

# **Transcendent Experience, Process, and Praxis Within the ‘Transcendence Movement’**

**Keith Beasley**

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**Bangor University, Wales**

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## Summary

This thesis investigates the nature and dynamics of transcendent experience: phenomena I have witnessed in many individuals, groups, and organisations. Transcendent experience is best described as an attitude or way of life that is fundamentally different to what could be construed as the ‘normal’, conventional, and rationalistic attitudes that pervade the Western epistemological mind-set today as the most—if not sole—means to valuable knowledge and experience. This thesis does not seek to explain its features dogmatically and definitively—after all, such a phenomenon evades the reductive and totalising effects of rationalisation—but assesses a vast range of supporting literature to emphasise how it is manifesting itself across an equally vast and eclectic range of peoples. By examining evidence from contemporary personal accounts, historical case study, published biographical accounts, scholarly reports and personal anecdotes, a number of key characteristics and principles of transcendence are identified as underpinning their experiences.

These principles include a commitment from the individual or group in question to embrace and practice ‘ways of knowing’ beyond rational cognition. There is a tendency for the subject to recognise themselves as involved in purposeful ways of knowing. This is seen as a recognition that the physical self is merged with a nature that is experienced by the subject as ‘transcendent’ to them; that is to say, a nature that is described as ‘divine’ or ‘spiritual’. A further principle is the subject’s openness to, and assimilation of, what is reported to be not one but multiple transcendent experiences. The benefits of these are construed to be a sense of belonging and a feeling of wellbeing—feelings, which it is claimed, could not be obtained through conventional ‘rational’ ways of knowing. In short, these people seem to be living according to, or at least intent on working towards, a transcendent way of ‘being’, one that validates non-rational, possibly ‘divine’ experiences as essentially ‘human’. Other key characteristics of transcendent experiences are ascertained, including the role of suffering and emptiness.

The aim of this research is to investigate such claims and to assess the importance, for those involved, of this ‘transcendent’ approach to life. My investigations conclude that these experiences may be on the increase, and that something akin to a ‘transcendence movement’ can be traced as operating within society, despite—and perhaps because of—the overreliance on more rational attitudes to meaning and methods for arriving at

‘truth’, which are in themselves only relatively useful for life and often detrimental to feelings of wellbeing. The movement I outline engages with a way or depth of being that transcends individual beliefs and cultural differences, and brings the person into creative contact with sources that transcend his or her own limited, individual perspectives.

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# **Part One:**

## **Aims, background and introductory sections**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Introduction, scope, context and approach**

##### **Introduction**

This thesis argues that transcendence can most usefully be seen not as an abstract concept but as a praxis: a daily way of life as practised by individuals and groups in what I have termed ‘the transcendence movement’.<sup>1</sup> In these studies I am concerned with a willingness and ability to ‘transcend thought’ by which I mean the use of levels or modes of consciousness beyond the purely rational. It is my contention and argument throughout this thesis that the transcendence movement represents those with such an ability to engage with a deeper consciousness.

Those within the movement would further suggest that this ability represents a leading edge of human development, with the implication that the ability is becoming more common. Whilst I will include quotations that support this contention, I do so by way of describing, as extensively as possible, the perceptions within the movement and in order

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<sup>1</sup> This being a multi-disciplinary thesis I use ‘movement’ in the popular sense of “a general tendency or current of thought” (Chambers English Dictionary, 1990) rather than a discipline specific usage. The implication of a multi-disciplinary approach on terminology is discussed in Chapter 2.

to clarify how this perspective differs from the prevailing epistemology. To quantify such contentions, even if it were possible, is beyond the scope of this work. In identifying what might be considered shifts since, say the 1960s, I include a range of empirical evidence. However, given the parallel changes in human society and in technology in the same period, it would not be possible to make any valid comparison or produce quantitative data to justify this as indicative of a ‘significant’ shift in abilities or perspectives.<sup>2</sup>

The transcendence movement, I argue, expresses itself in a variety of ways, some of which can be equated directly to key scholarly works in related areas. For example, in the seminal study, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (2005) Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead discuss the importance of ‘The Kendal Project’ for demonstrating the ‘holistic milieu’ of the many and varied spiritual activities that are taking place in a specific region of the UK (in their case, the area in and around Kendal in the English Lake District). Heelas and Woodhead describe one type of spirituality as:

Subjective-life forms of the sacred, which emphasise inner sources of significance and authority and the cultivation or sacralization of unique subjective-lives. (2005, p6)

My research is concerned with just such views within the new ‘holistic milieu’. It is thus important to examine some of the concerns raised regarding this concept by perhaps its most vehement critics: David Voas and Steve Bruce. Voas & Bruce’s criticism appear in *The Spiritual Revolution: Another False Dawn for the Sacred*, Voas & Bruce (2007)<sup>3</sup>. By examining their concerns about the projects of Heelas and Woodhead, I thereby examine concerns that could be readily extended to my own research into the supposed ‘holistic milieu’ of transcendent activities.

In their criticism of Heelas & Woodhead Voas & Bruce conclude that:

The next step [in research in this field], in our view, is to try to distinguish between the different constituencies currently considered under the holistic banner. Some people are undoubtedly motivated by an attraction to metaphysical spirituality, but others are

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<sup>2</sup> Those within the transcendence movement might argue that other changes in human behaviour (e.g. global communications) in fact reflect the very transcendence process under discussion. Indeed, a number of the references cited would tend to support such a contention. However, it is not the aim of this discourse to substantiate such claims. My intent is to describe how those within the transcendence movement understand their reality.

<sup>3</sup> In Kieran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp’s *A Sociology of Spirituality*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

mainly interested in physical and mental methods of stress relief, or in alternative forms of healing, or in spa-type bodywork, or in opportunities for self-expression and psychological support. How the numbers break down, how much overlap there is between them, whether and when the connections reflect a shared conception of the sacred rather than simply mutual sympathy or common practice - these are the questions to address. (Voas & Bruce 2007, p59)

In this thesis I shall address these questions by studying the underlying values and 'philosophies of life' of a sample of those who consider themselves within such an 'holistic milieu', of what I term the 'transcendence movement'. In this work I restrict my analysis to those individuals who demonstrate a commitment to spiritual practice (as defined by Heelas & Woodhead, 2005), and thereby shed light on the nature and dynamics of the transcendence movement. This movement, I demonstrate, comprises those who identify themselves as partaking in those aspects I will identify as essential to the movement, who would readily admit to being part of this proposed 'holistic milieu'. It also comprises other individuals and groups who share a commitment to what I will identify as certain traits and practices that are not ordinarily covered by a 'spiritual' label, but are nonetheless part and parcel of 'transcendence' as I define the term.<sup>4</sup> As Voas and Bruce themselves suggest, a psychological perspective and a study of advantages to personal lives (such as 'stress-relief') may be as relevant as those factors that are deemed explicitly religious or spiritual. For example, the individual who is willing to enter into some sort of healing or therapy may, in some instances, indicate a commitment to transcend selfish attitudes, and may therefore be considered to embody an attitude of 'transcendence'.

One major criticism propounded by Voas & Bruce is that one cannot claim there to be a growth in numbers of people exhibiting spirituality. This is a fair criticism, if only due to the almost impossible task of quantifying such a contention. In this study I do not profess that the trends I identify exemplify a significant trend across the human population as whole. My claim is no more (and no less) that previous disparate individuals and groups are coming together to express in their characteristics a unified and common adherence to 'transcendence' and can thus be regarded as expressing a possible shift in values, and that this shift can be described as the 'transcendence movement'. My aim is to demonstrate, through an extensive description of the

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<sup>4</sup> I agree to some extent with Voas & Bruce when they say "This view of the self as sacred is not always distinguishable from a conventionally modern view of the self as precious and self-determining" (Ibid p44). As I discuss elsewhere, the transcendence process is substantially about 'finding oneself': not in a selfish way, but to establish 'one's place in the world'.

perspectives, praxis and activities within the transcendence movement, that such a self-consistent and coherent pattern can be discerned.

