposes of this essay, distinguishes: (1) the terrestrial or material world, in principle knowable through the senses, and structured by the laws of space, time, and matter; (2) the "intermediate" world of mind and the "vital principle," invisible to the senses; (3) the "celestial" or "archetypal" world of the "knowable" God and Platonic forms; and, finally, (4) the Infinite, the "unknowable" God, the Godhead, which is actually not so much a level as a "ground" for the other levels. Complementing this "outward" ontology is a corresponding ontology of the levels of the self, which distinguishes: (1) the body; (2) the mind; (3) the soul, the "final locus of our individuality," that which relates to God; and (4) spirit, the 

Given such a "hierarchical ontology," one can make easy sense of other aspects of the philosopiaperennis. At the highest levels, world and self, outer reality and inner reality, coincide as the "ground" of all that is. It is the fundamental human existential project to realize this truth, to come increasingly to know the higher levels of reality, and to express the deeper levels of the self. Such a project, furthermore, is universal, as is the hierarchical ontology, and hence beyond any given or particular spiritual tradition.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the attractiveness of such a model, as well as for a host of other reasons, there has, within transpersonal psychology, been little critical or systematic attention paid to the questions of (1) whether the claims associated with such a model (i.e., that the model successfully identifies the common structure underlying different traditions, and that such a model is "valid") are in fact acceptable, or (2) how such claims might be expressed and justified. That is, does such a hierarchical ontology really point to the underlying structure of the various historical and contemporary transpersonal theories? Can a hierarchical ontology, furthermore, be understood as valid in a compelling contemporary manner?

There are several reasons why these questions have largely not been the starting point for sustained inquiry. Perhaps the most
significant reason has to do with the fact that transpersonal psychology, although often drawing on ancient sources, has had much of its attention directed to "data" which is new and unexplored by most contemporary psychological researchers, and only recently has had its attention drawn to rigorous theoretical formulation and communication with mainstream theorists. There has also been some related ambivalence to the theoretical articulation of transpersonal insights, experiences, and practices. This has sometimes been rooted in a skeptical attitude toward linguistic expression found historically with some mystics and sages, sometimes related to the suspicion or opposition of mainstream theorists, and sometimes connected with the developmental process in consciousness disciplines that requires at some point a process of "disidentification" with the discursive aspects of the intellect, though these aspects are later "re-integrated.'

A final reason for the preliminary level of theoretical articulation in transpersonal psychology is the contemporary confusion about the philosophical foundations of the "social" or "human" sciences in general, especially in the wake of the present decline of positivist and "scientistic" models. Many researchers in the social sciences are not particularly aware of this foundational disarray. The earlier narrowness of positivist and empiricist models of reality and inquiry discouraged the very possibility of identifying other legitimate domains of investigation such as the higher three of Smith's four ontological levels, or the use of methods of inquiry or knowing such as hermeneutical or interpretive, contemplative, and mystical approaches. Adequate differentiation of these domains and methods has been rendered nearly impossible, leading to confusions evident, for instance, in some discussions attempting to justify transpersonal claims empirically, whether through physics, neurophysiology, or other empirical sciences.

On the positive side, however, it must be said that transpersonal psychology now shows signs of developing increasingly rigorous theory. This is in part due to a certain developmental maturing of the field in which, I would argue, the value and hindrances of theoretical work are more accurately seen in balance, and in part due to incorporation of the critique of positivism and scientism, and the attempt to clarify the expanded scope of the human sciences.

Nonetheless, despite such promising trends, there remain, from the point of view of mainstream contemporary work in
religious studies, psychology, and philosophy, a series of important objections that cast considerable doubt on the validity of the two basic claims associated with any hierarchical ontology. Attending to and meeting such objections, which stand as major barriers to current articulation and communication of transpersonal insights, would seem to be a crucial part of the theoretical work of transpersonal psychology. I want here to mention briefly objections from religious studies and psychology, before concentrating on philosophical objections.

Many scholars of religion, for example, seriously question the first universalist claim, that there is a common, identifiable, meaningful structure to the different historical transpersonal religious and philosophical expressions, as well as the auxiliary claim that this common structure is somehow the "core" or the "transcendent unity" of the historical religions and wisdom traditions. One type of objection to the first universalist claim, for instance, has surfaced especially in the discussion of the different forms of "mysticism." Many scholars of mysticism reject the notion of a common mysticism which crosses cultural and religious boundaries, and is relatively autonomous in relation to culture, history, tradition, and practices, structured rather by its own "mystical" modes of validity and value. Robert Gimello (1983) argues, against the claims of mystical autonomy and mystical sameness:

Mysticism is inextricably bound up with, dependent upon, and usually subservient to the deeper beliefs and values of the traditions, cultures, and historical milieux which harbor it. As it is thus intricately and intimately related to those beliefs and values, so must it vary according to them (p, 63).

He claims (1983, p, 63), seemingly directly criticizing the perennialist Claim, that mystical experiences are not the same across traditions, that the Buddhist experience of sunyata or of the Buddha-nature is in no sense the same as the Christian mystic's experience of the Trinity, Christ, or the Godhead, or the Jewish mystic's experience of En-sof, or the Vedantist's experience of the identity of iuman and brahman. Therefore, to affirm a hierarchical ontology that makes claims about the "core" within different historical traditions requires a response to the objection that claims of common structure obscure or even distort the actual details of such historical traditions. It also requires being clearer methodologically about the nature of such "structures," and more careful about respecting the particularity of given contexts and details.
If we turn to the area of psychology and its philosophical foundations, we find seriously challenged, where not simply dismissed, the second universalist claim that such a theory is valid, that it gives the most adequate understanding of reality and the ultimate human good. Leaving aside the strictly methodological objections concerning what can be studied "scientifically," that come from behaviorist and neurophysiological approaches, I want to mention two psychological objections to the developmental claims explicitly advanced by Wilber (1980, 1984), but often implicit in the work of some perennialists. First, there is the well-known psychoanalytic equating of mysticism with regression, and religion with something like an infantile illusion (Freud, 1964, 1962).9 Secondly, there is the question whether we can posit developmental hierarchies at all in the moral and spiritual domains, even if we accept tentatively Piaget's (Ginsburg & Opper, 1969; Gruber & Voneche, 1977) theory of cognitive development. Very serious questions (Flanagan, 1984, pp. 149-172) have been raised, for instance, about Kohlberg's (1981a) theory of moral development, which might well be raised concerning Wilber's developmental psychology, and any version of a hierarchical ontology which charts out a schema of "upward" evolution reversing the "downward" devolution or "emanation." These include questions of: whether there is actually empirical evidence and cogent argument for the theory, whether the moral and spiritual domains really manifest the criteria of stage development and "hierarchization" thematized by Piaget in terms of cognitive development (i.e. universality, the presence of discretely structured stages, the "inclusion" of earlier stages, and the invariance of developmental sequence), and whether there is an unjustified bias toward particular cultural values or expressions (notably Western, individualist, and "masculine" in the case of Kohlberg).?

