

## THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY REVISITED

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*ABSTRACT:* This essay critically examines the perennialist metaphysic endorsed in most transpersonal works. After a historic overview of the idea of a perennial philosophy, the modern debate between perennialist and contextualist scholars in the study of mysticism is briefly reviewed. It is suggested that the perennial vision stems from an a priori commitment to a nondual monistic metaphysics, is hostage of objectivism and essentialism, and is prone to dogmatism and intolerance. The author then shows that perennialism and contextualism share certain complementary Cartesian-Kantian assumptions that force spirituality into limiting molds, and concludes suggesting the need for a vision of human spirituality that integrates the merits of perennialism and contextualism while eschewing their shortcomings.

Transpersonal studies are usually characterized as disciplines independent of any particular religious tradition, philosophical school, or world view (e.g., Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). However, the philosophical foundations of transpersonal theory have generally been associated with the perennial philosophy (e.g., Hutchins, 1987; Rothberg, 1986; Valle, 1989; Wilber, 1990, 1995), and the spiritual universalism typical of perennialism pervades both early and modern transpersonal scholarship (e.g., Grof, 1988, 1998; Harman, 1988; Maslow, 1970; Vaughan, 1982; Wilber, 1977, 1995; Wittine, 1989).

According to Wilber (1994), for example, "the aim of transpersonal psychology ... is to give a psychological presentation of the perennial philosophy and the Great Chain of Being" (p. x). Vaughan (1982), one of the leaders of the transpersonal movement, also asserts that the transpersonal perspective "has its roots in the ancient perennial philosophy" (p. 38), and "recognizes the transcendental unity of all religions and sees the unity in the mystical core of every spiritual tradition" (p. 37). Likewise, whereas Hutchins (1987) presents transpersonal psychology as a contemporary exploration of the perennial philosophy, Wittine (1989) defines transpersonal psychotherapy as "an approach to healing/growth that aims to bridge the Western psychological tradition ... and the world's perennial philosophy" (p. 269). And one of the main goals of Grof's (1998) latest work is to show that "modern consciousness research has generated important data that support the basic tenets of the perennial philosophy" (p. 3).

Only in recent years have a few transpersonal authors begun to recognize the tacit nature of this association between transpersonal theory and the perennial philosophy.

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Discussing the assumptions of current transpersonal definitions, for example, Walsh and Vaughan (1993) write: "Exploring the precise relationship between transpersonal psychology and the perennial philosophy is an important task for future research, but assuming the nature of the relationship in current definitions may be premature" (p. 201).

In this spirit, the main objective of this essay is to critically examine the adhesion of transpersonal theory to a perennialist metaphysics. First, I offer a historical overview of the idea of a perennial philosophy and a typology of the main varieties of perennialism. Second, I briefly review the contemporary debate between contextualist and perennialist scholars in the modern study on mysticism. Third, I discuss several fundamental difficulties shared by all varieties of perennialism. Finally, I unpack a set of complementary epistemological assumptions that constrain both perennialism and contextualism, and I suggest the need for a vision of human spirituality that integrates their valid insights while eschewing their shortcomings.

#### THE IDEA OF A PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY

The idea of a perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*) has received different articulations throughout the history of Western philosophy. The search for a universal, permanent, and all-encompassing philosophy can be traced to the Neoplatonism of Philo of Alexandria or the Platonic-Christian synthesis of St. Augustine. However, it is not until the Renaissance that we find the term "perennial philosophy" explicitly used in philosophical circles (Loemker, 1973). More precisely, it was Agostino Steuco (1497-1546), bishop of Kisamos and librarian of the Vatican, who coined this term to refer to the *prisca theologia* or *philosophia prisca* of Marsilio Ficino, a unifying philosophical system based on a synthesis of Platonic principles and Christian doctrines. Thus, the modern notion of a perennial philosophy should be regarded as a product of the ecumenical interest of the Christian tradition in the Neoplatonic Renaissance (Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Nicolas de Cusa, Agostino Steuco, etc.) in finding unity and harmony amidst a multiplicity of conflicting world views (Schmitt, 1966).

Throughout the history of philosophy, the term "perennial philosophy" (*philosophia perennis*) was also used as a synonym for Scholasticism and Thomism; as the final goal of philosophy by Leibniz; as the regulative ideal of philosophical practice by Jaspers; and as a world philosophy, synthesis of East and West, by Radhakrishnan (Collins, 1962; Loemker, 1973). Common to all these conceptions, however, is the idea that a philosophical current exists that has endured through centuries, and that is able to integrate harmoniously all traditions in terms of a *single Truth* that underlies the apparent plurality of world views. According to the defenders of the perennial philosophy, this unity in human knowledge stems from the existence of a single ultimate reality that can be apprehended by the human intellect under certain special conditions.

Although already reintroduced in the West first by Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society founded in 1875, and later by Swami Vivekananda in his influential address to the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 (Clarke, 1997; Faivre, 1994), it was not until the publication of Aldous Huxley's (1945) *The*

*Perennial Philosophy* that perennialist ideas reached the masses and became popular beyond esoteric and academic elites. As is well known, Huxley (1945) described the perennial philosophy as "the metaphysics that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being" (p. vii).

What characterizes Huxley's perennialism, as well as the one of the so-called traditionalists such as Rene Guenon, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, or Frithjof Schuon (see Quinn, 1997), is the conviction that the "single Truth" of the perennial philosophy can be found at the heart of the mystical teachings of the world's religious traditions. Although with different emphases, all these authors claim that whereas the exoteric beliefs of the religious traditions are assorted and at times even incompatible, their esoteric or mystical dimension reveals an essential unity that transcends this doctrinal pluralism. This is so, traditionalists argue, because mystics of all ages and places can transcend the different conceptual schemes provided by their cultures, languages, and doctrines and consequently access a direct intuitive understanding of reality (*gnosis*). Therefore, perennialists generally distinguish between mystical experience, which is universal and timeless, and its interpretation, which is culturally and historically determined. According to this view, the same mystical experience of the nondual Ground of Being would be interpreted as emptiness (*sunyata*) by a Mahayana Buddhist, as Brahman by an Advaita Vedantin, as the union with God by a Christian, or as an objectless absorption (*iasamprajnatasamadhi*) by a practitioner of Patanjali's yoga. In all cases, the experience is the same, the interpretation different.

But what is this "single Truth" about which all contemplative traditions supposedly converge? According to modern defenders of the mystical version of the perennial philosophy, such as Nasr (1989, 1993), Schuon (1984a), and Smith (1976, 1987, 1989), the doctrinal core of the perennial philosophy is the belief that Absolute Spirit, Pure Consciousness, or the Universal Mind, is the fundamental essence of both human nature and the totality of reality. Although there may be some descriptive or interpretive divergences, all contemplative traditions regard reality as originated by, and ontologically the same as, a simultaneously immanent and transcending Spirit that is identical in essence to human innermost consciousness. This Spirit constitutes the ultimate referent for what can be regarded as real, true, and valuable.