Underpinning this convergence of previously disparate organisations, those within the groups contend, is a feeling that human consciousness is undergoing a shift or evolution; that there is a process that underpins their awareness of transcendence at the collective as well as at the individual level.<sup>5</sup> Whilst providing evidence of a perceived increase in examples of transcendence in many facets of society, especially since the 1960s, I do not therefore maintain that this is itself evidence of an increase in spirituality; such a claim would be untenable.<sup>6</sup> For one thing, the significant changes in communication technology in the last five decades makes it impossible to compare factors ‘like for like’.<sup>7</sup>

Voas & Bruce are also critical of those factors deemed ‘important’ in the very determination of ‘the holistic milieu’. They claim:

The descriptions of spirituality given by the Kendal respondents seem to have little to do with the supernatural or even the sacred; it appears to be a code word for good feelings, the emotional rather than the material. (Voas & Bruce 2007, p51)

Applying such a criticism to those respondents—the reports of which we shall analyse later—I concede that they too were more likely to describe their experiences as ‘natural’ rather than ‘sacred’.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, it is also clear from my later analyses of descriptions given by my respondents that the underlying reason for them to pursue a spiritual path or one of transcendence is to improve the quality of life, health and a sense of wellbeing. Voas & Bruce conclude that spirituality is a code word, but a code word for what? I

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<sup>5</sup> Supporting theories to this contention are provided in Chapter 9.

<sup>6</sup> If numerically significant data applying to a population is hard to obtain, it is possible to determine, as I have done through question on ‘fruits of experience’, whether an individual found their practice and experiences significant in their life. Such evidence whilst not quantifiably useful for sociological purposes, at least provides valuable clues as to the nature and the dynamic of the transcendence process.

<sup>7</sup> I might, for example, suggest that in the five years 2007-2012, compared to 1957-1962, that there have been significantly more books, films and TV programmes directly concerned with topics magical, spiritual or psychic and that this indicates a growing and open interest in human nature beyond the rational. To quantify such a claim would be particularly difficult, if only because the means by which such material is promoted now did not exist in 1960. Such an analysis is certainly well beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> Of my questionnaire responses, nobody uses the word ‘sacred’, 3 use the word ‘natural’ (Contributors 3, 17 and 19).



would suggest that it is a code word for the very significant and positive indication of the respondents, of their willingness to change aspects of themselves and their lives. That is, to *transcend* those aspects of themselves that they perceive as unwanted or negative. Whether religion or a particular spiritual path is better at enabling this development than a secular or therapeutic path is not, I would argue, the important question. Rather, the signification question to ask is that if one is able to transcend the vast range of possible labels and approaches to wellbeing, *what* are the common, practical factors that enable the change? Which factors make a difference?<sup>9</sup> This is the approach I have taken in my research. As Voas and Bruce suggest, individuals are not necessarily interested in ‘spiritual’ experiences per se, but seek to be ‘authentic’ or ‘deeper’ in their approaches to living.<sup>10</sup> Does this not suggest an important trait, and perhaps a trend? It is with this in mind, and as the very context for my research, that I explore the nature and dynamics of transcendence.

Another concern of Voas and Bruce levelled at Heelas and Woodhead, and again one applicable to my own study, is whether any trends that seem to exist are really ‘revolutionary’ or ‘transitory’ (Voas & Bruce 2007, p53). As they say: ‘There is nothing particularly new about alternative spirituality, it has been around for a long time.’ (Voas & Bruce 2007, p53)

Even if those who I report as being within the transcendence movement see their actions as significant beyond their own lives, and as indicative of a wider, universal shift in the consciousness of humanity as a whole (as I have modelled in Chapter 7), it obviously does not mean that this has actually occurred. Individually, they may be regarded as delusional, and if whole groups profess as much, they may share a collective delusion. Since each individual has his or her own idea of reality, which cannot be independently verified, such delusions are difficult to prove or disprove. My contention is merely that

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<sup>9</sup> This post-dualistic approach thus side-steps the problematic ‘secular or religious’ and ‘sacred or natural’ debates which, I suggest, add little to the understanding of why an individual chooses the path they do. Likewise I would agree with Don Cupitt that the conceptual writings of Immanuel Kant, being based on the modern, rational, paradigm, provide little to aid understanding of transcendence, with its basis in the post-rational paradigm: see, for example Cupitt 1997, pp88 &126.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Voas & Bruce 2007, p53. Whilst Voas & Bruce are concerned by the secularised use of the word spiritual (as somehow not of value), I would focus on the ‘deeper’ degree of engagement being discussed and equate this to a commitment to the transcendence process by those concerned.

there are individuals, who were at one time pursuing some cause or committed to some personal, spiritual or community goal, but who now—and often with suddenness—see a common cause in their work, efforts and methods. Such individuals, I claim, represent that proportion of humanity that sees humanity as a whole, and value ‘being human’ as a fundamental social value that transcends the particularities of individual identifications of faith, cultures and ideologies. This, I argue is an important and significant observation.

Voas and Bruce conclude that, ‘People are unwilling to be told what to believe, when to go to church, or how they should be labelled.’ (Voas & Bruce 2007, p59) This, they conclude, is a sign of increased individualism. This may indeed be the case, but is that always a bad thing?

Discussions with my contributors repeatedly emphasised an alternative perspective to the argument: that individuals who had had low self-esteem (if not ‘victim mentality’) were, through their spiritual practices, beginning to think far more for themselves, to question what was important to them and how they need to live their lives. This is far more than a sociological question of the religious versus the secular; it is a fundamental existential questioning about life and its meaning. The respondents in the fieldwork I have analysed were grappling with questions such as “what does it mean to be human?” “What does it mean to be me?” It is these more existential questions that are prevalent in the transcendence movement. Voas and Bruce, however, focus on different issues, for instance, commenting that: “They [those in the holistic milieu] are also less willing than ever to commit themselves to any kind of religion or spirituality, even a spirituality of the self.” (Voas & Bruce 2007, p59).

I concede that those within the holistic milieu of the transcendence movement may choose not to commit to an organised spiritual group. However, I strongly disagree that they therefore all demonstrate a lack of commitment. A common feature of the contributors/respondents within my own fieldwork is precisely their commitment to the transcendence movement and the processes that underpin their own experiences of it. One facet of my definition of the transcendence movement is that it comprises those individuals (who may also belong to other movements) who are willing and able to put themselves through the often painful process of growth and change. I would agree that such commitment may still only be noticeable in small numbers, but my investigations

indicate it to be very much present, in all connotations of ‘present’ (both visibly present and present in a sacred sense).