Although it is vital to clarify and resolve the objections arising from religious studies and from psychology, I want to focus on a third set of objections. These arise from the main temporary philosophical schools, which, as I suggested, almost entirely deny the validity of a hierarchical ontology as described by perennialists, even though philosophy itself originated with the Greeks as a discipline concerned with a "Love of wisdom" (philosophia) which was cultivated by a kind of ascent to knowledge of higher levels of being.11 Rather, contemporary philosophical objections have almost entirely to do with the second question, that of validity, and can be tentatively divided into objections concerning the truth of a hierarchical ontology, and objections concerning its value.12

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THREE TYPES OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL OBJECTIONS TO PERENNIALIST CLAIMS

What then are the main contemporary philosophical objections to hierarchical ontologies? To give a sense of these objections, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the main forms and current state of contemporary philosophy. (The following account, of course, presupposes a transpersonal perspective and would surely differ from the kind of narrative given by those who are the subjects of the account.)

Much has happened in the Western philosophical world in the last twenty-five years. The most crucial process has involved, as I suggested above, the growing untenability of positivist approaches, and the emergence of alternative approaches to understanding the natural sciences, the "human sciences," and the nature of language. Generally speaking, the development has been a movement from positivism and scientism (the belief that the only valid knowledge is that of the "empirical" sciences, both natural and social) to an approach which could broadly be called "hermeneutical" and "practical," involving a recognition of the contextual, normative, interpretive, and metaphorical dimensions of language, knowledge, and action. Put simply, it is a movement from an ontology which ultimately admits only physical elements to an ontology which admits "mental" and "intersubjective" factors of intention, interpretation, history, value, and social norm as irreducible. There is, however, still no transpersonal ontology that would accept and account for (Platonic) "archetypal" (or "celestial") and "infinite" levels. If Huston Smith is right in claiming that there have been three great Western epistemologies, those of Bacon (emphasizing the senses and the physical world), of Aristotle (emphasizing as well theoretical and practical reason), and of Plato (emphasizing as wen noetic and mystical insight), then we might say that much of contemporary philosophy has recently returned to Aristotle (as is captured in slogans claiming a return to "practical" and "normative" philosophy) but has not yet produced a contemporary Plato. Indeed, the turn toward a renewed understanding of interpretive and practical dimensions of reason comes with several strong objections to any further move to something like a Platonic notion of a contemplative and mystical reason.

The nature of these objections can become clearer if we turn to three main modes of contemporary philosophizing, and turn especially to their criticisms of traditional philosophical and religious metaphysics. For such metaphysics (that is, Plato and
the ensuing "footnotes" to Plato) was typically rooted in a hierarchical ontology, although not always of the sort specified by perennialists! Critiques of traditional metaphysics, in fact, furnish the very point of departure for the main types of emphatically contemporary philosophy, with only a (sizable) minority of current work operating more or less within classical metaphysical and religious traditions. Almost all such critiques can be located within one of the three following approaches, each of which gives special attention to a particular ontological domain and to a particular range of phenomena.

First, we have what I will call "philosophical empiricism," rooted in the twentieth-century analytic philosophy of science and (scientific) language, represented by Moore (1962a, 1962b), early Wittgenstein (1961), Carnap (1959, 1966), Ayer (1950), and Quine (1961, 1969), among others. Since this approach is concerned mostly with the first ontological level, its objections mostly emphasize questions about the empirical truth and conceptual adequacy of a hierarchical ontology; value questions as such, where not merely empirical questions of the origin and function of particular values, are not generally permitted. Secondly, we have what I will call "radical hermeneutics," represented by Nietzsche (1954), Heidegger (1977), Derrida (Norris, 1982), and Rorty (1979), among others. Here, there is attention especially upon interpretation, the limits of language, and the nature of "lived experience," with the objections concerning both matters of truth and matters of value. Lastly, we have what I will call "critical social theory" in the broad sense that includes not only the Frankfurt School members (particularly Habermas [1971, 1979, 1984]), but also Marxism, feminism, and ecologically-minded social theory. Here, attention is on social-political domination and its metaphysical, psychological, and economic expressions and underpinnings, and hence the objections mostly concern the value of a hierarchical ontology, although there is also often concern with the question of truth.

Philosophical Empiricism

At present, the work of classical positivists (e.g. Comte and Mach) and "logical positivists" (or "logical empiricists," as Schlick, Carnap, Ayer, and others [Ayer, 1959] sometimes called themselves) stands sharply criticized. However, important aspects of the positivist critique of metaphysics are still maintained by those who wish to take a contemporary "empiricist" or "naturalist" position that would integrate some of the interpretive and practical dimensions articulated by recent critics of positivist tenets, such as Quine (1961, 1969),
Kuhn (1970), and Feyerabend (1975). Such naturalism, however, as in the work of Quine, the leading contemporary empiricist philosopher, still remains resolutely oriented to the epistemological primacy of the direct observation of nature. "Evidence" and "experience," as in classical empiricism, still provide the fundamental basis for valid knowledge and effective action; the natural sciences represent the paradigm of knowledge. Furthermore, the classical empiricist critique of traditional metaphysics remains largely intact, even as the empiricist treatment of science and language shifts somewhat.

For at least since Burne, empiricists have harshly criticized traditional Western metaphysics. The general aim of the empiricist criticism is to point to the disparity between such metaphysics and the results of sustained observation of the natural world. Hume (1955) writes:

> If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance—let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion (p. 173).

When we consider the modern logical positivist rejection of metaphysics, which has set the tone for "analytic" (especially Anglo-American) philosophy in this century, we find this general approach in more developed form. Here, the criticism is composed of two related arguments, the first having to do with the question of truth, and the second with the question of linguistic meaning. (The logical positivists are well known for identifying the two questions, in the "verification theory of meaning.")

The first argument, concerning the truth of metaphysics, is that either natural science and natural history disprove metaphysical (and religious) claims about the world, showing them to rest on superstitions and to be ungrounded in impartial observation of the world, or that there is in fact no way that metaphysical assertions could be proved or disproved at all. The former aspect preserves the earlier (Western) Enlightenment critique of metaphysics and religion, while the latter represents the logical positivist claim that metaphysics is unverifiable (and unfalsifiable). In this way, metaphysics comes to be seen as merely a kind of pseudo-knowledge or pseudo-science. Metaphysical statements have no clear relation to the "evidence," normally understood as the data of natural science and natural history, and posited as the source, as it were, of valid knowledge. Carnap (1966) writes:
Metaphysicians cannot avoid making their statements nonverifiable, because if they made them verifiable, the decision about the truth or falsehood of their doctrines would depend upon experience and therefore belong to the region of empirical science. This consequence they wish to avoid, because they pretend to teach knowledge which is of a higher level than that of empirical science. Thus they are compelled to cut all connection between their statements and experience; and precisely by this procedure they deprive them of any sense (p. 210).

The question of the evidence

Metaphysicians, so the argument goes, typically justify their statements, when they do so at all, by referring to some special source of knowledge such as revelation or intuition, both of which are incapable of being verified or falsified. Or, as with Spinoza or Hegel, they claim some kind of grandiose coherence as the standard of validity, in which verification and falsification again seem impossible, for everything and anything can conceivably be made to fit. But, on the logical positivist view, exemplified by Carnap's work, verifiable statements must be empirical or connected in some way with empirical statements. Even in Quine's (1961, 1969) empiricist critique of logical positivism, in which metaphysics or ontology now has cognitive content, there is still an insistence that metaphysical statements have their ultimate contact with "reality" in their tenuous relation to scientific evidence; presumably, most if not all traditional metaphysics would still be banished, for lacking any clear connection to evidence.