Other major principles frequently derived from this primordial Truth include involutory cosmology, hierarchical ontology and axiology, and hierarchical epistemology (see, e.g., Nasr, 1989, 1993; Quinn, 1997; Rothberg, 1986; Smith, 1976, 1989; Wilber, 1977, 1990). Let us briefly look at them one by one: (1) *Involuntary cosmology* is the postulate that the physical universe is the result of a process of emanation, restriction, or involution of Spirit. In other words, Spirit is prior to matter, and matter has evolved from It. (2) *Hierarchical ontology and axiology* refer to the vision of reality as composed by different layers or levels of being that are hierarchically organized (e.g., matter, mind, and spirit)-the so-called Great Chain of Being. In this hierarchy, the higher levels are those closer to Spirit and are regarded as more real, more causally effective, and more valuable than the lower levels. And (3) *hierarchical epistemology* is the theory of knowledge according to which knowledge of the higher realms of

the hierarchical ontology is more essential, reveals more about reality, and is therefore authoritative concerning knowledge of the lower ones. That is, knowledge of Spirit (contemplation, gnosis) is more true and valuable than knowledge of the mental and physical levels (rational and empirical knowledge, respectively).

### *Varieties of Perennialism*

For the sake of clarity, I have been talking about mystical perennialism as a monolithic approach. However, I would like to suggest here that it should be more accurately regarded as a family of interpretative models. In this section, I briefly review the main perennialist models developed in the fields of comparative mysticism, cross-cultural philosophy of religion, and transpersonal studies.

While considering the following classification, readers should bear in mind that there is a substantial degree of overlap between models and that some of the authors quoted as representatives of a particular model could have also been situated in support of others. Also, it is important to notice that there may be important differences between authors grouped under the same roof. Without more provisos, what follows is an outline of five perennialist models: Basic, Esotericist, Perspectivist, Typological, and Structuralist.

*1. Basic.* The first *and* most simple form of perennialism, maintains that there is only *one path* and *one goal* for spiritual development. According to this model, spiritual paths and goals are everywhere the same, and descriptive differences either reflect an underlying similarity or are the result of the different languages, religious doctrines, and cultural backgrounds. The point here is, then, that although mysticism is phenomenologically the same, nonexperiential variables may affect its interpretation and description (e.g., Huxley, 1945; Smart, 1980) (Figure 1).

*2. Esotericist.* The second form of perennialism while admitting *many paths*, holds that there is only *one goal* common to all spiritual traditions. As in the previous model, this goal, although universal, may have been differently interpreted and described according to the specific doctrines of the various mystical traditions. Although not exclusive to this school, this view is usually associated with traditionalists such as Schuon (1984a) or Smith (1976, 1989), who claim that the spiritual unity of humankind can be found only in the esoteric or mystical core of religious traditions and not in their exoteric or doctrinal forms. Echoing this esotericist tenet, Grof (1998) points out that: "Genuine religion is universal, all-inclusive, and all-encompassing. It has to transcend specific culture-bound archetypal images and focus on the ultimate source of all forms" (p. 24). The guiding root metaphors of this model are the images of different rivers reaching the same ocean, different pathways leading to the peak of the same mountain, or different cascades of water issuing from a single spring (Figure 2).

*3. Perspectivist.* The third form of perennialism, although conceding the existence of both *many paths* and *many goals* in mysticism, conceives these goals as different perspectives, dimensions, or manifestations of the same Ground of Being or Ultimate Reality. Grof (1998, p. 26ff), for example, explains the diversity of spiritual ultimates (a personal God, an impersonal Brahman, sunyata, the Void, the Tao, Pure

FIGURE 1  
BASIC

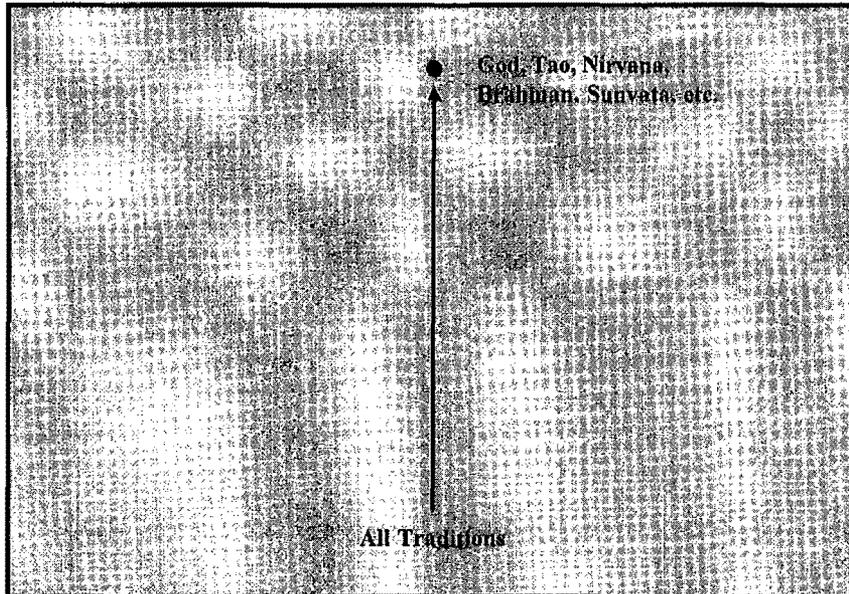
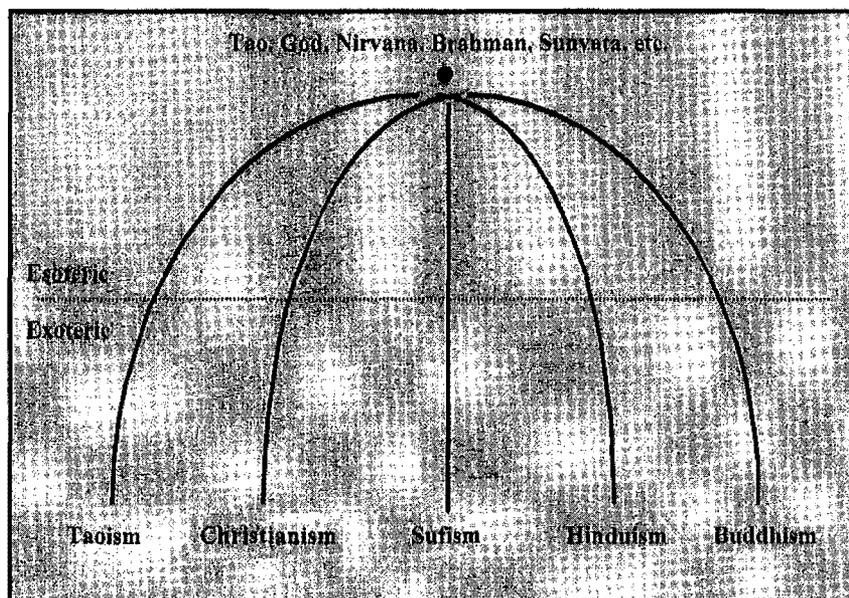