In the final sentence of their critique, Voas and Bruce summarise their position thus, “If there is a revolution, we should know where to look for it” (Voas & Bruce 2007, p59). My findings go some way to providing answers for their consideration. My studies conclude that we find a revolution of sorts both between and across the categorisations and various identification that comprise our current rationalised conceptions of what it means to be human. In other words, the transcendence movement is found in the very implosion of rigidly defined terms, representations, and conceptions of who we are and what we seek. Voas and Bruce end by noting, “the sacred is giving way to the secular” (Voas & Bruce 2007, p59), a proposition that may or may not be true. Such a debate is, I would argue, largely irrelevant to my inquiry and to the task in hand. If our aim as researchers is to understand the changes taking place in society, then to debate which categories best suit our descriptions of people is to miss the point. As my participants indicated, pigeon-holing and labelling of an individual does not and probably never can fully describe that person’s unique way of Being in the world.<sup>11</sup>

My arguments inevitably refer to accepted, mainstream philosophical and religious academic discourse in order to provide grounding for the notions and concepts of transcendence that I have utilised. Whilst I thus concede a degree of pigeon holing in order to provide further context and perspectives for my discussions, my focus is on the application of transcendence to the daily life of specific individuals and groups; on the subjective attitudes, and practices of my contributors and others within the transcendence movement. As such I am considering transcendence not only as a praxis, conceptual framework and epistemology but also as an ontology. Compared to the ways of thinking about and engaging in the world that are currently prevalent in society, I illustrate how transcendence represents a major shift in how those within the transcendence movement view themselves and understand their own lives. To them, life, both individually and collectively, is an evolutionary co-creation. Beyond most if not all categories, -isms and -ologies, the essence of transcendence replaces the either/or

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<sup>11</sup> I capitalise ‘Being’ in order to allude to the very essence or substance of personhood. That is to say, to indicate not simply that a person is a being among beings, but to describe what it means for that person to exist and to be aware of their existence. We shall turn to the role of ontology for making sense of the transcendence movement later, with special reference to the ideas of Heidegger, the philosopher made famous by his investigations into the nature of Being.

approach that underpins our rationalistic dualisms. Instead, it embraces the sense of rational detachment that places experiences of such feelings of courage and compassion above concern for labels or social status.<sup>12</sup> Far from embodying a set of values, a mere ideology, the transcendence movement is characterised by those who are willing and able to live them, to apply them to their lives, to ‘walk the talk’, and embody a greater depth of being by engaging with their very Being. Such people, as I shall demonstrate, therefore share similar traits, perceptions and commitments by which they can be identified.

### **Traits, perceptions and commitments**

It is both my intent and approach to describe transcendence not in terms of beliefs or techniques practiced, but in terms of values, experiences and their associated characteristics or traits. In particular, I identify those within the transcendence movement as having certain perceptions about the nature of human life. In particular, they tend to perceive that every human, creature and global system is part of an interconnected whole, one that is constantly evolving, and one that every individual co-creates. Just as significantly, these perceptions are deeply felt: more than a learnt belief, they are embodied. They result, I argue, from an inner knowing borne of transcendent experiences of a deep sense of belonging.

In addition to these perceptions, those within the transcendence movement are seen as actively demonstrating a number of commitments. In particular, they live in the present moment, with presence. That is to say, to the best of their ability they surrender their own individual wants and desires to enable them to remain committed to the sense of being part of a more significant, more objective approach to life, to realising they are part of a greater whole, and sustained by a certain ‘Oneness of existence’.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The need for courage was emphasised by Justin Welby in his first sermon as Archbishop of Canterbury: “The present challenges of environment and economy, of human development and global poverty, can only be faced with extraordinary Christ-liberated courage.” (from [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21875199](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21875199), accessed 22.3.13). During the service he also focused on reconciliation, another commitment associated with transcendence. Whilst it is too soon to suggest that the Anglican Church might be becoming more transcendent (in the terms of this thesis), these are encouraging signs. I refer to them here as illustrative of signs of transcendence across human organisations: transcendence is by no means a feature of only the NRM (New Religious Movement) or New Age.

<sup>13</sup> My understanding and use of the term Oneness, as with other terminology is the subject of Chapter 2. In effect I adopt the stance of Ervin Laszlo, Stanislav Grof & Peter Russell in *The*

Instead of reacting to situations or insisting on prescribed courses of action or attitudes, those within the transcendence movement are intent on suspending judgement so as to engage more fully, in the present, and allow the experiences of the world come to them rather than impose their own judgements and shapes upon it. Any theories, philosophies or techniques that they subscribe to are not abstract concepts per se, but are pragmatic truths acted out day-to-day. Key to this is a commitment to integrate their emotional and intellectual facets.<sup>14</sup>

Closely related to the above is a commitment to inclusiveness; compassion for the feelings of others and an attempt to understand perspectives or attitudes that are at variance to one's own. That is, living the acknowledgement that each individual is different, and yet no less worthy, and indeed as connected to the sense of Oneness that I referred to as anybody else.<sup>15</sup>

A significant corollary of these traits is that any individual or group who feels the need to justify a particular creed or belief, without attempting to understand other perspectives, is not considered part of the transcendence movement. Likewise those who analyse, write about or preach on a subject without 'practicing what they preach' are similarly outside the movement I describe.

Lastly, I identify transcendence with a commitment to an awareness of one's own state of connectness or engagement with others and the world at hand, and to work (both long-term and short-term) to stay present.<sup>16</sup> Such presence, as I shall explain, is concerned with seeking and acknowledging connections; rather than seeking to separate or extricate oneself from one's environment so as to single oneself out as being present to oneself and to oneself alone. In the long-term this sense of awareness requires one to

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*Consciousness Revolution* (Las Vegas: Elf Rock, 2003), wherein the terms Absolute Consciousness, Oneness, Source, God, Superior Cosmic Intelligence (are example) are used interchangeably.

<sup>14</sup> In my 'Context and features' section below I illustrate how this trait can be seen as a response to the concerns expressed by C.P. Snow in his *Two Cultures* (Snow 1959 & 1963).

<sup>15</sup> An example of such inclusiveness would be an acknowledgement of the breadth of faiths present in British society by the Prince of Wales. Rather than become "Defender of the Faith" (i.e. Christianity) when he becomes King, he has expressed his preference to be known as 'Defender of Faith'. See [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/theroyalfamily/3454271/Prince-Charles-to-be-known-as-Defender-of-Faith.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/theroyalfamily/3454271/Prince-Charles-to-be-known-as-Defender-of-Faith.html), initial news item from 13 Nov 2008, accessed 22.3.13.

<sup>16</sup> Or, in popular parlance, 'living in the here and now'.

confront those issues that prevent oneself from developing, and resolve them so as to acquire a more objective attitude, and thereby to transcend oneself.

This equates to a commitment to such ideas as Emotional Intelligence (EI) and the use of sustained personal reflection (although these terms might not be recognised and employed by all individuals). This thesis is thus about transcendence as a process that is integrated into one's daily life, and is one that concerns the fundamental experiences of one's Being, or, as I argue in Chapter 8 with recourse to the philosophy of Heidegger, oneself as 'Being in the World'. In the understanding of transcendence that I expound, transcendent experience and transcendence practice are attitudes, a way of thinking and behaving that overcomes the conditioning brought upon one by one's cultural, social, political, personal impositions and prejudices. This notion of transcendence is considered (by those consulted in this study) as providing a sense of fulfilment and quality of life beyond the measure of those who follow the dogmatic prescriptions of a particular philosophy or technique.

My inquiry investigates into how transcendence, as I have broadly defined the term, is found and employed in people's lives so as to enhance their experiences of wellbeing and to extend their ability to cope with the demands of life at the start of the twenty-first century. Above all, transcendence is about 'being human', and is thus a paradigm that transcends the concerns of individual academic disciplines, and their related -isms. These features of transcendence, as I shall now explain, inform both my approach to this study and provide a framework for the argument of this thesis.

## **Structure**

In this introductory chapter I define the scope of my investigation, and describe the background and context to my study, and the limitations and benefits of its methodological approach. In so doing I intend to position the transcendence movement in relation to other established social trends and developments, in particular to contrast it to other recent movements related to personal or spiritual development.

Chapter 2 is concerned with terminology and definitions. Here I introduce my two-facet model of consciousness and transcendence which provides the working hypothesis for later discussions on the processes and experiences related to transcendence.

Chapter 3 concludes the introduction to the thesis with a description of the transcendence movement, as I have coined the term. Here I examine the nature of transcendent relationships between humanity, the divine, and the natural world, with ourselves and with others. In so doing, and by including examples from Western society and communities of the present day, I provide a framework for the more detailed analysis of transcendence that follows in subsequent parts.