The question of the statements

The second argument about meaning is closely related. For the logical positivists, only two classes of statements can have meaning: the first class of empirical statements by virtue of the connection of such statements with evidence or data, the second class of definitional and logical statements purely by virtue of semantic or logical meanings. Metaphysical claims, which go beyond mere empirical claims, and do not admit to being tautologous or purely self-referential, would not seem to fit anywhere in the world of statements that can have meaning in any strict sense. To claim a determinate meaning for metaphysical statements is to make a basic mistake about language. The early Wittgenstein, who was not adverse to mysticism, nonetheless denied mysticism any determinate meaning or cognitive status. In his *Tractatus* (1961), he distinguished sharply between what one could "say" (what was capable of determinate meaning), and what one could merely "show," (the "mystical," that which cannot be put into words). To be sure, he felt that all important life questions had to do with what one could merely "show": "We feel that even when all scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left and this is the answer" (p. 73; proposition 6.52).
According to empiricist criticism, then, hierarchical ontologies would stand charged with being at worst simply wrong, or at best unverifiable, and thus devoid of any true cognitive content whatsoever (natural science being the arbiter of cognitive content). They might be meaningful only in a very loose or derivative sense of "meaning," that has little or nothing to do with claims that could possibly reach "truth" or presume to refer to "reality." In other words, they are at best far from the epistemological and ontological action.

Radical Hermeneutics

The work of Nietzsche (e.g. 1954), Heidegger (1977), Derrida (Norris, 1982), and Rorty (1979) (to name the main figures of this approach) offers a generally quite different, and somewhat broader kind of critique of metaphysics, although there are points of convergence with the empiricist critique. Rather than a concern with natural science and naturalistic observation (i.e., with Huston Smith's "lower" world), we have an insistence upon the radically interpretive character of all experience, language, and theory, as well as a concern with questions of value, particularly a concern with living life fully and authentically. Such an approach thus develops in some ways a wider sense of the human than that of the empiricists. Its critique centers precisely on what are taken to be the misguided features of Western metaphysical traditions, from Plato through to the present. The first of these (connected with questions of truth and meaning) is the metaphysical belief that philosophy can go beyond the limits of language to reach some kind of pure and unmediated accessing of the truth (Nietzsche, Derrida, Rorty). The second (connected with questions of value) is the tendency of metaphysics to become nihilistic and to devalue life, the body, and the earth (Nietzsche), or to forget "Being" (Heidegger). To simplify somewhat, then, we might say that there are two main components of the radical hermeneutical critique, one concerning the nature of language, the second concerning the negative effect of metaphysics on life-practice.

Both of these concerns, and the related criticisms of hierarchical ontologies, are found, for instance, in the work of Nietzsche, who in many ways is the progenitor for contemporary forms of "radical hermeneutics" and "deconstruction:" Nietzsche's criticism of metaphysical language starts from an examination of how language relates to a more direct experience of "life." He claims that language is inherently metaphorical, incapable of reaching precision, certainty, and complete perspicuity. Linguistically-expressed claims inevitably represent a kind of gross approximation of experience.
Nietzsche sometimes speaks of language as "falsifying" experience, and concepts as "fictions" asserting permanence, enduring identity, universality, and determinate structure. Such "fictions" may serve pragmatic purposes, but we come to lose sight of the origin of such concepts in experience, reifying the concepts into realities. Nietzsche (1966) analyzes the traditional Western dualism as rooted in a historically particular linguistic pattern favoring a "faith in opposite values" (p. 27), rather than as disclosing basic insights about reality.

This first kind of criticism is further represented in some interpretations of hermeneutics and in deconstructionist critique. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975, 1976), the foremost contemporary theorist of hermeneutics (the theory of interpretation), for instance, although affirming elements of tradition and thus differing substantially from Nietzsche, points to how all knowledge claims can only be articulated and have meaning within "traditions" and within language. Such contexts, in which occur all experience, are fundamentally structured by non-universal core assumptions or "prejudices" (or "prejudgments," Vorurteile). The project of arriving at a universal categorial framework and/or moving beyond the confines of language and "prejudices" does violence to the realities of particular traditions, as well as to experience in general, which is most basically "hermeneutical." Deconstructionists also focus on the critique of any hopes or claims to achieve complete conceptual adequacy. All claims are necessarily interpretations, for there are no "facts," no "objective reality," and no achievement of complete "presence" with the independent object. We can never go beyond the reach of language and texts; attempts to do so can be "deconstructed" and we can see other stories going on, quite different from the story associated with the original claim. The deconstructionist claim, as summarized by Mark Taylor (1983), is this:

Consciousness, therefore, deals only with signs and never reaches the thing itself. More precisely, the thing itself is not an independent entity (be it "real" or "ideal") to which all signs refer, but is itself a sign. . . . In the absence of any primal signified which can serve as a secure anchor, signifiers float freely within a field of signification that appears to be endless. . . . There is no logos to be revealed, no secret to be uncovered, no truth to be discovered (pp, 397, 400).

Nietzsche's second criticism, echoed especially by other "existentialist" writers, identifies the whole theoretical and metaphysical project, beginning with Socrates and Plato, with a kind of repression and forgetting of the more vital and valuable
aspects of lived experience: the body, the emotions, sexuality, and, above all, what Nietzsche identifies as the Will to Power, that is, the deep impulse to a certain form of life. Philosophy and the project of metaphysical theory are at bottom attempts at control rooted in fear and insecurity with the actualities of life. Metaphysics becomes a tool for, and a legitimization of, the attempt to dominate the natural and social worlds, as well as to have “reason” dominate the other aspects of the internal world. Nietzsche (1967) writes:

Psychology of metaphysics: the influence of timidity (*Furchtsamkeit*).

That which has been feared the most, the cause of the most powerful suffering (lust to rule, sex, etc.), has been treated by men with the greatest amount of hostility and eliminated from the “true world.” Thus, they have eliminated the affects one by one-posted God as the antithesis of evil, that is, placed reality in the negation of the desires and affects (i.e., in nothingness).

In the same way, they have hated the irrational, the arbitrary, the accidental (as the causes of immeasurable physical suffering). As a consequence, they negated this element in the being-in-itself and conceived it as absolute “rationality” and “purposiveness.”

In the same way, they have feared change, transitoriness: this expresses a straitened soul, full of mistrust and evil experiences ....

A creature overloaded and playing with force would call precisely the affects, irrationality, and change good in a eudemonistic sense, together with their consequences: danger, contrast, perishing (pp, 309-310, paragraph 576).

The project of metaphysical theory is thus for Nietzsche a falling-away from a direct, relatively unconscious expression of the fullness of life, and eventually expresses itself as nihilism. To express such a fullness, poetry or music are much more appropriate.

Hierarchical ontologies, then, are guilty here on two related counts. First, they rest on a naive understanding of language, and do violence to the realities of particular traditions, guiding assumptions, and the actual play of interpretations and texts, in which occurs our only life. Second, they are part of a process of differentiation of the intellect out from other aspects of experience, which has the (deconstructed) purpose of domination, and has the result of a loss of contact with experience and "life," in the construction of a dry, abstract, reified, lifeless theoretical realm.