FIGURE 2  
ESOTERICIST

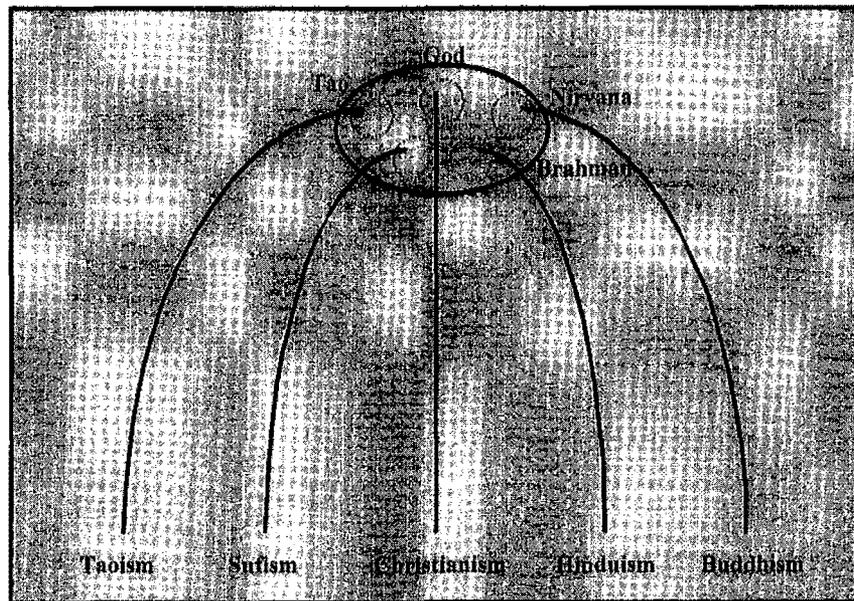


Consciousness etc.) as different ways to experience the same supreme cosmic principle. The title of the essay, *One Is the Spirit and Many Its Human Reflections*, by Nasr (1993), is characteristic of this approach. This position can take a Kantian outlook, as in the case of Hick (1992), who suggests that conflicting spiritual knowledge claims and world views result from different historically shaped phenomenal awarenesses of the same noumenal reality. The guiding root metaphor here is the popular Sufi story of several blind men touching different parts of the same elephant, each insisting that their description accurately depicts the whole (Figure 3).

4. *Typological* Closely related to universal perspectivism is the postulation of a *limited number of types of mysticism* that run across the different traditions. e.g., Otto's (1932) outward and inward, Stace's (1960) extrovertive and introvertive, or Zaehner's (1970) nature, monistic, and theistic. This model is also perennialist insofar as these types of mysticism are claimed to be independent of time, place, culture, and religion. Typological universalism generally takes a perspectivist stance and affirms that the different types of mysticism are diverse expressions or manifestations of a single kind of spiritual experience or ultimate reality.

5. *Structuralist*. This model understands the many mystical *paths* and *goals* as contextual manifestations (surface structures) of underlying universal patterns (deep structures) that ultimately constitute *one path* and *one goal* paradigmatic for all spiritual traditions. Already implicit in Jung's distinction between noumenal and phenomenal archetypes, and in Eliade's studies on myth, a two-level structuralist account of universal religion and mysticism was first explicitly proposed by Anthony and Robbins

FIGURE 3  
PERSPECTIVIST

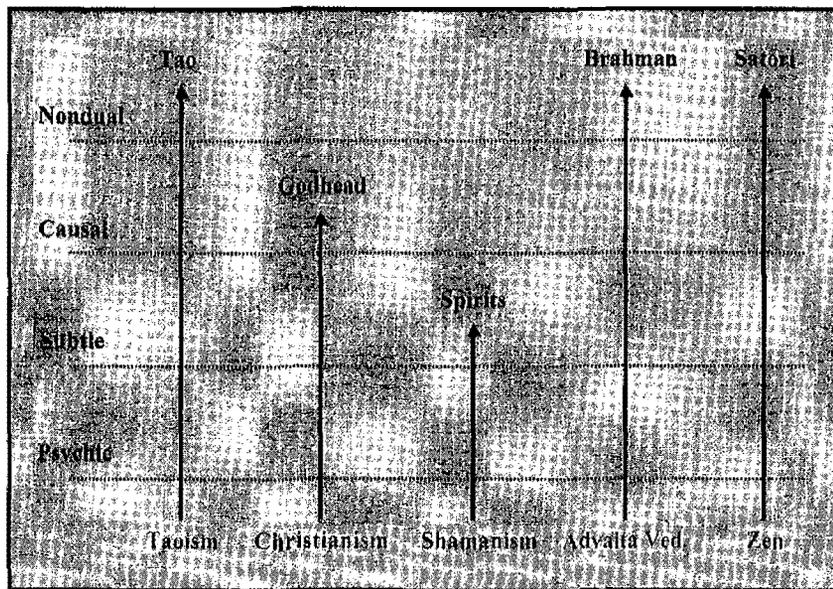


(Anthony, 1982; Anthony & Robbins, 1975). The structuralist approach to perennialism took a developmental and evolutionary turn in transpersonal studies in the hands of Wilber. According to Wilber (1984, 1995, 1996, 1997), although historical and cultural factors determine the surface manifestations of spiritual forms, human spirituality is ultimately universal, as constituted by an evolutionary hierarchy of invariant deep structures or levels of spiritual insight: psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual. A metaphor used by Wilber to depict this model is a ladder whose rungs correspond to the different spiritual levels (Figure 4).

CURRENT TRENDS IN THE MODERN STUDY OF MYSTICISM

Classic definitions of mysticism explain mystical knowledge in terms of an identification with, or direct experience of, the ultimate Ground of Being, which is variously described in capitalized terms such as God, the Transcendent, the Absolute, the Noumenal, Ultimate Reality, or, more simply, the Real (e.g., Carmody & Carmody, 1996; Hick, 1992; Huxley, 1945; Schuon, 1984a; Underhill, 1955). These definitions are typically perennialist insofar as they assume the existence of a single, ready-made ultimate reality that is directly accessed, partially or totally, by mystics of all kinds and traditions. If mystical knowledge is direct and ultimate reality is One, so the reasoning goes, mystical experiences must either be phenomenologically identical, or, if different, correspond to different dimensions, perspectives, or levels of this singular spiritual ultimate. The perennialist logic rests then on three fundamental premises: (1) There is a single referent for all mysticisms, (2) this referent corresponds to the ultimate nature of reality or the Divine, and (3) mystics can directly access this single ultimate reality.

FIGURE 4  
STRUCTURALIST



These three interrelated assumptions have been seriously challenged by a number of scholars of modern comparative mysticism, who share an emphasis on the importance of contextual determinants of mystical insights and experiences. Let us briefly look at some of the main features of this debate between perennialists and contextualists.