Part Two is concerned with the praxis of transcendence.<sup>17</sup> In each chapter I examine how a range of individuals embrace transcendence within their lives as an on-going commitment to the sense of oneness and their participation within it. I start, in Chapter 4 by relating significant examples of transcendent experiences from my own personal path of spiritual exploration and growth. That one's own transcendent experiences are not only of personal value but may shed light on the understanding of a subject from an academic perspective is aptly illustrated by Carl Gustav Jung in his seminal work *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963). Whilst my own spiritual and mystical experiences in no way match Jung's own, including his near death experiences<sup>18</sup> in either profundity nor duration, it is highly appropriate, I argue, to apply his style of first-hand narrative of such experiences.

In Chapter 5 I review examples of published accounts of contemporary transcendent experiences (including those of Jung). From these I demonstrate that, far from being confined to 'religious' people or so-called 'mystics', transcendent experiences are available to everyone.

I continue this discussion in Chapter 6 where I analyse personal accounts of 'multiple transcendent experiences' collected for this project, and describe discussions with individuals reporting such experiences. I have deliberately encouraged and collected accounts which are not explicitly 'religious' nor 'spiritual' per se, but which the experiencee himself or herself identifies as transcendent. My studies are consciously inclusive of 'day-to-day' transcendent experiences. This focus on the extraordinary within the ordinary is further emphasised by my exclusion of drug induced

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<sup>17</sup> I use the term praxis in a similar way to Paulo Freire, who used it widely in his much cited *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), and later by David A. Kolb (1984), in the context of experiential learning in education. For example: "praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire 1970, p66).

<sup>18</sup> As described in Jung 1963, pp320-329.

experiences.<sup>19</sup> Through the accounts of this and preceding chapters I identify common elements and key factors that describe the nature and dynamics of transcendence experiences.

Chapter 7 draws my discussions together by proposing a series of models that go some way towards explaining—or at least providing a plausible way of explaining—transcendent experiences and related effects or experiences, such as suffering. These models offer insights into the dynamic or process by which one might assimilate and subsequently benefit from transcendent experiences, even when they seem at a surface level to be detrimental to our sense of wellbeing.

Having developed models or frameworks in order to make sense of the personal growth process that accommodate the experiences of my contributors, I seek to make greater sense of how we can attain higher levels of consciousness, and grow accordingly. To this end, in Chapter 8 I consult the ontological ideas of Martin Heidegger, in particular, his concept of Being and how a development of his concept helps us make better sense of the nature and dynamics of transcendence that I have concluded thus far. In so doing, our notion of transcendence is found to be not so much a *particular type* of experience, but as fundamental change in one's ontological outlook and epistemological conception of the way in which make sense of ourselves and the world we find ourselves in.<sup>20</sup>

In Part Four I elaborate the key issues that underpin the transcendence process. These features, common to both my theoretical and empirical research findings, provide the threshold concepts<sup>21</sup> from which I then determine practically beneficial factors related to

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<sup>19</sup> This is not to deny that, in some cultures (shamanic, for example), drug induced transcendent experiences are seen as positive and valuable. Excluding such experiences also enables a more manageable scope for my research.

<sup>20</sup> To debate whether or not transcendence, as discussed, is strictly ontological is not the aim of this discourse: to do so would be to detract from the practical emphasis of my study. As Ferrer says “We could say, then, that *subject and object, knowing and being, epistemology and ontology, are brought together in the very act of participatory knowing.*” (Ferrer 2002, p122; emphasis in the original).

<sup>21</sup> Within education theory, ‘threshold concepts’ are considered a particularly useful research tool in identifying how to teach subjects that typically cause students difficulty. A recent and updated introduction to threshold concepts, by the original authors, can be found in Meyer, J. H. F. & Land, R. (2006) ‘Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge - An Introduction’ in Meyer, J. H. F. & Land, R (Eds) *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, pp3-18. The application of Threshold Concepts to soft-skills (including Emotional Intelligence and relaxation techniques, both highly relevance to transcendence) features in my PGCertHE portfolio: see Beasley, K.



the transcendence process. These include evolutionary consciousness (Chapter 9); the notions of ‘nothingness’ and the value of an ‘empty’ mind (Chapter 10); the place of mysticism in the lives of those practicing transcendence (Chapter 11); and, as already indicated, the question of transitions and the transcending of (mental) barriers (Chapter 12).

Before a final conclusion in Chapter 14, I address the question of the impact of transcendent experience. That is to say, if, as I will have argued, transcendent experiences are a valuable tool in both individual and collective development, how can one bring about such experiences and assimilate or harness their beneficial effect (Chapter 13)? Equally important and perhaps part of the same question: if, as I shall explain it is, suffering is a part of this growth process, is it appropriate to try to minimise or eradicate it? The approach taken within the transcendence movement, we shall see, may seem counterintuitive as it suggests one embrace and engage with the suffering, and paradoxically, it may well lessen—if not in severity at least in duration—in the very attempt to do so. To embrace such a broad range of elements in my discourse, whilst essential in highlighting the essence of transcendence, could lead to an unmanageable quantity and breadth of data and discussion. For this reason I have restricted my scope in a number of ways, which I shall now describe.

## **Scope**

Although further research could pursue such a line of enquiry, it is not the intent of this thesis to suggest a physical mechanism for the process of transcendence. Rather, my approach is to present and assess the empirical evidence and not over-complicating the mechanistic theory.

As the philosopher Bertrand Russell himself concluded, hypothesising theories to ever greater conceptualisations, or inventing new terms in such an attempt, often confuses the simple truth of the reality one is attempting to describe. In the case of transcendence, the first-hand accounts of my contributors provide a depth of understanding consistent with

the practical emphasis of this thesis, as opposed to theoretical understanding provided by abstract philosophical ideas.<sup>22</sup>

My focus on the experiential evidence is thus not only appropriate but essential to this thesis. Whilst accepting that transcendent experiences are not always perceived as ‘positive’, I shall focus on the positive effects of such experiences, particularly their medium and long-term effects. I am particularly concerned with the overall wellbeing of individuals who practise transcendence,<sup>23</sup> accepting that, within such lives, there may be periods of ill-health and trauma. Whilst a particular focus to this work is the role of suffering within the transcendence process, I am specifically excluding experiences and issues related to mental illness. I have attempted, to the best of my ability, to include experiential accounts and theories from individuals who are generally emotionally stable and in good mental health. My study concerns the capacity of those who are able to realise and accept the possibility of transcendent experiences as raising their own level of consciousness. This study does not preclude the possibility that those with serious mental illness may also benefit from the models and insights developed in this work, but such objectives are beyond the scope of this current project.

If the aim of transcendence is personal and societal development, inevitably the question arises as to what exactly is being transcended. I would argue that if any restriction is offered in answering this question then the very essence of transcendence has been misunderstood. Even in examining religious and transcendent experiences, the dangers of restriction are clear. As Aldous Huxley says in his famous *Perennial Philosophy* (Huxley 1946):

In religion as in natural science, experience is determined only by experience. It is fatal to prejudge it, to compel it to fit the mould imposed by a theory which either does not correspond to the facts at all, or corresponds to only some of the facts. (Huxley 1946, p141)

However, in paradoxical manner, as is the want of transcendence, engagement with other theories in the explication of a theory of transcendence (as that which overcomes

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<sup>22</sup> This argument is further discussed, in the context of Heidegger’s ‘language game’, in Chapter 8.

<sup>23</sup> Whilst traditionally transcendent experiences are often thought of as happening *to* one (without intent), individuals within the transcendence movement are found to be committed to activities and attitudes that they find conducive to such experiences. I thus use the phrase ‘transcendence practice’ to indicate such conscious commitment to the process of transcendence.

all theoretical boundaries) is necessary, as Huxley himself retorts: “Mystics make theology, and theology makes mystics” (ibid). In presenting the models to describe transcendence (Chapter 7), I highlight the tensions between the mystical and scholarly facets that underpin our study of transcendence.