*Philosophical Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology*
Critical Social Theory

The Enlightenment, it is sometimes forgotten, also had, besides the more "cognitive" critique of metaphysics as dogmatic and superstitious, a very clear social-political critique. Metaphysics, especially where it is strongly connected to authoritarian traditions and practices, is a masked ideological justification of oppression and domination. If we bring together the criticisms stemming from democratic, socialist, feminist, psychoanalytic, and ecological movements and norms of the last two centuries, we might formulate the following more precise charge: Traditional metaphysics falsely asserts a hierarchy of value between different groups of persons, and between humans and the rest of the natural world, as well as between so-called "higher" levels of the self (typically seen as reason, soul, or spirit) and the "lower" levels (usually involving body, emotions, and sexuality).

Such a theory of hierarchical social relations typically locates, through metaphors, symbols, implicit assumptions, and forms, as well as through explicit content, higher value in the aristocratic, the urban, the intellectual, the male, and the human, and lower value in the common, the tribal and rural, that having to do with craft or manual work, the female, and the natural. But, so the critique goes, such a hierarchy of value denies and tends to block the inborn potential of those beings described by the latter categories; inborn potential must be seen as equivalent for all, and social relations reconstructed accordingly. Metaphysics sanctimoniously, either directly or indirectly, justifies domination and the suppression of human and non-human potential to live the fullest lives possible. We might say polemically that metaphysics describes and justifies the quickened (pseudo-) development of a few, at the cost of the forced regression of the many. The commonly recognized elitism of metaphysics, philosophy, and hierarchical ontologies is neither generally beneficent nor necessary; it is rather (at least in our time) pernicious and avoidable.

Such a hierarchical social theory, quite explicit, for example, in Plato's work, is paralleled commonly by a hierarchical psychology, which locates greater value in the "rational" and "spiritual" and lesser value in the body, emotions, drives, and desires. Such a psychology not only serves as adjunct to the hierarchical social theory, linking social levels with psychological levels, but also, as in social theory, falsifies and deforms psychological reality, suppressing the life of the body, the emotions, and sexuality. Here the criticisms are close to those of Nietzsche; metaphysics in its hierarchical form is anti-body, anti-emotions, anti-sexuality, as well as being anti-nature and
anti-woman. If this does not logically follow from metaphysical theories, it certainly is historically the dominant interpretation.

Often, these kinds of arguments are cast in an evolutionary or developmental theory, especially by those sympathetic to the (Western) Enlightenment project of establishing a fully "rational" society rooted in equality, human rights, and self-determination based in collective discourse and the common search for truth and good. Jürgen Habermas (1971, 1979, 1984), perhaps the most systematic contemporary exponent of "critical theory," takes this kind of approach. He (1979, 1984) suggests that social relations free of (social) domination and (psychological) distortion can be understood as the result of onto- and phylogenetic developmental processes toward a fuller rationality that overcome metaphysical and religious worldviews, along with their social and psychological structures. Metaphysical and religious worldviews, which Habermas analyzes primarily in terms of their structure rather than their content, do not permit such fully rational knowledge and action.

Such worldviews, Habermas believes, mark a lower level of development, in terms of core developmental criteria (as articulated in the Piagetian tradition), such as differentiation of modes of rationality, reflexivity, autonomy, and universality. That is, metaphysics tends, first, to obliterate and prevent proper differentiation; it tends to blend together the cognitive, normative, and expressive dimensions whereas a full rationality demands their clear distinction. Where there is such clear differentiation between these dimensions, there can be developed the characteristically modern enterprises of empirical inquiry, formal law, modern art, and a "communicative" ethics where what is "right" is only dependent on giving the best reason for a given action or norm in communication free of domination and neurosis; there is no place for anything like metaphysics. Secondly, there is in metaphysical worldviews a low level of reflexivity (the ability to thematize as problematic any explicit or implicit claim). Some metaphysical (or religious) claims are taken as absolute principles and dogmatically accepted, forming barriers to criticism and further learning. Habermas relates, thirdly, the metaphysical worldview to particular large-scale social problems resulting from the ideological need to legitimate political and material inequalities that arise concomitantly with increases in material production. Metaphysical hierarchies reflect social inequality and generally a lower level of autonomy in relation to nature and society than is found in modern societies and world views.
This third objection, then, goes something like this, in relation to a hierarchical ontology: Hierarchical ontologies are commonly ideological expressions of social and psychological relations involving domination and exploitation of most humans (especially women, workers, and tribal people), of nature, and of certain parts of the self. Such domination limits drastically the autonomy and potential of most of the inhabitants of the human and natural worlds, justifying material inequalities and preventing that free and open discourse which is the seed of a free society. It distorts psychological life by repressing, albeit in the name of wisdom and sanctity, aspects of ourselves whose full expression is necessary to full psychological health and well-being. Perhaps we might have a hierarchical ontology in which metaphysical hierarchy is not connected to social and psychological hierarchy, but thus far in history, such an ontology has only rarely been seen in theory, and perhaps even more rarely in practice.

TOWARD A CONTEMPORARY TRANSPERSONAL FRAMEWORK

I want to claim here that those working in transpersonal psychology need to take such objections seriously, for all of these objections develop insights about systematic problems, and express important values, often not prominent in the traditional expressions of hierarchical ontologies. On the other hand, the objections are not as such fatal to the idea of a perennial philosophy, since they can be interpreted as identifying very significant kinds of historically prevalent distortions of the "full" or "essential" expression of the perennial philosophy, rather than as rendering invalid the two core perennialist claims. That is, we can understand the objections as pointing to a series of dangers preventing such a full expression: the danger of ignoring the empirical "facts" in the interests of so-called "higher truths"; the dangers of what we might call "conceptual attachment" and the reification of conceptualizations of "higher levels"; the danger of suppression or repression, in the supposed interests of the "higher" levels, of the "lower" levels of the body, emotions, sexuality, the earth, etc.; and finally the dangers of a hierarchical ontology being used ideologically and unjustly to justify the blocking of the potential of certain beings, while favoring the development of others.

Contemporary transpersonal approaches as well as approaches harkening back to classical sources that do not integrate the insights of these criticisms (while overcoming their limits) run two major risks: first, the risk of not being fully aware of such distortions and dangers, thereby increasing the possibility of
reproducing them, and second, the risk of not being able to communicate adequately with many in the contemporary world who may be sincerely motivated by concerns of freedom and liberation. These latter persons, not without some wisdom (perhaps defensively at times), often place the above kinds of objections directly in the path of any possible transpersonal development, for themselves and for others. Recognition of the objections as pointing to systematic distortions helps to separate what is valid in the critiques from the often reductionistic conclusions that are taken to follow. Such an analysis indicates more clearly the limitations of the contemporary frameworks in which the objections have been expressed, and facilitates critical discussion with some of the more mainstream nontranspersonal approaches.