Ever since the publication of Steven Katz's (1978a) seminal work, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, the contemporary conversation on mysticism has orbited around the issues of the universality versus plurality of mystical aims and experiences, the direct versus mediated nature of mystical knowledge, and the ontological status of the spiritual realities that mystics claim to access. Although with different emphases, Katz and other contextualist scholars claim that *all mystical experiences*, as any other human experience, *are mediated, shaped, and constituted by the language, culture, doctrinal beliefs, and soteriological expectations of the traditions in which they occur*. What contextual and conceptual factors influence, then, is not only the interpretation of mystical states (as perennialist happily admit), but also their very phenomenological content: "The experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience" (Katz, 1978b, p. 26). Therefore, for contextualists, there is <sup>110a</sup> variously interpreted universal mystical experience, but at least as many distinct types as contemplative traditions (Almond, 1982). What is more, these types of mysticism do not necessarily correspond to different dimensions or levels of a single spiritual ultimate, but may be independent contemplative goals determined by particular practices, and whose meaning and soteriological power largely depend on their wider religious and metaphysical frameworks. Consequently, as Katz's (1978b) original essay concludes, "'God' can be 'God,' 'Brahman' can be 'Brahman' and *nirvana* can be *nirvana* without any reductionistic attempt to equate the concept of 'God' with that of 'Brahman', or 'Brahman' with *nirvana*" (p. 66). Or, as he forcibly puts it some years later:

Straightforwardly, what is argued is that, for example, the Hindu mystic does not have an experience of *x* which he describes in the, to him, familiar language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience; his experience is not an unmediated experience of *x* but is itself the at least partially preformed anticipated Hindu experience of Brahman. Again, the Christian mystic does not experience some unidentified reality which he then conveniently labels 'God', but rather has the at least partially prefigured Christian experiences of God, or Jesus, and so forth. Moreover, as one might anticipate, it is my contention, *based on what evidence there is*, that the Hindu experience of Brahman and the Christian experience of God are not the same. (Katz, 1983b pp. 4-5)

Needless to say, such a direct threat to the widely cherished idea of a common spiritual Ground for humankind did not go unnoticed or unchallenged. On the contrary, the writings of Katz and his collaborators set the stage for two decades of lively, and often heated, debate between a plethora of perennialist- and contextualist-oriented scholars. Although I cannot offer here an exhaustive review of this debate, it may be helpful to give at least a brief summary of its main features.

In the perennialist camp, four main lines of reasoning are usually developed. First, some perennialist authors argue for the existence of a cross-cultural "pure consciousness experience" that, due to its nonconceptual nature, must be both immediate and universal (Evans, 1989; Forman, 1990, 1998). Second, they defend the deconstructive

nature of the mystical path, that is to say, a view of mystical practices such as meditation as processes of "deautomatization" (Deikman, 1966) or deconditioning of socially learned conceptual schemes and cognitive structures through which we apprehend ourselves and the world (Brown, 1986; Forman, 1990, 1999; Rothberg, 1989). Third, perennialists resort to scriptural data that apparently contradict the contextualist thesis; for example, if all spiritual experiences are molded by doctrinal beliefs and expectations, the unexpected and sometimes heretical insights reported by many mystics (such as Meister Eckhart, Isaac Luria, or even the Buddha) should not occur (Forman, 1990; Perovich, 1985; Stoeber, 1992). Finally, they accuse contextualists of both working upon questionable epistemological assumptions (e.g., that *all* experience, including the mystical, is mediated), and being self-contradictory: If all knowledge is constructed, the contextualist thesis is also a construct without universal or absolute value, and if so, why should we prefer it? (Evans, 1989; Rothberg, 1989; Wilber, 1995).

Contextualist authors, for their part, typically argue for their position along one or several of the following lines. First, they offer detailed textual and historical accounts that indicate the radical contextuality of mystical practices and aims and the resulting phenomenological differences among mystical experiences (Fenton, 1995; Girmello, 1978, 1983; Hollenback, 1996; Katz, 1978b). The primary goal of these analyses is to show how mystical experiences and referents are progressively shaped and constituted through specific doctrinal commitments and practices (e.g., Klein, 1986). Second, they describe the mystical path as a reconstructive process aimed at the reconditioning of cognitive structures and conceptual schemes that allow mystics to apprehend self and world according to their doctrinal beliefs (Gimello, 1978; Katz, 1978b). Third, contextualists hold that there is an inescapable reciprocity between experience and interpretation, where "all experience becomes *interpreted* experience, while all interpretation is mediated by experience" (Dupre, 1996, pp. 3-4). No experience comes with its interpretation, and since the lenses to understand the meaning of spiritual experiences always derive from some external (and usually doctrinal) framework, mysticism is not in a privileged epistemological position (Jones, 1993; Proudfoot, 1985). Fourth, they challenge the existence of "pure consciousness experiences" and assert that, even if such contentless states exist, they may not be cognitive of any ultimate or divine reality (Bagger, 1991; Jones, 1993). Finally, some contextually oriented authors accuse perennialist thinking of being ideological, authoritarian, patriarchal, and overlooking the spirituality of women, indigenous people, and other marginal groups (Heron, 1998; Jantzen, 1994; Kremer, 1996; Raphael, 1994).

This is not the place to assess the value of each one of these arguments. Later on, I will suggest that both perennialism and contextualism are rooted in interrelated ontological and epistemological presuppositions, but first I would like to discuss certain fundamental problems and assumptions that lurk behind all types of perennialism.

#### THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS OF THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY

In this section, I want to point out that perennialism: (1) is an a priori philosophical stance, (2) privileges a nondual monistic metaphysics, (3) is geared to an objectivist epistemology, (4) leans towards essentialism, and consequently (5) tends towards dogmatism and intolerance in spite of its avowedly inclusivist stance.

### *Perennialism Is an A Priori Philosophical Stance*

What I am suggesting here is that the common core of spirituality espoused by the perennial philosophy is not the conclusion of cross-cultural research or interreligious dialogue, but an inference deduced from the premise that there is a transcendent unity of reality, a single Absolute that underlies the multiplicity of phenomena and towards which all spiritual traditions are directed.

The evidence provided by perennialists to support their claim of a common goal for all spiritual traditions is both striking and revealing. Perennialists generally claim that the transcendent unity of religions can only be intuitively apprehended and confirmed by an organ or faculty known as the Intellect (also called Eye of the Heart or Eye of the Soul). According to perennialist thinkers, the Intellect participates in the Divine reality and, being therefore universal and unaffected by historical constraints, is able to objectively see "things as they really are" through direct metaphysical intuition (*gnosis*) (Schuon, 1997; Smith, 1987, 1993). To be sure, to postulate intuitive forms of knowing beyond the structures of ordinary subject-centered and communicative reason is a bold and salutary step for which perennialists should be commended. However, to claim that this intuitive knowledge necessarily reveals a perennialist metaphysics is a self-serving move that cannot escape its own circularity. To be genuine, we are told, metaphysical intuitions must be universal. And this is so, we are assured, because universality is the distinctive mark of what is True. In Schuon's (1984a) words: "The [perennial] truths just expressed are not the exclusive possession of any school or individual; were it otherwise they would not be truths, for these cannot be invented, but must necessarily be known in every integral traditional civilization" (p. xxxiii). And he adds: "Intelligence is either individual or universal; it is either reason or Intellect" (p. 152). But then, the perennialist discourse boils down to saying that either your metaphysical intuition confirms the Primordial Truth, or it is false, partial, or belonging to a lower level of spiritual insight. By means of its own circular logic, the perennial philosophy has made itself invulnerable to criticism (cf. Dean, 1984).