My scope is thus, itself, transcendent, seeking to demonstrate an intrinsically human way of embracing both the intellectual and sacred, or rational and non-rational aspects of daily-life. This research is thus concerned with the individuals and groups within the transcendence movement, who demonstrate this capacity. Other than this distinction (and other focuses or restrictions described in Part One), my scope is intentionally broad. The aim is to demonstrate that examples of transcendence themselves illustrate a key property of transcendence: that it knows no particular limits, boundaries or constraints.

Thus, whilst my field research happens to have been carried out at a university located in Wales, my source material, contributors and examples have little if anything in common in the details of their descriptive content, and converge simply in light of their exhibition of characteristics of transcendence. It is my contention that transcendence is emerging as a global phenomenon, a feature not of any particular upbringing, culture or type of person, but as if it were an ‘inner drive’ or human ‘truth’ that any individual from any background may partake in or choose to pursue. The personal traits, practices or other factors that might determine this willingness to pursue transcendence are the subject of Part 4.

This research has at its focus, the individuals and groups who demonstrate an intent towards and a commitment to the process of transcendence. It is accepted that, in quantifiable terms, the number of individuals is small. Likewise it is accepted that significant numbers of individual human beings may well display none of the traits described. Whilst the models I present in Chapter 7 embrace those with such alternative ontologies, it is not the aim of this work to attempt to quantify the ratio of those in the transcendence movement compared to those who are not. My aim is to contrast and compare the traits and abilities prevalent in the two groups and to demonstrate the presence of transcendence spread, albeit possibly thinly, across humanity’s breadth.

An important question asked by this work is, ‘what is it that is being transcended?’ The answer, simply put is whatever needs to be for any given individual at any given

moment in their lives. This answer sets an important scope, which itself reflects the nature and dynamic of transcendence. What matters, I argue, is not which habits or beliefs, labels or categorisations are outgrown and from which we depart—or transcend—to find new, better ones; but, rather what matters, and what is the focus of this thesis, is the attitude that underpins this development: the very willingness to embrace the experience of change, of transcendence. My multi-disciplinary approach thus lends itself well to the subject matter of this study. To restrict my scope to any particular meaning of transcendence (as for example in transpersonal psychology or a particular religion) would be to risk missing its essential meaning.

The research on which this thesis is based was carried out between 2009 and 2013 and the focus is on contemporary experiences of transcendence. In exploring the suggested beginning of the transcendence movement, examples of experiences and theories from the early and middle twentieth century are provided. My aim however is not to chart the development of the movement as such, but to illustrate its breadth, range and key features at this point in human history.

The question could be asked as to how the transcendence movement relates to the distinctions sometimes made between the modern and postmodern (and even as some suggest, the post-postmodern). Given the considerable range of opinions as to the meanings of these terms, to engage in this debate would require extensive review and analysis.<sup>24</sup> Such a review is beyond the scope of the current work. It is also pertinent to note that individuals within the transcendence movement would tend not to make categorisations or distinctions of this nature. As I demonstrate, the praxis of transcendence is about an ability to engage in daily life with depth, which typically precludes debate on semantics.

Such ability sets the transcendence movement apart from other movements. This I will now explore, by examining the contextual background to transcendence from a range of disciplinary perspectives.

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<sup>24</sup> For two examples of descriptions of the range of views, see Sheenan, P. (2004) *Postmodernism and philosophy* in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp20-42 and Cupitt, D. (1992) *Unsystematic ethics and politics* in *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* London & New York: Routledge, 1992, pp149-155.

## Context and features

The understanding and practice of transcendence, as I use the term, finds parallel in ideas and themes discussed throughout philosophies of religion, perhaps most notably in the Perennial Philosophy of Huxley . Huxley writes:<sup>25</sup>

In studying the Perennial Philosophy we can begin either at the bottom, with practice and morality; or at the top, with a consideration of metaphysical truths; or, finally, in the middle, at the focal point where mind and matter, action and thought have their meeting place in human psychology. (Huxley 1946, p14)

Engagement with the process of transcendence within the transcendence movement, which is my subject, equates directly to Huxley's 'middle gate' which:

Gives entrance to the exponents of what has been called 'spiritual religion'—the devout contemplatives of India, the Sufis of Islam, the Catholic mystics of the later Middle Ages, and, in the Protestant tradition, such men as Denk and Franck and Castellio, as Everard and John Smith and the first Quakers ... (ibid)

It is my contention that many ordinary Quakers today, and others (see Chapter 3) taking a 'middle gate' are living Huxley's Perennial Philosophy which, as a psychology:

Has its source in metaphysics and issues logically in a characteristic way of life and system of ethics. Starting from this mid-point of doctrine, it is easy for the mind to move in either direction.

In the present section we shall confine our attention to but a single feature of this traditional psychology—the most important, the most emphatically insisted upon by all exponents of the Perennial Philosophy and, we may add, the least psychological. For the doctrine that is to be illustrated in this section belongs to autology rather than psychology—to the science, not of the personal ego, but of that eternal Self in the depth of particular, individualised selves, and identical with, or at least akin to, the divine Ground. Based upon the direct experience of those who have fulfilled the necessary conditions of such knowledge, this teaching is expressed most succinctly in the Sanskrit formula, *tat tvam asi* ('That art thou'): the Atman, or immanent eternal Self, is one with Brahman, the Absolute Principle of all existence; and the last end of every human being is to discover the fact for himself, to find out Who he really is. (Huxley 1946, pp14-15)

Far from a purely conceptual philosophy, the Perennial Philosophy is, Huxley emphasises a "way of life". Likewise transcendence as I discuss it here. The adoption of the Perennial Philosophy or commitment to a path of transcendence is for each

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<sup>25</sup> To emphasise the 'essential unity' at the heart of Huxley's Perennial Philosophy is criticised by, for example, Jorge Ferrer (2001 – see later in this chapter). He argues that "the longed-for spiritual unity of humankind can only be found in the multiplicity of its voices" (Ferrer 2001, p111). I would agree. Ferrer's point is at the very heart of inter-spirituality: Teasdale (see Chapter 3) and his successors argue just as Ferrer does, that it is the very difference between faith traditions that, in the spirit of an harmonious, shared, humanity, brings out the depth of 'being human' in all those who pursue such a (transcendent) path.

individual to discover their “imminent eternal Self” “for himself”. Such self-discovery is, I argue, a vital element in the process of transcendence. Thus, my focus, like Huxley’s is not pure metaphysics nor abstract theology nor indeed any religion (or spiritual) activity undertaken as a ritualistic practice. Instead, like the middle gate of Huxley, it is the interplay between these two approaches to the divine which includes an understanding “based upon the direct experience” and a life that transcends ideas of human and sacred; i.e.

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—the thing is immemorial and universal. (Huxley 1946, p9)

An aim of my study is to demonstrate that the essence of Huxley’s Perennial Philosophy, for instance, is alive and thriving within the transcendence movement (although not necessarily recognised by that term).

Key to transcendence is a knowing beyond rational knowing. As Huxley says: “Knowledge is a function of being. When there is a change in the being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and amount of knowing.” (Huxley 1946, p9). Huxley provides the image of a child “transformed by growth” whose knowledge “becomes more conceptual and systematic”. In so doing however, there it typically experiences “A certain deterioration in the quality of immediate apprehension, a blunting and a loss of intuitive power. (ibid) Transcendence, I argue, is therefore about restoring these childlike<sup>26</sup> ways of knowing whilst retaining one’s intellectual abilities so that one may live wholly in:

The one, divine Reality [which is] substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. (Huxley 1946, p10)

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the child or the return to a childlike state can be regarded as a symbol or personification of the transcendence movement. The child as goal of transcendence is not uncommon in philosophical ideas of our development as beings free from constraints of rationalistic thinking. See for example, Nietzsche’s rendition of the child as the goal of the Superman or Übermensch in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue. To take another example in stark contrast to the atheistic prose of Nietzsche, note the words of Jesus to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Matthew, chapter 18: 3)

Such engagement with “the one, divine Reality” is thus, as Huxley argues, not about having certain beliefs or following prescribed actions, but about being “loving, pure in heart”. Such simple principles, as Huxley describes, are at the heart of not only all faiths but also of any healthy community, at both local, regional and national levels. Few would argue otherwise: certainly not the millions of individuals who, in some way or other, engaged directly with ‘The Greatest Show on Earth’ that was the London 2012 Olympics (see, for example, Abrams, J. & Parker-Starbuck, J. 2013).