However, recognition of such distortions from a transpersonal point of view does not necessarily lead to a simple affirmation of a "reformed" hierarchical ontology. Rather, there seem to be at the present time two main (related) theoretical and practical options, aside from the option of simply ignoring these objections and regarding classical traditions as fully adequate for us. On the one hand is the option to affirm the "essence" of classical metaphysical and religious paths as still valid, and to attempt to work out, within mostly traditional conceptual and practical structures, a reconciliation of the classical traditions with the more modern emphases on empirical science, on hermeneutical sophistication, on the value of body, emotion, and sexuality, or on feminist, ecological, and social dimensions of liberation. This often, although not always, retains at least some of the basic tenets of a hierarchical ontology. On the other hand, for many, a recognition of the prevalence of such systematic distortions in the historical theory and practice associated with hierarchical ontologies render any such reconciliation, even if conceptually and practically possible, awkward and undesirable. These latter persons, often focusing on the distortions themselves as the starting point for reflection and action, point commonly to non-hierarchical structures, past and especially currently emergent, as fundamental. Arguably, both approaches may together contribute to a contemporary version of the perennial philosophy quite different from that identified by current perennialists, and not strictly hierarchical.

In this final section, I want to suggest first how the three current modes of philosophical objections might be integrated by those working within the structures of a hierarchical ontology. But I also want to make it clear how reflection on some of the objections, notably those related to questions of social, ecological, and intrapsychic domination, often lead to fol-
following the second option of attempting to articulate non-hierarchical models, both within a given domain and as a whole. These options of course are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and many will need to draw from both options as they develop.

Within the framework of a hierarchical ontology, we can understand the philosophical objections as pointing to (at least) two basic kinds of distortions. The first is the commonly recognized tendency, connected with the "rationalization" and "exotericization" of living traditions, to lose the full existential and experiential import of the tradition, notably including an understanding of its mystical aspects. Put simply, in terms of Huston Smith’s model, there is a gradual ontological reduction to a theory of three levels, then two levels, and now indeed to only one (purely physical) level. Such reduction no doubt parallels an "experiential" reduction or narrowing. Arguably the actual targets of the contemporary critiques of hierarchical ontologies are not so much the authentic representatives of the perennial philosophy, but rather the rationalized and dogmatic metaphysical and religious systems that had been increasingly separated from their practical and experiential (especially mystical) dimensions. This point, often expressed in terms of a distinction between "esoteric" and "exoteric" aspects of traditions, has been clearly made by most of the modern articulators of the perennial philosophy.29

A second, less commonly articulated distortion might be called, from the point of view of a hierarchical ontology receptive to the contemporary objections, the distortion of transcendence without full integration, which I want to discuss as it surfaces in two basic contexts.29 First, in the context of a developmental psychology, the distortion is identified by the idea, common to many traditions, that a lower stage must be completed before there is "transcendence" of that stage; distortion and future pathology ensue when the tasks of the lower stage are not fully met. Expressions of would-be transcendence are then distorted by the lack of adequate groundwork, or by energy seemingly being expended on higher-level tasks that are, as it were, actually trying to accomplish lower-level tasks. Conceptual emphasis on, or some experiential access to, a "higher" level, i.e., talking about or even experiencing God or brahman, need not ensure the completion of "lower" level tasks. Secondly, in the context of the different levels of knowledge, the distortion appears when a lower mode of knowledge is not granted its proper autonomy, especially when it is unduly dominated by upper level knowledge or principles. A theology that is generally acceptable, as it was to Galileo, need not ensure adequate...
empirical knowledge. Furthermore, such illegitimate domina-
tion of the "lower" by the "higher" may result not only in
distortion to the lower type of knowledge, but also to the higher
type.

We can understand this distortion rather simply by recalling
the concept of "hierarchization," the notion that a "higher"
structure resolves or transcends the systematic problems of the
"lower" structure, preserves or integrates its achievements, and
manifests a new and emergent structure. If we accept some-
thing like the concept of "hierarchization" as the core principle
of development and transformation, then clearly this second
type of distortion represents one of the fundamental possible
systematic problems of transpersonal development, one of the
basic dangers of "ascending" the hierarchy (Wilber, 1984a).

Having thus introduced these two basic distortions, I now
move to showing how the philosophical objections can be re-
interpreted, from the point of view of a hierarchical ontology,
as implicitly identifying distorted expressions of the "essence"
of hierarchical ontologies, rather than be interpreted as having
decisively rejected that "essence," as is explicitly claimed.

A Re-interpretation of Empiricist Objections
to Hierarchical Ontologies

For instance, philosophical empiricism stands on what it takes
to be the sure connection of all theory with evidence, and
criticizes hierarchical ontologies for their lack of attention to
empirical grounding, to "evidence" and to "experience." We
can re-interpret this criticism as accurately identifying not so
much the essential perennialist features but rather two kinds of
actual historical tendencies related to the above distortions: (a)
the preponderant historical loss of the "evidential" and
"experiential" dimension in modern metaphysical and religious
approaches, and (b) the attempt by many modern metaphys-
icians and religious thinkers to enforce the "primacy" of
"higher level theories" (i.e., metaphysics and religion) on the
emerging empirical sciences (one version of the distortion of
"transcendence without full integration"). In the face of such
assertions of the validity of metaphysics and theology on
empirical matters, we can see that the achievement (as well as
the present predicament) of the empirical sciences lies precisely
in their differentiation from metaphysics and theology, as well
as from the other domains that emerge as quasi-autonomous in
the modern Western world (e.g. law, art, ethics).30

Admitting such distortions (and thus the partial validity of
positivist and empiricist criticisms) need not entail the on-
A need to differentiate modes of inquiry and evidence
tological and epistemological reductionism common to philosophical empiricism. In the first place, perennialists also criticize much of modern metaphysics and religion for their lack of experiential or "evidential" basis, claiming that perennialism rests ultimately on experiential foundations. Schuon (1984) and Nasr (1981), for example, commonly speak of the "sapiential" nature of perennial traditions, their rootedness in direct knowledge. And yet clearly such "evidence" is of a quite different order than the evidence of the empirical sciences, such that the empiricist critique (such as that of Carnap [1959, 1966]) misfires when directed at perennialists. Secondly, acceptance of the differentiation out of empirical science from tradition and from other cultural modes might also be integrated within are-formulated transpersonal theory. Indeed, there arises a great contemporary need to differentiate more precisely between different modes of inquiry and evidence, so as to articulate the evidential basis for transpersonal theory. I take one of the fundamental contemporary foundational projects in transpersonal theory to be the articulation of a model distinguishing and relating the structural features of different modes of inquiry (and their related forms of action). Such work would especially outline the features of what we might call the "logic of contemplative inquiry," and might connect to the already quite substantial contemporary philosophical work that attempts to distinguish and relate empirical inquiry and "hermeneutical" inquiry. The result might well be an an account following in its basics the contours of Wilber's (1983, pp. 1-37)suggestive reference to the "three eyes" of the flesh, mind, and soul.

Accepting the partial validity of the empiricist critique also allows us to see more clearly the limits of this critique, and its philosophical flaws. Experience and evidence are rightly noted as basic to all theory and all claims, and yet it seems a serious mistake to conceive of all knowledge and inquiry, and all experience and evidence, according to the rather narrow "scientistic" model of the empirical sciences, constructed in the image of physics. For the differentiation of empirical inquiry out from traditional approaches, as well as from other cultural modes emerging with the modern world, coupled with insistence on the autonomy of empirical standards and methods, in no way implies that such standards and methods, and the related ontological domain for which they are most appropriate, are in any way unique or privileged. (Of course, this is a dominant contemporary assertion and assumption.) It is possible to respect the relative autonomy of empirical approaches while arguing for other kinds of autonomy appropriate to other kinds of approaches. In fact, most recent (non-transpersonal) philosophical discussions critical of scientism,
such as that of Habermas (1971), contain arguments for a
certain degree of autonomy for the empirical sciences, locating
such autonomy, however, within the larger structure of what
we might call a "hermeneutical" or interpretive mode of
rationality.