In the wake of these aporias, a more cogent explanation for the insight into the transcendent unity of religions is that it stems from an a priori commitment to the perennial truth, a commitment that, after years of traditionally oriented study and spiritual practice, is gradually transformed into a direct metaphysical intuition that grants the believer a sense of unquestionable certitude. According to Nasr (1996), for example, the goal of perennialist hermeneutics is not to study what the diverse spiritual traditions say about themselves, but "to see beyond the veil of multiplicity... that unity which is the origin of all sacred forms" (p. 18), and to discover "the truth that shines forth within each authentic religious universe manifesting the Absolute" (p. 18). This task can be accomplished, Nasr (1996) asserts, only by focusing on the esoteric dimension of the religious traditions, the hierarchy of levels of reality, the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon, and other perennialist postulates. In other words, perennialist hermeneutics assumes what it is supposed to discover and prove. This circularity is apparent in Quinn's (1997) description of the hermeneutic of the tradition: "Thus, for Guenon and Coomaraswamy, it was an absolute and indispensable requisite to believe a profound religious or metaphysical doctrine or principle in order to understand it" (p. 25). And this is probably why perennialist thinkers usually characterize faith as a

faculty ontologically situated between ordinary reason and the Intellect (e.g., Schuon, 1984b). Needless to say, for perennialist thinkers, "faith is a profound and total 'yes' to the One, which is both absolute and infinite, transcendent and immanent" (Schuon, 1981, p. 238).

Space does not allow me to adequately discuss here the important question of whether the superiority of perennialism (or of any other metaphysical system) can be established by appealing to the phenomenological content of spiritual experiences. As we have seen, the position of traditional perennialists is that the truth of the 'perennial philosophy can only be seen and validated, not by mystical experiences, but through a special type of abstract metaphysical intuition. As Huston Smith (1987) points out, for example, to justify the perennial philosophy, we should "not appeal to experience at all" but rather focus on "doctrines [that] derive from metaphysical intuitions... that the perennial philosophy appeals [to]. To discern the truth of metaphysical axiom one need not have an experience" (p. 554).<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, it would seem that, in the same way that alternative or even logically incompatible theories can fit all possible evidence—as the Duhem-Quine principle of underdetermination of theory by evidence shows (Duhem, 1953; Quine, 1953)—alternative metaphysical systems can fit all possible spiritual experiences. If this is the case, the prospects for showing the privileged truth of the perennial philosophy through an appeal to experience are, I think, quite poor.

#### *Perennialism Privileges a Nondual Monistic Metaphysic*

As we have seen, perennialist models typically assume the existence of a universal spiritual reality that is the Ground of all that is and of which the contemplative traditions are an expression. In spite of their insistence on the ineffable and unqualifiable nature of this Ground, however, perennialists consistently characterize it as Nondual, the One, or the Absolute. The perennialist Ground of Being, that is, strikingly resembles the Neoplatonic Godhead or the Advaitin Brahman. As Schuon (1981) admits, "the perspective of Sankara is one of the most adequate expressions possible of the *philosophic perennis* or sapiential esoterism" (p. 21). The Absolute of the perennial philosophy, far from being a neutral and truly unqualifiable Ground, is represented as supporting a nondual monistic metaphysics.

In transpersonal studies, both Grof's and Wilber's accounts of perennial philosophy closely follow this trend. Whereas Wilber (1995) situates an impersonal nondual Ground as the zenith of spiritual evolution, Grof (1998) describes the common core of all religious traditions as an Absolute Consciousness that, being identical in essence to human individual consciousness, creates an ultimately illusory material world through a process of involution. For both authors, this recognition confirms the truth of the essential message of the Hindu Upanishads: "Tattwarnasi" or "Thou are that", that is, the essential unity between the individual soul and the divine.'

Apart from the aforementioned exclusive intuitionism, the arguments offered by perennialist thinkers for this single Absolute are both a priori and circular. For example, perennialists often assert that, because multiplicity implies relativity, a plurality

of absolutes is both a logical and a metaphysical absurdity: "The absolute must of necessity be One and, in fact, *the* One as asserted by so many metaphysicians over the ages" (Nasr, 1996, p. 19). This commitment to a monistic metaphysics is closely related to the perennialist defense of the universality of mysticism. As Perovich (1985), a perennialist philosopher, puts it: "The point [of the perennial philosophers] in insisting on the identity of mystical experiences was, after all, to bolster the claim that the most varied mystics have established contact with 'the one ultimate truth'" (p. 75).

### *Perennialism's Geared to an Objectivist Epistemology*

Admittedly, to charge the perennial philosophy with objectivism may sound surprising at first. After all, certain perennialist doctrines represent a serious challenge for objectivist standards, and perennialist thinkers have often contested the scientific view of valid knowledge as one anchored on an objective and detached rationality. On the one hand, the affirmation of a fundamental identity between human innermost subjectivity and the ultimate nature of objective reality obviously represents a formidable objection to the Cartesianism of natural science. On the other hand, perennialists have repeatedly stressed not only the existence of intuitive knowing (the "Eye of the Heart"), but also the centrality of the moral and affective dimensions of knowledge. Most of these challenges to scientism are well grounded, and perennialist philosophers should be credited for having anticipated them even decades before objectivism was exhausted in mainstream science and philosophy.

Nonetheless, the perennialist vision falls back into objectivism with its insistence that there is a pre-given ultimate reality that can be objectively known by the human Intellect (intuitive knowing). As Schuon (1981) states: "The prerogative of the human state is objectivity, the essential content of which is the Absolute" (p. 15). Although objectivity should not be understood as limited to the empirical and external, Schuon (1981) tells us that "knowledge is 'objective' when it is capable of grasping *the object as it is and not as it may be deformed by the subject*" (p. 15; italics added).

Of course, these assumptions make the perennial philosophy subject to all the anxieties and aporias of Cartesian consciousness, such as the false dichotomies between absolutism and relativism or between objectivism and subjectivism. This relapse leads perennialists to demonize and combat what now have become in their eyes the "horrors" of relativism and subjectivism (e.g., Schuon, 1984b; Smith, 1989). In the introduction to a contemporary perennialist anthology, for example, Stoddart (1994) writes: "The only antidote to the relative and the subjective is the absolute and the objective, and it is precisely these that are the contents of traditional philosophy or 'perennial wisdom' (*Sophia perennis*)" (p. 11). Or, in Schuon's (1984b) words: "We have to take our choice: either objective knowledge, absolute therefore in its own order, is possible, proving thereby that existentialism [subjectivism] is false; or else existentialism is true, but then its own promulgation is impossible, since in the existentialist universe there is no room for any intellection that is objective and stable" (p. 10). Paradoxically, these rigid dichotomies between the absolute and the relative, between the objective and the subjective, emerge only in the context of the very Cartesian epistemology that the perennial vision rightfully challenges (Ferrer, 1998).

### *Perennialism Leans toward Essentialism*

The perennialist attribution of a greater explanatory power or ontological status to what is common among religious traditions is problematic. The nature of this problem can be illustrated by the popular story of the woman who, observing her neighbor entering into an altered state of consciousness on three consecutive days, first with rum and water, then through fast breathing and water, and finally with nitrous oxide and water, concludes that the reason for his bizarre behaviors *was* the ingestion of water. The moral of the story, of course, is that what is essential or more explanatory in a set of phenomena is not necessarily what is most obviously common to them.