My focus is thus such depth of engagement, across a spectrum of human activity. Such depth and associated values are subjects increasingly considered worthy of academic study. Recent decades have seen a significant research activity, across a wide range of disciplines, which attempts to identify, chart and define an observed shift in humans’ attitudes towards and practices related to religion and spirituality.

Considerable research has been completed (for example in *Beyond New Age* by Steven Sutcliffe & Marion Bowman (eds 2000) and in Michael York’s *The Emerging Network* on the ‘New Age Movement’ and ‘New Religious Movements’ (NRM).<sup>27</sup> From such work has come a plethora of terms, groups (organised or nebulous) and theories that have sought to categorise the evidence of behaviour and attitudes recorded by sociologists, anthropologists and theologians; to name but a few interested parties.

Significant amongst these studies is the work by Linda Woodhead & Rebecca Catto in *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*. They identify that in the UK, since the 1980s, the boundaries between religion, spirituality and the secular have become increasingly blurred: or I would say, transcended. This situation is radically different from the conventional view that applied before the Second World War:

The new entrants to the spiritual marketplace are more focused on supporting individuals in their everyday lives, fostering new kinds of identity and lifestyle, and linking the like-minded and like-hearted to one another in a vast plurality of different forms of religious alliance. (Woodhead & Catto 2012, p27)

That is, the focus of spiritual practice now, as within the transcendence movement, is a cooperative endeavour to improve quality of life, rather than to endorse a hierarchy and rigid obeisance of rules and customs. Woodhead & Catto identify a trend that, they claim, reflects a move into the secular and mainstream of humans’ quest for depth and

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<sup>27</sup> Examples of transcendence within NRM, probably include the Baha’i and the Brahma Kumaris. I discuss both groups in Chapter 3.

meaning to life; to seek an inner essence; to uncover what it is that makes a human wholly human.

Having identified this essential feature of recent trends, Woodhead & Catto, perhaps surprisingly, include no significant mention of 'Religious Experience' as a factor in the religious and spiritual landscape of the UK. Likewise, except for one brief mention, this otherwise excellent review excludes discussion on the role of consciousness or evolutionary consciousness. It is in these two areas in particular that our inquiry here expands and develops the ideas of Woodhead & Catto.

There are many ways of describing the humans' quest for depth and meaning to life. One possible way is expressed by the motto: "One Spirit: Connecting with inspiration and purpose" that was employed by a key gathering of faith groups to express their collective aim of interfaith: to transcend their own specific dogmas and embrace the values of other faiths irrespective of their differences.<sup>28</sup> Resulting from a series of discussions involving representatives from many separate groups that are open to such a movement as I extol as the transcendence movement, this motto was borne, and has been proposed for promotional use by all represented groups. Despite their different focuses, structures and activities, the groups concerned have come to recognise they are part of one overall ethos and movement and seek to present a united front to the public and to national and international governments. Only in the last few years have such groups been willing to work together in such an integrated manner: a clear indicator of a changing underlying ethos at work.

Whether it is previously disparate groups coming together under a 'One Spirit' banner or the varying practices of individual seekers, the many features of transcendence may seem confused and complicated. However, those within the transcendence movement,

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<sup>28</sup> Conclusion reached on 2nd March 2013 at the *North West & North Wales Regional Gathering of the Wrekin Forum*, held in Chester and which I attended. Groups represented included the *Wrekin Trust*, *One Spirit Interfaith Foundation (OSIF)*, *Christians Awakening to a New Awareness (CANA)* and the *Spiritual Companions Network (SCN)*. Also party to the on-going discussion are the *Brahma Kumaris* and the *White Eagle Lodge*. A number of these organisations are featured in my study of transcendence movement organisations in Chapter 3. All are summarised, with web addresses, in Appendix 5.



would agree with this speaker at the gathering mentioned above, : “It’s very simple. And that’s why it’s so difficult to grasp. It’s one very simple, central idea.”<sup>29</sup>

Alister Hardy certainly seemed to understand what ‘it’ was and is. In describing his establishment of the Religious Experiences Research Centre (RERC),<sup>30</sup> Marianne Rankin (2008) writes:

Hardy thought of humans as spiritual animals, and of religious experience as a natural phenomenon of evolutionary value. He felt that in exploring their environment, humans had become aware of something beyond it, a transcendent presence which met them in a different way from their everyday experience. In other words, he believed that spirituality was a natural part of consciousness. (Rankin 2008, p3)

To embrace the concepts of religious experience, evolution, consciousness, spirituality and ‘transcendent present’ in just one paragraph goes a long way to describing the essence of ‘it’. An ‘it’ that, in the context of this thesis describes transcendence. To those within the transcendence movement these terms, like all elements of life itself, are interconnected. A key gist in the commitment to the transcendence process is the willingness to accept this interconnectedness without a need or attempt to define each of these terms separately.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, understanding the notion of transcendence discussed herein requires not the logical summation of an understanding of each term, but a ‘way of knowing’ that itself transcends the rational and logical way of thinking and brings each part together accordingly. Rankin provides an appropriate example of what this means by quoting *The Cloud of Unknowing* thus: “No one can fully comprehend the uncreated God with his knowledge; but each one in a different way, can grasp him fully through love.” (Rankin 2008, p63)

The essence of transcendence, like that of ‘the uncreated God’, needs to be embraced as a lover. Analysis with mind alone is insufficient. Or, as one *Wrekin Trust Round Table* participant (as quoted earlier) puts it:

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<sup>29</sup> Speaker 10 in the ‘Evolving Consciousness’ study group at the Wrekin Trust Round Table 2010, from a transcript of the session. A report of this gathering is included within Appendix 4.

<sup>30</sup> The RERC has been housed at what is now Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, since July 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Thus, whilst I identify holistic, integrated and holographic as terms that express (some of) the essence of transcendence, to distil the gist of transcendence requires an analysis of what these ideas have in common; what do they have in common? (Rather than a pedantic analysis of their difference). The answer is that each of these concepts is about connections and an inherent connectness.

[I] spent ages, you know, using my intellect to analyse what was happening to me. And then realised that was absolutely no use. Yet, you could critically analyse it till the cows came home and it would make no difference. It was still there, staring you in the face. So, you either engage with it and say, well, what does this feel like? How is it moving? How is it moving me and how is that making you move in the world? And then, the guidance, I think, comes to you.<sup>32</sup>

The above quote is typical of the personal experiences shared within the fieldwork of this research. Not only does this individual emphasise the importance of engaging beyond the intellect, but she introduces another important facet of transcendence: that ‘guidance’ comes through such engaging; that transcendence is a ‘way of knowing’ whatever it is one needs to know at that moment, such as an answer to a specific question on which one had been reflecting.

If a transcendence experience might provide a specific answer to a specific question, another important feature of transcendence, as described here, is that it is limitless; the term, the idea, has no restriction, physically or conceptually.<sup>33</sup> This notion is perhaps best illustrated by reference to a ground-breaking development in sub-atomic physics:

The entire universe is permeated by an ocean of Higgs field—a cold relic of the big bang—that is responsible for many of the properties of the particles that make up you and me and else everything else we’ve ever encountered. (Greene 2004, p256)

In July 2012 scientists at the CERN laboratory announced that, to a probability of 99.9999%, they had discovered a particle that had the characteristics of the Higgs particle,<sup>34</sup> closely associated with the Higgs field described above. Whilst the details are largely incomprehensible to those outside the discipline, the implications to the present discussion are significant: science now has a high confidence in the existence of something (the ‘it’ perhaps of my discussions above) that permeates “the entire universe” and which is part of the make-up of, literally, “everything.”