Empiricist reductionist attempts, furthermore, suffer from two
other defects. On the one hand, they neglect fundamental
structures of knowing, and, on the other hand, they are
implicitly self-contradictory. Hence, arguments critical of
positivism and scientism have either laid out higher (usually
hermeneutical) structures as basic and irreducible, or they have
shown reductionistic empiricist arguments to be self-contra-
dictory." The latter point is that theorists making such
scientistic arguments implicitly commit what Habermas calls a
"performative paradox"; they deny the presupposition entailed
by their own speech acts, namely the assumption that
intersubjective dialogue and understanding are possible and in
fact provide the basic structure in which scientific investigation
has "meaning." In other words, a purely monological manipu-
lation of the world generates no meaning or understanding. 32It
is striking that both aspects of such a hermeneutical critique
involve recourse to at least two hierarchically-ordered levels;
the hermeneutical or interpretive level is taken to "include" the
empirical level. As such, the hermeneutical critique is very
easily integratable by those interested in transpersonal themes,
and indeed some perennialists have often framed very similar
arguments, although of course, they would criticize as limited
and incomplete the hermeneutical two-level ontological and
epistemological models.

A Re-interpretation of Hermeneutical and Social-Political
Objections to Hierarchical Ontologies

When, from the perspective of a hierarchical ontology, we turn
to the remaining philosophical objections, we find in a parallel
way that such objections are not fatal to hierarchical ontolo-
gies. It is quite possible to understand hermeneutical and
existential critiques, as well as the related arguments of the
different types of critical social theory, as integratable within a
transpersonal framework in a way similar to that suggested in
the case of empiricist objections; that is, they can be seen as
pointing implicitly to distortions, but their reductionistic
conclusions do not hold. Such criticisms can be interpreted as
implicitly pointing to: (a) the loss of the experiential basis of
hierarchical ontologies, and (b) not allowing the appropriate
autonomy due to what we can call the second ontological level
and its related (hermeneutic and communicative) epistemology.
an insistence on the autonomy of language (a version of the distortion of "transcendence without full integration"). According to these criticisms, traditional metaphysics distorts, through its dogmatism, the relative autonomy of language. In addition, it de-values and constricts, where not denying, the autonomy and vitality of the body, the emotions, and sexuality, on the level of the individual, and nature and other beings, women, and most males, on the level of ecological and social relations.

Yet it is possible once more to integrate on a transpersonal basis much of what is valid in such criticisms, and some of what are taken to be classical expressions of the philosophia perennis arguably did so to some extent. For example, with their more experiential and especially mystical emphasis, perennialists (e.g., Schuon, 1984, chap. 2) agree in large part with the hermeneutical insistence on the autonomy of language, themselves criticizing metaphysical and theological dogmatism, literalism, and fundamentalism as reflecting a distorted understanding of language, and of the relation of language to experience and the highest knowledge. Certainly an awareness of the uses and limits of language is commonly a distinguishing mark of many if not most contemplative traditions, both Western and Eastern. Further, we often find (Katz, 1984) that the more "esoteric" use of language is often highly dependent on context and proper interpretation as when concerned with communication in the teaching situation or the field of "skillful means" (Buddhist upiyya) in the world.

However, the second kind of distortion (of the autonomy of aspects of the second "hermeneutical" level) is somewhat more deep-rooted in the classical expressions of the philosophia perennis, and the integration of the critique more problematic, although still possible. And it is reflection on this distortion which causes many to consider breaking with, or modifying strongly, the concept of a hierarchical ontology. The more abstract model of a hierarchical ontology certainly does not logically require the repression of body and sexuality, nature and women, or the erection of a class system. Within the context of one kind of interpretation of a hierarchical ontology sensitive to these issues, we might find explicit recognition of the kind of autonomy "appropriate" to the "lower" level, whether body or nature. Furthermore, it is certainly logically conceivable to accept a hierarchical ontology and simultaneously to recognize the ultimate equality of all persons (and perhaps of all beings), and to reflect such equality in terms of normative arrangements concerning rights and opportunities. A hierarchical ontology can, without self-contradiction, integrate changed self-conceptions of body, sexuality, emotions, and changed social and ecological relations. It can understand
dominant past historical interpretations as containing basic distortions of "lower" levels, distortions which have in turn "pathologized" what are seen as "higher" levels or higher doctrines. And it is clear that such identification of distortions and attempts to recover the "essence" of metaphysical and religious traditions is going on in many quarters, notably spurred by modern ecological, feminist, and social liberation movements and approaches. 35

Whether or not such a second "integration" works (or is even desirable), we can again point out that reductionism (here "hermeneutical") does not work. Indeed, without movement to, or inclusion of, "higher" levels, hermeneutics and critical social theory remain mired in a series of theoretical and practical problems.» First, we can again note that incorporation of what is valid in their criticisms need not entail reductionism toward the "higher" levels. For their criticisms of "higher" ontological levels and modes of inquiry do not take adequate stock of transpersonal themes and of more "esoteric" aspects of traditions, and arguably do not hold when applied to some of the "deeper" or more "authentic" expressions of the philosophia perennis. These critiques can be interpreted, once more, as critiques of typical "distortions" of such traditions rather than of their essence. 37 Secondly, it is possible simply to layout such metaphysical structures as basic and irreducible, required by an adequate study of the various modes of human knowing. Thirdly, we can again locate a kind of "performative paradox" in their critiques, in that the denial of "archetypal" or "celestial" levels commonly occurs simultaneously with the making of metaphysical claims whose validity cannot be guaranteed at the level of communicative or hermeneutical discourse. At that level, it does not seem possible to escape the poles of absolutism and relativism, without recourse to a higher metaphysical level. 38 Fourthly, as Habermas (1979, pp. 165-166) and Dobert (1973, p. 136) suggest, resolution of many traditional questions of "meaning" and "purpose" may be difficult or impossible within the hermeneutical structures identified, although they do not treat this as a problem. Several writers, including Kohlberg (1981 b), have seen such questions of meaning as demanding a movement to metaphysical (frequently transpersonal) levels.t?

Non-hierarchical Models

It is, however, certainly historically true that most of even those exponents of the great metaphysical and religious traditions identified as embodying most closely the core perennialist thesis of a hierarchical ontology (with, to be sure, some
significant exceptions) link such an ontology to the devaluation of the body, sexuality, and nature, and to patriarchal and class-based social relations. Plato's *Republic*, of course, gives the classical Western model, claiming that the basic ontological levels directly parallel the different levels of self and the different types of persons, in which such devaluation and such relations are eternalized.

These connections have led many to consider non-hierarchical approaches to these very same problems. Such approaches often resonate with *some* expressions or aspects of the main metaphysical and religious traditions, but would seem to demand a break with extensive dependence on a hierarchical ontology as I have defined it in this essay. Revaluations of understandings of the body, emotions, sexuality, nature, and the place and nature of social justice in metaphysical and religious traditions has led many to deny the truth and value of hierarchical models in these domains, and to look for models, both classical and contemporary, in which the dominant hierarchical de-valuation of these areas is overturned. Some have looked to "pre-civilizational" religious traditions for insight and inspiration, others to modern political models, especially democratic and decentralist, and still others to elements of modern science, such as ecological theory.