Furthermore, even if we could find an essential substratum to the different types of mystical awareness (such as, for example, "pure experience," "suchness" or "one taste"), it does not necessarily follow that this common ground should be the goal of all traditions, the most spiritually valuable aim, or *the* zenith of our spiritual efforts. Although it is certainly possible to find parallels across religious traditions, the key to the spiritually transforming power of a given tradition may lie in its own distinctive practices and understandings. The limitations of the following image notwithstanding, the perennialist agenda could be compared to the desire of an individual who enters a rustic Parisian bakery and, observing the variety of delicious croissants, baguettes, and coffee cakes displayed, insists that he wants to savor what is essential and common to all them, that is, flour. Like the many delicious flavors we can sample in a French bakery, however, the fundamental spiritual value and beauty of the various traditions may derive precisely from their unique creative solution to the transformation of the human condition. As Wittgenstein (1968) puts it, to find the "real" artichoke we do not need to divest it from its leaves.

### *Perennialism Tends toward Dogmatism and Intolerance*

These universalist and objectivist assumptions generally lead perennial philosophers to recede into dogmatism and intolerance toward different spiritual world views. As we have seen, the perennial philosophy conceives the different religious traditions as pathways directed to a single Absolute reality. In spite of the different metaphysical universes espoused by the contemplative traditions, perennialists insist that "there is only one metaphysic but many traditional languages through which it is expressed" (Nasr, 1985, p. 89).

But what about spiritual traditions that do not posit a metaphysical Absolute or single transcendent Reality? What about spiritual traditions that refuse to fit into the perennialist scheme? The perennialist solution to conflicting spiritual traditions is well known: Religious traditions and doctrines that do not accept the perennial vision are inauthentic, merely exoteric, or represent "lower levels" of insight in a hierarchy of spiritual revelations whose culmination is the perennial Truth. And because the perennialist Absolute is best depicted by a nondual monistic metaphysic, perennialists generally rank as lower those traditions that do not conform to nondualism or impersonal monism: Sankara's impersonal nondualism is closer to *the* Absolute than Ramanuja and Semitic personal monotheisms (Schuon, 1981), nondual traditions closer than theistic ones (Wilber, 1995), and so forth.

As we have seen, perennialists justify these rankings on the basis of metaphysical intuitions about the ultimate nature of the Absolute. We have already pointed out the inescapable circularity involved in this line of argumentation. The problems with this claim become even more apparent when we look at the spiritual history of humankind. Mystics from the most diverse times and places have reported metaphysical intuitions that not only did not conform to the perennialist cosmology, but also were fundamentally at odds with each other. Actually, generations of mystics from different traditions, and often from a single tradition, have debated metaphysical issues for centuries without substantial signs of agreement—the everlasting quarrels between Buddhist and Hindu contemplatives about the ultimate nature of the self and reality are well known in this regard (see, e.g., Chinchore, 1995). In addition, it is important to stress that these differences did not arise only among the "exoteric" representatives of the traditions (as perennialists often maintain), but among the contemplatives themselves. As any student of the history of religions well knows, for every ecumenically oriented mystic (actually the exception to the rule), there are dozens of exclusivist figures. To quote one paradigmatic example, witness Ramanuja's views on Sankara's Advaita Vedanta:

This entire theory rests on a fictitious foundation of altogether hollow and vicious arguments, incapable of being stated in definite logical alternatives, and devised by men who are destitute of these particular qualities which cause individuals to be chosen by the Supreme Person revealed in the Upanisads; whose intellects are darkened by the impressions of beginningless evil; and who thus have no insight into the nature of words and sentences, into the real purport conveyed by them, and into the procedure of sound argumentation, with all its methods depending on perception and the other means of knowledge—assisted by sound reasoning—have an insight into the true nature of things. (Thibaut, 1904, p. 39)

And this is just the prelude to more than 100 pages of attacks on the followers of Sankara (in the Thibaut translation).

Apart from abundant historical data, substantial disagreements among mystics are also evident in the contemporary interreligious monastic dialogue. In the recent Gethsemani encounter among Buddhist and Christian monastics, for example, important differences in their spiritual beliefs (on ultimate reality, on God, on grace, on intuition, etc.) were widely acknowledged as a source of mutual enrichment (Mitchell & Wiseman, 1997).

*The esotericist idea that mystics of all ages and places converge about metaphysical matters is a myth that must be laid to rest.* In contrast to the perennialist view, what the spiritual history of humankind suggests is that *spiritual doctrines and intuitions affected, shaped, and transformed each other, and that this mutual influence led to the unfolding of a variety of metaphysical world- rather than to one metaphysic and different languages.*

In this regard, it is interesting to note how the fields of comparative mysticism, cross-cultural philosophy of religion, East-West hermeneutics, and the interreligious dialogue, all of which started with universalistic assumptions and aspirations, gradually moved to more dialogical and pluralist approaches (see, e.g., Byrne, 1995; Clarke, 1997; Dean, 1995; Heim, 1995; Knitter, 1985; Vroom, 1989; Wiggins, 1996). The

following statement by Knitter illustrates the increasing awareness of a plurality of spiritual worlds emerging in the contemporary interreligious dialogue:

Like a newly married couple growing out of the first stages of infatuation into real living together, partners in religious sharing, as they get to know each other, soon arrive at the existential realization of how bewilderingly different they are. What had been initially experienced as similarities now become differing, even opposing, faces... One gradually becomes aware of the naivete and the downright danger of proclaiming a "common essence" or a "common core" within all the religions of the world... but right now, in the dust and dirt of the real world, we have to deal with the manyness, the differences, among the religions before we can ever contemplate, much less realize, their possible unity or oneness. (Wiggins, 1996, p. 86)

In the name of ecumenism and universal harmony, then, perennialists overlook the essential message and unique soteriological solution offered by the various spiritual traditions. By equating all spiritual goals with the insight into an Advaitin-like nonduality, the multiplicity of revelations is rendered accidental and the creative richness of each way of salvation is considered a historical and cultural artifact. Even though perennialists, to their credit, reject both the exclusivism of exotic believers and the inclusivism of sentimental ecumenism, their commitment to a nondual monistic metaphysic that is supposed to be Absolute, universal, and paradigmatic for all traditions is ultimately a return to exclusivism and intolerance. At the heart of this exclusivism is the claim that the perennial Truth is the superior view (i.e, capable of including all others). The associated intolerance does not lie in the perennialists' belief that other approaches, say pluralist or theistic, are "wrong," but in their conviction that they are "less right." As historian of religions Hanegraaff (1998) eloquently puts it, talking about contemporary perennialism:

"Perennialism "suffers from the same inner conflict *which* haunts universalist schemes generally. It is meant to be tolerant and inclusive because it encompasses all religious traditions, claiming that they all contain at least a core of truth; but it qualifies the actual diversity of faiths by pointing out that, whatever the believers may say, there is only one fundamental spiritual truth. Only those religious expressions which accept the perennialist premises can be regarded as "genuine." All this can be reduced to two brief and paradoxical formulations: New Age "perennialism" (like perennialism in general) cannot tolerate religious intolerance; and it sharply excludes all exclusivism from its own spirituality. (...) Religious tolerance on a relativistic basis, which accepts other religious perspectives in their full "otherness," is unacceptable because it sacrifices the very idea that there is a fundamental "truth." (pp, 329-330)

#### BEYOND PERENNIALISM AND CONTEXTUALISM

In the preceding pages, I have dealt with the problems of perennialism at length while offering a much briefer account of those of contextualism—the postmodern adversary of perennialism. This is because perennialism, not contextualism, has been the foundational philosophy of transpersonal psychology. Although these two approaches are often *seen* as opposed alternatives, I now want to argue that both perennialism and contextualism are actually shaped by a set of complementary epistemological assumptions.