Simple though these words are, the enormity of the discovery, like the notion of transcendence that I am endeavouring to describe here, is extremely difficult to comprehend. “Everything” means everything: there is no thing, no energy, nothing that

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<sup>32</sup> From transcript, see footnote 24.

<sup>33</sup> That transcendence can be both specific and general is typical of its paradoxical nature.

<sup>34</sup> See [www.guardian.co.uk/science/blog/2012/jul/04/higgs-boson-discovered-live-coverage-cern](http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/blog/2012/jul/04/higgs-boson-discovered-live-coverage-cern), accessed on 15.7.12. The confidence level in the result is “5 sigma [which] is the usual particle physics threshold for discovery. It roughly means that you’re 99.9999% sure.” (quoted from the above web page).

is not affected by the Higgs boson and Higgs field or embraced by the notion of transcendence.<sup>35</sup>

Others have used the idea of transcendence in a similar vein. Christian de Quincey, for example, in *Radical Knowing* (2005) also links transcendence with mystical experience and with evolution:

Clearly, we have abundant evidence from the perennial philosophy and from modern spiritual teachers and practitioners that mystical experience transcends reason. We can evolve beyond reason, and when we do so we do not obliterate the benefits we've gained from reason over the past few thousand years. (de Quincey 2005, p32)

The quote comes from a section entitled Different Ways of Know (ibid pp34-35), a theme echoed by a number of other authors referenced in this thesis: rational consciousness is but one of many ways of knowing. Importantly, a transcendent consciousness does not replace rational thought: rather it embraces it, supplementing it with non-rational knowing to provide a deeper, broader relationship:

Beyond reason, unities and communions of experiences and higher states of consciousness appear to reason as ineffable and noetic—the infinite domain of the mystic. Whereas reason dominates feeling,<sup>36</sup> mystical knowing does not "conquer" reason—it envelops it, embraces it, transcends it. Thus, mystical or spiritual intuition is integrative: It includes, while transcending, both reason and somatic feeling. (de Quincey 2005, p32)<sup>37</sup>

In saying this, de Quincey does emphasise that it does not have to be this way: reason does not have to swamp primal knowing: it only does so because it has “become unplugged from its roots in the deep wisdom of the body” (ibid p33). It is possible however, as my contributor’s accounts in subsequent chapters confirm, that: “We need to open the vital channels between our words—even our written words—our bodies, and the articulate flesh of the world.” (ibid p33)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Whether the Higgs field equates directly to transcendence is outside the scope of this discussion but, in that they both permeate everything, they have a commonality that is particularly pertinent to my argument.

<sup>36</sup> Except perhaps, de Quincey notes, in the case where psycho-active substances have been taken. In such cases, feelings often do overshadow rational knowing.

<sup>37</sup> De Quincey uses ‘somatic feeling’ to mean an ‘indigenous’, ‘preverbal’ sense of knowing, a ‘liminal consciousness’ (ibid p33).

<sup>38</sup> Quoting de Quincey’s *Radical Nature*, (2nd edition), South Paris, ME: Park Street Press, 2010, p104).

That is, in a transcendent mode of thought, one can ‘read between the lines’ by feeling or intuiting as well as rationalising what is being read.<sup>39</sup>

De Quincey offers another perspective by contrasting the corresponding styles of inquiry:

Third-person inquiry leads to a science of external bodies, first-person inquiry to an interior science of the mind, while second-person engagement leads to a *communal science of the heart*. Whereas the ultimate ideal of objective knowledge is control, and the ultimate ideal of subjective knowledge is peace, the ultimate ideal of intersubjective knowledge is relationship-and, dare I say it, love. (de Quincey, 2005, p180)

Transcendent thought thus equates to de Quincey’s “intersubjective knowledge”, which transcends the dualities of subjective: objective and control: peace.<sup>40</sup>

This treatise builds on the above ideas by taking the theories and showing them to have found root in the transcendence movement. Through multiple transcendent experiences and a commitment to working with an evolutionary consciousness, it is my aim to demonstrate that the *Radical Knowing* of de Quincey, for example, is a succinctly argued description of what I have termed transcendent thought. Others label and describe it somewhat differently, but a gist common to referenced descriptions can be identified.

For example, I use the term transcendence in the same sense as that implied by C. P. Snow in his famous Rede lecture of 1959, i.e. *The Two Cultures*. Whilst Snow does not use the verb to ‘transcend’ he makes a strong case for bridging the gap between and significantly improved communication between what he calls the two cultures. These he identifies with two facets of his own persona: “By training I was a scientist: by vocation I was a writer”. (Snow 1959, p1)

In his *A Second Look* of 1964, in responding to criticisms and comments received, he clarifies that one of his objectives was to take a step back from the view of there being two cultures (and of their respective two views) to highlight that, scientists and literary intellectual are all, first and foremost, human beings. Snow, in examining the primal needs of mankind for basic shelter and sanitation, comments that people, of any culture:

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<sup>39</sup> Some techniques of ‘rapid reading’ may work in this way.

<sup>40</sup> The implications of Quincey’s stance to research methodology is also important: as transcendence is concerned with intersubjective knowledge, so appropriate means of inquiry need to be applied. Based on de Quincey’s ideas (and other which I discuss elsewhere in this chapter) this implies that a combination of first, second and third-person inquiry is required. This is the approach taken in this study.

“Shouldn't have to watch their children die. Here, if anywhere, we are members one of another.” (Snow 1964, p85)

Within the transcendence movement there is such an acknowledgement, not only with a tacit nod of the head but through practical commitment, to transcending the difference of education (with effective segregations into ‘scientists’ or ‘artists’, for example), as well as an ability to live and communicate as either or both as required.<sup>41</sup>

In his *A Second Look*, Snow notes that, in addition to the ‘two cultures’, there is another groups of individuals, and

This body of opinion seems to come from intellectual persons in a variety of fields- social history, sociology, demography, political science, economics, government (in the American academic sense), psychology, medicine, and social arts such as architecture. It seems a mixed bag: but there is an inner consistency. All of them are concerned with how human beings are living or have lived-and concerned, not in terms of legend, but of fact. (Snow 1964, p70)

He adds:

It is probably too early to speak of a third culture already in existence. But I am now convinced that this is coming. When it comes, some of the difficulties of communication will at last be softened, (Snow 1964, pp70-71)

I would suggest that he is describing nothing less than the beginning of what I am now calling the transcendence movement.

If Snow highlights the need for transcendence, then one of the most cited books on the nature of transcendence is Stanislov Grof's *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and the Transcendence in Psychotherapy* (1985). Whilst largely based on studies into consciousness-states enabled by LSD, the descriptions of transcendence that he includes parallel those states experienced by my contributors without recourse to drugs. Whatever the ‘cause’ of the states of mind, his descriptions and thus the meaning of the word ‘transcendence’ is highly significant. For example:

Some other transpersonal phenomena involve transcendence of spatial rather than temporal barriers. Here belong the experiences of consciousness of another person, group of persons, or all of humanity. One can even transcend the limits of a specifically human experience and tune into what appears to be the consciousness of animals, plants,

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<sup>41</sup> A number of examples of such an ability are includes in Chapter 5. Alister Hardy, for example, as well as renowned scientists was an accomplished painter. He was, for example, featured in *Plankton Shape and Form: an Inspiration in Art and Design*, Beaumaris Canolfan Gallery, June 1 - June 14th 2012, as part of the Beaumaris Arts Festival 2012.

or inanimate objects. In the extreme, it is possible to experience the consciousness of all creation, of the entire planet, or of the entire material universe. (Grof 1985, p41)

That a transcendent consciousness can enable a person to feel ‘at one’ with another creature or with “the entire material universe” may seem far-fetched, but numerous examples exist of ordinary individuals who, without the help of drugs, are having experiences that are of a very similar nature to those described by Grof.<sup>42</sup> He continues:

Another important group of transpersonal experiences involves telepathy, psychic diagnosis, clairvoyance, clairaudience, precognition, psychometry, out-of-the-body experiences, travelling clairvoyance, and other paranormal phenomena. Some of them are characterized by a transcendence of ordinary temporal limitations, others by transcendence of spatial barriers, or a combination of both. Since many other types of transpersonal phenomena also frequently involve access to new information through extrasensory channels, the clear boundary between psychology and parapsychology tends to disappear or become rather arbitrary when the existence of transpersonal experiences is recognized and acknowledged. (Grof 1985, p44)

Thus the importance of good relationships to one’s wellbeing is emphasised: transcending thought is not ‘for the sake of it’. A clear parallel between transcendence and transpersonal psychology is also identified, which I will now explore further.