Such non-hierarchical models, however, may not be so much alternative as complementary to a hierarchical ontology generally. This may help to avoid many of the distortions discussed above, even if we maintain important elements of a hierarchical ontology. One way to elucidate the manner in which hierarchical ontologies may be modified through considering complementary non-hierarchical models can be elucidated by the following argument, with which my essay concludes.

We can remember that classical models of a hierarchical ontology not only understand the cosmos as tiered, but generally see each level as having its own proper correlated mode of knowing. For instance, if we follow Smith's (1976) model, we would typically conceive of empirical methods as fundamentally related to the material domain and the human body, hermeneutical methods as related to cultural values and the "mental" domain, and contemplative and mystical approaches as most suitable for the archetypal-celestial and infinite domains. We would then construe the "ascent to the absolute" as the path that rises progressively to higher domains and higher modes. Yet reflection on what seems valid in some of the philosophical objections we have considered leads to another model of conceiving of these various "domains" and
"modes of knowing," one that has important implications for our discussion. For it also seems possible to "progress" on the path and, in a sense, to "ascend," while remaining primarily within one domain, for instance that of "nature" or "society," and simply "deepening" one's understanding of that domain, whichever one it might be. Such deepening could be understood in terms of a deepening of epistemological modes that in turn disclose ontological levels closer to the "source," not so much by transcending body or nature, but rather by remaining within each domain. Such a model is obviously not far from what is often meant by some representatives of the perennial philosophy, who understand "higher" levels as "including" rather than as negating the "lower" levels, as in a sense being "within" lower levels. Here, arguably, there is no reification of the spatial metaphors of "hierarchy" and "ascent" and no related link with the de-valuation of nature, body, community, and society as "lower." Rather, such domains might be the location for the project of liberation.

This kind of model might help us to link up with several expressions of classical metaphysical and religious traditions that modify the usual hierarchical model, often with the interest of linking metaphysics and religion more with everyday life than with an "other-worldly" approach. We might think of the four types of yoga classically outlined in the Bhagavadgiti. Each of the yogas are appropriate for a different personality type, several of them quite suitable for those living everyday lives in society (karma and bhakti) but all leading to liberation. Or we might refer to the similar delineation of the different ways articulated by the Christian medieval mystical theologian Bonaventure (1978), which seems to suggest deepening of awareness and concern with one main domain might be just as valid a path as the traditional ascension through the different levels. We also might be drawn to some of the Hua-Yen Buddhist images of interpenetration, where every being and every domain contains the truth of every other being and domain, and of the whole. Or we might think of other Mahayana Buddhist insights, emanating from more emphasis on everyday and lay life than given in earlier Buddhist traditions, that refuse to see nirvana as solely transcendent, emphasizing the radical immanence (right here, right now) of nirvana and its indistinguishability from the phenomenal world of samskara.

Indeed, development of non-hierarchical models may be seen not so much as contradicting the philosophia perennis, but rather as indicating that affirming the hierarchical ontology alone may be a one-sided and potentially dangerous mode of expression. Stressing, as it were, the more "masculine" qualities...
of differentiation, ascension to the heights, activity and movement, and transcendence. What may be most needed, and what may open the contemporary world to the obscured domains and topics of inquiry rightly pointed to by hierarchical ontologies, much more efficaciously than a resumption of a classical hierarchical ontology alone, is an exploration of the corresponding, more "feminine" qualities: integration and relationship, awareness of the "ground," receptivity and openness, and immanence, the "always already" quality of enlightenment and liberation." Contemporary philosophical objections to hierarchical ontologies may, if we listen to them in a way different from the way they intend, only be pointing to the need for such balance of qualities. A complete trans-personal theory, appropriate to our time, must integrate both sets of qualities, once again and, in a way, for the first time. It must, in other words, explore both the truth and the limits of the claims of a hierarchical ontology.

NOTES


I will continue to use the term "perennial philosophy" despite certain problems with that term, noted by Smith when he justified his preference for the term, "primordial tradition." See Smith (1976), p. x. See also Nasr (1981). I will understand the term to refer to the approach which makes the claims considered below, and employ the term mostly because of its wide use elsewhere.

2 The clearest brief expression of Wilber's theory can be found in his discussion of "The hierarchy of structural organization," in his (1984b) A sociable God (Boulder, CO: Shambhala), pp. 19-33.


4 Smith's model is presented in his (1976) Forgotten truth, especially pp. 34–95, as well as briefly in his (1982) Beyond the post-modern mind (New York: Crossroad), pp. 32-57. It should be noted that Smith readily admits the clear metaphorical character of this schema. See Smith (1976), pp. 19-22.

Ken Wilber (1983) has again given a pioneering transpersonal articulation of many of these problems in his *Eye to eye* (Garden City, NY: Anchor), particularly in 'Eye to eye' (pp. 1-37) and 'The problem of proof' (pp. 39-51). Many of the same problems have received a clear treatment from a hermeneutical or interpretive point of view in the work of Apel, Habermas, and Taylor, and others. See, for instance, Karl-Otto Apel (1977), "The a priori of communication and the foundation of the humanities," in Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy (eds.), *Understanding and social inquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press), pp. 292-315; Jürgen Habermas (1971), *Knowledge and human interests* (Boston: Beacon); and Charles Taylor (1971) "Interpretation and the sciences of man," *Review of Metaphysics*, 25, 3-34, 45-51. See also the bibliography and the other sources collected in the Dallmayr and McCarthy volume.

See especially the collections of essays edited by Steven Katz: (1978a) *Mysticism and philosophical analysis* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press), and (1983) *Mysticism and religious tradition* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press). Katz (1978b) makes the strong claim, in his "Language, epistemology, and mysticism" (pp. 21-74 of the first collection), that there "is no philosophia perennis, Huxley and many others notwithstanding" (p. 24).

Ken Wilber seems much more careful (and helpful) on the first methodological point (clarifying the nature of "structures"), than on the second point (respecting the particularity of different contexts). We should also remember that the caution usually exhibited by scholars of religion on these points often betrays their own framework (and predicament). They seem to assume it rather unlikely relativism between religious traditions, and exhibit an inability to thematize what is humanly common. Perhaps the contrast here is between an excessive universalism (seemingly Wilber's tendency), and an excessive relativism, with the truth somehow and somewhere through and between such a pair.

Ken Wilber's examination of what he calls the "pre-trans fallacy," as well the work of John Engler, are very helpful on this point. See Wilber, "The pre-trans fallacy," in his (1983), pp. 201-246; and Jack Engler (1984), "Therapeutic aims in psychotherapy and meditation: Developmental stages in the representation of self," *J. of Transpersonal Psychology*, 16, 25-61.


On the loss of the wisdom dimension in philosophy, see Jacob Needleman (1982), *The heart of philosophy* (New York: Knopf). The model of ascent is perhaps clearest in classical philosophers such as Plato and Plotinus.