### *The Cartesian Roots of Perennialism*

As we have seen, perennialists generally assume that there is a "pregiven" spiritual ultimate that can be "objectively" known by mystics of all traditions. A corollary of this assumption is the belief that this spiritual ultimate has certain pre-given features (e.g., nondual, monistic, impersonal) that are independent of human participation in it. Because consensus about such attributes is virtually absent among mystics (except perhaps, and vaguely enough, about its intrinsically benevolent nature), perennialists try to preserve the unity of mysticism by invoking perspectivist, hierarchical, and/or structuralist views.

A drawback shared by all these approaches, however, is that they import to spiritual realities the notorious Myth of the Given of empiricist science, and with it, most of its insurmountable problems. The appeal to the "given" has been diversely articulated throughout the history of Western philosophy, for example, in terms of "sense-data," "objects of the world," or "immediate experiences." In the context of our discussion, by the Myth of the Given, I understand the following two interrelated theses: (1) The world has pre-given features independent of any cognitive activity (ontological thesis), and (2) human knowledge finds its justification by matching its claims with this pre-given world (epistemological thesis).

As is well known, both theses have been seriously undermined by contemporary developments in the human sciences and hermeneutics, anthropology and linguistics, the philosophy and sociology of science, feminist and indigenous epistemologies, and modern cognitive science, among other disciplines. From different perspectives, these approaches have made evident that once we take seriously the interpretive nature of human knowledge and the collapse of the representational paradigm of cognition, the very idea of a pre-given world becomes not only naive but also misleading and unnecessary. But let us be clear here: None of these modern disciplines claims that there is not a world "out there" apart from human ideation. In contrast, what they strongly suggest is that the features of this world are not independent, objective, or fixed, but rather co-determined, malleable, and dynamic. In other words, the world does not have an intrinsic nature waiting to be discovered and represented by human cognition, but discloses itself in a variety of ways partially contingent on the dispositions, intentions, and modes of consciousness of the knower.

Although heavily criticized by philosophers for decades (e.g., Davidson, 1984; Gadamer, 1990; Goodman, 1978; Kuhn, 1970; Quine, 1953; Rorty, 1979; Sellars, 1956; Tamas, 1991; and Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991), the Myth of the Given is not easy to dispose of altogether. Indeed, some contemporary thinkers hold a weaker version of the Myth that posits the existence of very rough and malleable but still intrinsic features in the sensorimotor world. Without the existence of such "intrinsic features," it is usually argued, our conversations about the natural world would be rendered unintelligible, and our scientific discoveries and technological advances unexplainable (e.g., Searle, 1995). While a Jamesian pragmatist epistemology can probably explain these "unexplainable" facts without resorting to essentialist discourse, I believe that it is legitimate to talk conventionally about intrinsic features of the world in such a weaker sense. Although

malleable and co-determined to a large extent, the sensorimotor world does present itself to us in nonarbitrary ways.

This "weakness" needs to be emphasized even more strongly when we move to mental and spiritual realities. What I am suggesting here is that *the creative element of human cognition plays an even more fundamental formative role in hermeneutic and spiritual knowing than in empirical domains*. In other words, as we move from the more gross to the more subtle, the gap between being and knowing, between the ontological and the epistemological, is increasingly abridged. Accordingly, it becomes less and less adequate to anchor the soundness of knowledge claims on any kind of intrinsic features and more and more necessary to discern validity standards of a different kind.

Perennialists generally recognize the closing of the gap between ontology and epistemology, being and knowing. However, their claims that ultimate reality has universally pre-given features (e.g., nondual, impersonal, monistic) and that the perennial Truth reveals "things as they really are" reveal the residual objectivism of their approach. Herein lie the Cartesian roots of perennialism,

#### *The Neo-Kantian Roots of Contextualism*

Whereas perennialism leans back to Cartesianism, contextualism subscribes to Neo-Kantian epistemological assumptions about the nature of knowledge and reality. As we have seen, contextualists convincingly argue that spiritual knowledge is mediated and molded by cultural factors, doctrinal commitments, and soteriological expectations. That mystics generally experience and report the knowledge cultivated by their traditions is obviously accurate, and these authors should be credited for having emphasized the radical plurality of spiritual claims.

From this valid insight, however, contextualism goes on to deny or bracket the ontological and metaphysical import of human participation in spiritual realities. According to Cupitt (1998), for example, "The [postmodern] mysticism of secondariness is mysticism *minus* metaphysics, mysticism *minus* any claim to special or privileged knowledge, and mysticism without any other world than this one" (p. 8). Although it would surely be unfair to charge the contextualist program with psychologism, subjectivism, or reductionism, it is safe to say, I believe, that it typically operates under the spell of what Popper (1970, 1994) calls the Myth of the Framework. In our present context, this Myth would suggest the idea that *mystics are prisoners of their conceptual frameworks and that spiritual knowledge must always be shaped or screened through them*. Listen to Katz (1988): "My view—and it's important that it be understood—is that while such transcendental realities or Reality may well exist, it (or He, She or It) can only be known by us in the way such metaphysical realia become available to us given the sort of beings we are" (p. 754). In other words, metaphysical realities may exist, but we can access only our situated phenomenal awarenesses of them. Contra mystical claims, no direct knowledge of spiritual realities is therefore possible.

As we have seen, one way to challenge this myth is to show that mystics report insights that their doctrines and beliefs could not have prepared them to "expect" nor allowed

them to "constitute." Although mysticism does tend to be "conservative" (Katz, 1983b) in its reaffirming of previous doctrinal beliefs, perennialists are right in noting the emergence of novel and truly "revolutionary" mystical events that cannot be fully explained by ordinary constructive variables or acquired conceptual framework. This is a legitimate rejoinder that reveals the shortcomings of a "strong" contextualist program. However, there is still a more fatal stroke to be given to the Myth of the Framework.

As I see it, the crucial flaw of the contextualist logic is not the denial that mystics can transcend their conceptual frameworks, but *the very postulation of a dualism of conceptual framework and uninterpreted reality*. This Dualism of Framework and Reality, however, is widely regarded as implausible, especially in the wake of Donald Davidson's (1984) celebrated essay "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." Taking the translatability of languages as paradigmatic case, Davidson (1984) argues that the idea of alternative conceptual frameworks necessarily presupposes a larger common ground that makes these frameworks truly "alternative" and whose existence belies the idea. According to Davidson, the dissolution of this "third dogma of empiricism" (after Quine) not only undermines the existence of conceptual frameworks (and its related self-defeating conceptual relativisms) but also renders the idea of an uninterpreted reality (the Myth of the Given) unintelligible.