I am using the concept of "validity" in an inclusive manner, to cover more strictly "cognitive" questions of "truth," as well as more normative questions of "rightness." In other words, I am not assuming a radical split between cognitive and normative matters in terms of being able to be "rationally grounded," nor am I foreclosing the possibility of speaking of modes of validity other than those thematized in contemporary discourse.

Some of the key criticisms of positivist philosophy of natural science include: W.V. Quine, "Two dogmas of empiricism," in his (1961) *From a logical point of...*


15For instance, much of Heidegger's well-known critique of metaphysics seems directed more at a kind of "school" metaphysics than at authentic versions of the perennial philosophy. For an account of this critique, see Hubert Dreyfus and John Haugeland (1978), "Husserl and Heidegger: Philosophy's last stand," in Michael Murray (Ed.), *Heidegger and modern philosophy* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press), pp. 222-238.

16This position is still maintained by the contemporary empiricist philosopher Quine, who writes that scientific theory (i.e., all of knowledge) "stands proudly and notoriously aloof from value judgments." See his (1973) *The roots of reference* (La Salle, IL: Open Court), here p. 49, as well as his (1981) "On the nature of moral values," in his *Theories and things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press), pp. 55-66.


19Thisis Quine'S view. Metaphysics has meaning but only when understood as the collection of those statements which are most general and abstract, and most isolated from any contact with "reality," See Romanos (1983), chap. 2. Some contemporary writers on metaphysics and religion have implicitly accepted an empiricist framework and thus defended a "necognitivist" view of the claims of those endeavors, even though the classical traditions (and certainly the perennial philosophy) almost always make emphatic truth and reality claims. See on this, John Hick (1983), *Philosophy of religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 3rd ed.), chaps. 6-7.


Nietzsche writes: "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; . . . to be truthful means using the customary metaphors—in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to a fixed convention," See "On truth and lie in an extra-moral sense," in Nietzsche (1954), pp. 46-47. We can note a strong similarity here to the Buddhist critique of the link between conception, reification, and ignorance. See, for example, Bhikkhu NalJlananda (1971), *Concept and reality in early Buddhist thought* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society); and Jeffrey Hopkins (1983), *Meditation on emptiness* (London: Wisdom).


For a concise version of the view that hierarchical ontologies (with Plato and Jung taken as basic exemplars) are inherently anti-life and anti-woman, see Naomi Goldenberg (1985), "Archetypal theory and the separation of mind and body: Reason enough to turn to Freud." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 1*, 55-72. Rosemary Ruether (1983) writes: "An ecological-feminist theology of nature must rethink the whole Western theological tradition of the hierarchical chain of being and command, . . . It must unmask the structures of social domination, male over female, owner over worker that mediate this domination of nonhuman nature. Finally, it must question the model of hierarchy that starts with non-material spirit (God) as the source of the chain of being and continues down to nonspiritual 'matter' as the bottom of the chain of being . . . " See her *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a feminist theology* (Boston: Beacon), here p. 85.


It should be said, and I will return to this point in the last section, that Habermas' critique of metaphysics (and religion) and the parallel critique by feminists and social ecologists (that metaphysics is ineradicably related through its hierarchical expressions to the domination of women and nature), is at least some social theorists, who would accept the root norms related to the critiques, who would argue rather that there is no basic contradiction between metaphysical (and religious) approaches and such norms, but rather that the full expression of metaphysics can be integrated with these norms, indeed permits their most complete expression. For these latter theorists, the project is more one of redressing an imbalance, than of totally overcoming a whole tradition.

This is particularly true of many attempting to develop metaphysical, theological, and spiritual forms appropriate to feminism, and to a "deep" ecology that would radically alter the traditional understanding of the relation of humans and non-human nature, rather than develop further the in some ways still hierarchical model of "stewardship."

For a discussion of the esoteric/exoteric distinction, see Huston Smith's (1984) introduction to Schuon (1984), as well as chaps. 2 and 3 Schuon's *Esoterism as principle and all way* (Bedfont, England: Perennial Books); and Nasr (1981), especially pp. 77-78.
28Another way of understanding this distortion, which I will not explore here, would be to speak of an imbalance of the masculine and feminine qualities in the realm of spirituality, particularly an excess of the more "masculine" spiritual mode of transcendence (of body, emotion, sexuality, earth, community, and society), and a lack of the more "feminine" spiritual mode of "groundedness" and integration of these aspects of human experience.

29Understanding such "distortions" seems vital to understanding better some of the recent "scandals" involving spiritual teachers, most of them attempting to transmit Asian traditions in the Western context.

30The claim that the differentiation of the various "cultural value spheres" helps to structure the "modern" age is central to the work of Max Weber and has been developed in a contemporary form by Habermas. See Habermas' (1984) treatment of Weberian themes, pp. 143-271. Whereas Habermas sees this process as mostly positive, Nasr (1981, chap. 1) treats its negative aspects. (Weber himself remained ambivalent.)

31The first strategy has been followed (from a hermeneutical point of view) by Gadamer and Habermas, following something like a Kantian model of identifying the basic structures of different modes of experience. The second strategy has been followed by Habermas, Apel, and others.

It is important for those working on the philosophical foundations of transpersonal psychology to remember these two modes of arguments when developing their claims, which in part will involve showing the limits of overly reductionistic hermeneutical positions and arguments. Although such a hermeneutical critique of empiricism is now widely accepted, empiricists are quick to point out that the core hermeneutical concepts and assumptions cannot be argued for without some kind of (to them suspicious) "transcendental" argument outlining basic categories, and modes of inquiry and action.


33Again, it is only in the modern world that this epistemology has been so firmly differentiated from other basic types on such a large social scale. See again Habermas (1984) for an analysis of such differentiation. Habermas apparently believes that such differentiation is the last word. Arguably, however, such differentiation now requires "integration" through recourse to higher levels.

34Of course, not all perennialists find these objections worth taking seriously. See, for instance, Smith's (1976, pp. 118 ff) and Nasr's (1981, pp. 233 ff) criticisms of any notion of social evolution; such a notion is commonly the guiding assumption for what) have called critical social theory, as well as being conspicuously present in Wilber's work.

35Such considerations are largely missing from the writings of perennialists, with the exception of the work of Ken Wilber. See Ken Wilber (1984b), chaps. 3, 4, and 8.

36Some of those whose work I have identified with these three modes of objections, such as that of Nietzsche and Heidegger, have elements of a hierarchical ontology. Most of the rest of those cited do not.

37I have carried out this argument in the context of Habermas' critique of metaphysics and religion, in Donald Rothberg (in press), "Rationality and religion in Habermas' recent work: Some remarks on the relation between critical theory and the phenomenology of religion," Philosophy and Social Criticism.

38This problem, by the way, is also present for empiricist denials of metaphysics, as Quine's work suggests. See, on this point, Romanos (1983), chap. 1.

40Many of the important exceptions to this generality seem to be closely connected with "pre-civilizational" understandings of the sacred, the self, and society. We might think of Tantric movements in India and Tibet, or of the tribal nature of Judaism, which has reflected at times rather different attitudes toward the body and society.

41I thank Len Bowman for suggesting this interpretation of Bonaventure.

42On some aspects of these questions, see James Cutsinger (1985), "The role of the feminine in the perennialist critique of modern thought" (unpublished manuscript).

REFERENCES


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