But there is more. As Tamas (1991) suggests, this epistemic dualism contributes in fundamental manners to the existential estrangement of the modern self. By placing the individual inexorably out of touch with the "real" world, the alienating Cartesian gap between subject and object is epistemologically affirmed and secured: "Thus the cosmological estrangement of modern consciousness initiated by Copernicus and the ontological estrangement initiated by Descartes were completed by the epistemological estrangement initiated by Kant: a threefold mutually enforced prison of modern alienation" (p. 419). For our present purposes, Tamas's analysis is particularly helpful because, in contrast to other critiques, it brings to the foreground the pernicious implications of this dualism for the human participation in spiritual knowledge:

The Cartesian-Kantian paradigm both expresses and ratifies a state of consciousness in which experience of the unitive numinous depths of reality has been systematically extinguished, leaving the world disenchanting and the human ego isolated. Such a worldview is, as it were, a kind of metaphysical and epistemological box. (p. 431)

Once we give up the Dualism of Framework and Reality, however, we can, with Davidson (1984), "re-establish *unmediated touch* with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences true or false" (p. 198, italics added). It is crucial to realize at this point that because the overcoming of this dualism implies not only dropping ideas about conceptual frameworks but also "the concept of an uninterpreted reality" (Davidson, 1984, p. 198), these "objects" can no longer be taken to mean the pre-given objects of positivism, empiricism, or naive realism. On the contrary, giving up this dualism calls us *to move beyond objectivism and subjectivism towards the recognition of the simultaneously interpretive and immediate nature of human knowledge*. And this movement can only be fully honored and consistently performed, I believe, by embracing a participatory vision of knowledge and reality (see Ferrer, 2000a, 2000b). Speaking about the spiritual dimensions of nature, Iarnas (1991) states that,

in a participatory epistemology, "nature's unfolding truth emerges only with the active participation of the human mind. Nature's reality is not merely phenomenal, nor is it independent and objective; rather, it is something that comes into being through the very act of human cognition" (p. 434). And he adds:

the interpretive and constructive character of human cognition is fully acknowledged but the intimate, interpenetrating and all-permeating relationship of nature to the human being and human mind allows the Kantian consequence of epistemological alienation to be entirely overcome. (p. 435)

Put simply, to say goodbye to Kant is to redeem our participatory, connected, and direct relationship with reality and the source of our being. In other words, to liberate spirituality from the Cartesian-Kantian epistemological box, "to use Tamas's words, entails not only an overcoming of objectivist dilemmas, but also *the recovery of the metaphysical import of spiritual knowledge*."

**In** sum, both perennialism and contextualism heavily depend on the Dualism of Framework and Reality. Perennialist approaches tend to emphasize one pole of the dualism, holding on to the idea of an uninterpreted reality and falling prey to the problems inherent in the Myth of the Given. Contextualist approaches tend to emphasize the other pole, getting trapped in conceptual maps and falling under the spell of the Myth of the Framework. As we have seen, however, this splitting of reality into two halves is not only epistemologically suspect but also existentially and spiritually alienating.

#### CONCLUSION

A significant number of leading transpersonal authors endorse or have taken for granted the spiritual universalism of the perennial philosophy. In this essay, I have examined the perennial vision and some of its main presuppositions. These presuppositions include an a priori commitment to a nondual monistic metaphysic and an endorsement of objectivism and essentialism in knowledge claims about ultimate reality. These claims not only predispose toward subtle forms of religious exclusivism (superiority) and intolerance, but can also hinder spiritual inquiry and limit the range of valid spiritual choices through which we can creatively participate in the Mystery out of which everything arises. For these reasons, I believe that the exclusive commitment of transpersonal theory to the perennial philosophy would be detrimental to its continued creative vitality. It is my hope that the exposition and airing of the presuppositions of perennialism will help create an open space in which transpersonal theory need not subordinate alternative perspectives but can enter into a genuine engagement and a fertile dialogue with them.

The contemporary debate between perennialists and contextualists offers just such an opportunity for engagement. As I have suggested in this essay, each side has its merits and shortcomings. Perennialism rightly emphasizes the existence of common or analogous elements among spiritual traditions, the ontological status of spiritual realities, and their formative role in human spiritual knowledge. And contextualism rightfully draws our attention to the generally contextual nature of spiritual knowledge, the interrelationship of spiritual paths and goals, and the ensuing diversity of spiritual aims and liberations.

Both approaches, however, are burdened by a host of Cartesian-Kantian prejudices that not only reduce their explanatory power but also force spiritual possibilities into very limiting molds. More specifically, perennialism and contextualism are contingent on the Dualism of Framework and Reality (i.e., a vision of human knowing as mediated through conceptual frameworks that can neither directly access nor fully convey a supposedly uninterpreted reality). This basic dualism naturally engenders two interdependent epistemological myths: The Myth of the Given ("there is a single pre-given reality out there independent of any cognitive activity"), and the Myth of the Framework ("we are epistemic prisoners trapped in our conceptual frameworks"). These epistemological myths not only create all sorts of pseudo-problems about the nature of spiritual knowing but also contribute in fundamental ways to human alienation by severing our direct connection with the source of our being.

Once we *fully* overcome the Dualism of Framework and Reality, however, spiritual paths can no longer be seen either as purely human constructions (Myth of the Framework) or as concurrently aimed at a single, predetermined ultimate reality (Myth of the Given). Once we *fully* exorcise the Cartesian-Kantian spell in spiritual studies and give up our dependence on essentialist metaphysics, in contrast, the various mystical traditions can be better seen as vehicles for the creative unfolding of different spiritual ultimates and metaphysical worlds. Spiritual inquiry then becomes a journey, an endless exploration and disclosure of the inexhaustible possibilities of an always dynamic and indeterminate being, Krishnamurti notwithstanding, spiritual truth is not a pathless land, but a goalless path.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> To quote only a few of the most relevant works see, for various articulations and defenses of perennialism, Evans (1989), Forman (1990, 1998, 1999), Hick (1992), King (1988), Perovich (1985), Rothberg (1989), Shear (1994), Stoerber (1992), Wainwright (1981), and Wilber (1995, 1997). For critiques of perennialism and proposals of contextualist approaches, see Almond (1982), Dean (1984), Fenton (1995), Griffiths (1991), Heron (1998), Hollenback (1996), Idel and McGinn (1996), Jones (1993), Katz (1978a, 1983.), McGinn (1994), Proudfoot (1985), and Raphael (1994).

<sup>2</sup> For arguments suggesting that the perennial philosophy can find epistemic support in mystical experiences, see Grof (1998), Shear (1994), and Wilber (1990). For the contrary view, that is, that mystical experiences offer no evidential value for a perennialist metaphysic, see Angel (1994), Fenton (1995), Griffiths (1991), Jones (1993), and Smith (1987).

<sup>3</sup> The Neo-Hindu flavor of transpersonal perennialism should not be surprising, especially given that one of its main sources was the "Westernized Vedanta" of Huxley's (1945) *The Perennial Philosophy*.

<sup>4</sup> The term "Myth of the Given" was coined by Sellars (1956) in his seminal lectures on empiricism and philosophy of mind.

<sup>5</sup> Note that Neo-Kantian prejudices against the metaphysical import of spiritual knowledge are also present in transpersonal works. Talking about the ontological status of spiritual power, for example, Washburn (1995) points out that "we simply cannot know ... whether the power of the Ground, in addition to being an intrapsychic phenomenon, is also an extrapsychic (metaphysical, cosmic) noumenon" (p. 130). And he adds, although "Spirit may have its ultimate origin in a metaphysical source lying completely beyond the soul. ... the ego can have no experience, and therefore no knowledge, of the power of the Ground as it may (or may not) exist beyond these boundaries" (pp. 130-131).

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