In *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory*, Jorge N. Ferrer (2002) charts the development of Transpersonal Theory from its inception:

Crucial for the emergence of the transpersonal orientation was Maslow's (1970) equation of the peak-experience with what he called the “core-religious experience,” that is, the essential, intrinsic, and fundamental transcendent experience that he believed could be found at the heart of all religious traditions. It was this connection between psychological health and religious experience that impelled Maslow to move beyond the mostly secular and existential concerns of humanistic psychology, and towards the articulation of a new psychology: A psychology that, in contrast to the humanistic orientation, would be “transpersonal, transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interests, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like” (1968). (Ferrer 2002, p18)<sup>43</sup>

Thus, from the start, transpersonal psychology aimed to tackle many of the issues that are vital to transcendence: the bridge between the secular and spiritual, the “connection between psychological health and religious experience”, even “going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like”. Through such intent and considerable development by, for example, Maslow and by Grof (as cited later in this

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<sup>42</sup> The RERC database contains many such examples as, for example, quoted by Rankin (2008).

<sup>43</sup> Quoting Maslow, A.H. (1968) *Towards a Psychology of Being*, New York & London: D. Van Nostrand, (2nd edition), pp iii-iv.

chapter), transpersonal theory enabled tremendous strides not only towards whole human individuals, but also to a healthy individual ‘in the world’ as Heidegger puts it.

Despite many positive aspects, however, a number of features of transpersonal theory were, Ferrer argues, taking the discipline away from its roots and highest potential. These problems include “Intrasubjective Reductionism” (ibid pp22-28) and “Subtle Cartesianism” (ibid pp28-34). Both these features can be seen as the deep, inbuilt, propensity for authors and practitioners to revert back to the prevailing world-view: to try constantly to reduce all experiences and phenomena to pre-defined categories and descriptions; to separate everything into either/or distinctions; to objectify even the most subjective of human beingness. As Ferrer says:

The Cartesian philosophy of consciousness is at the heart of all representational paradigms of cognition, which envision human knowledge as the inner, subjective representation of an externally independent and objective world ... This representational view underlies all the objectivist demands for valid knowledge of traditional empiricism, positivism, and realism. For these epistemologies, our knowledge claims about the world, even if imperfect and approximate, need to be justified by matching them against a pregiven world that exists out there independently of human cognition. (Ferrer 2002, p29)

And therein lies the problem: so embedded, in not just the academic epistemology but generally in the human psyche, is the Cartesian world-view that it takes a high level of awareness and reflectivity to see past it. It is those who can think beyond the “Cartesian philosophy of consciousness”, irrespective of whatever other description they might give themselves, that characterises those within the transcendence movement. They, like the more recent transpersonal psychologists that Ferrer goes on to describe, recognise the danger of relying on any ‘pregiven’. Furthermore, they acknowledge ways of knowing wherein human cognition is far from independent of the world at large.

Having described the problems that have developed with transpersonal psychology, Ferrer goes on to ‘reconstruct’ transpersonal theory in a way that responds to the criticisms he has identified. He emphasises, as those within the transcendence movement do that:

Spiritual knowing is a participatory event: It can involve the creative participation of not only our minds, but also our hearts, bodies, souls, and most vital essence. Furthermore, spiritual energies are not confined to our inner world, but can also flow out of relationships, communities, and even places. (Ferrer 2002, p115)

That is to say, “Transpersonal phenomena can be more adequately understood as *multilocal participatory events*”. (Ferrer 2002, p116, emphasis in the original)

Or, alternatively, transpersonal phenomena, like transcendence, involves a whole-body / non-local consciousness. It is not constrained within one’s mind but embraces other facets of community, relationship or place. As I shall discuss further in Chapter 8, this can be seen to equate directly to Heidegger’s ‘Being in the World’. Such events spring from participating (in each and every activity) with one’s whole being; or one might say, through engaging *into* life.

Ferrer finds support for this view from many sources, not least Martin Buber who:

Proposes that the true place of spiritual realization is not the individual experience, but the community, the Between. In Buber’s words: “Spirit is not in the I but between I and you, it is not like the blood that circulates you, but like the air in which you breathe”. (Ferrer 2002, p119)<sup>44</sup>

That is, spiritual realisation or transcendence is usefully considered as a process, a flow of energy, an engagement.<sup>45</sup>

Ferrer continues:

Transpersonal events can also occur in the locus of collective identities, such as the ones that can emerge from archetypal, phylogenetic, ancestral, racial, or cultural morphic fields. Integrating and creatively expanding the work of Grof (1985,1988) and Sheldrake (1981, 1988), Bache (2000) argues that many of the transpersonal experiences that occur in psychedelic sessions need to be understood as involving not only individual human consciousness, but also larger fields of conscious identities that “include knowing, planning, and innovating”. (Ferrer 2002, p120)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Referring to Buber, M. (Kaufmann, W. tr., 1970) *I and Thou*, London: Collins, p89. I make further references to Buber in Chapter 8 (referring to a different translation).

<sup>45</sup> A simple example to illustrate this point would be the comparison between meeting an open, loving person and someone who was closed and ‘kept themselves to themselves’. The former participates in their relationship with others, the latter does not.

<sup>46</sup> Referring to Grof 1985 (as cited in this chapter); Grof, S. (1988) *The cosmic game*, Albany: State University of New York Press; Sheldrake, R. (1981) *A new science of life*, Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher; Sheldrake, R. (1988) *The presence of the past*, New York: Vintage & Bache, C.M. (2000) *Dark night, early dawn*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Ferrer includes another quote from Bache concerning “reaching into deeper levels of what we already are” (ibid p81), which might be interpreted as suggesting belief in pre-ordination and thus as a contradiction to Ferrer’s professed objection to the ‘pregiven’. I would suggest that such a contradiction is inherent in the paradox of transcendence. Within the transcendence movement one might say “we co-create our lives” in order to “fulfil our potential”. Or “God helps those who help themselves”. Some things, experience suggests, ‘are meant to be’ whilst others are totally outside an individual’s influence. As Ferrer adds, transpersonal events are



Thus, as my contributors describe, a sense of ‘belonging’ when engaged in a transcendent experience. A transpersonal event might be seen as immersion into the ‘web of life’.<sup>47</sup>

As Grof emphasises, it is an individuals’ ability to engage at a transpersonal level that provides the connection into the reality of daily life that enables a sense of belonging and thus wellbeing. Likewise and closely linked is one of the motivations given for committing to a ‘transcendent process’: the ‘fruit’ of transcendence experiences as Hardy described them.

Such transpersonal capabilities have been a feature of my meetings with those I identify as being within the transcendence movement. By sharing both intellectual ideas and physical/energetic practices, a number of common themes have emerged. A few common perceptions and commitments seemed to set apart these individual and groups even from the bulk of New Age and NRMs. In particular, they had, as I allude to above, a childlike quality to them, a natural curiosity for life. Far from holding fast to a particular creed or form of spiritual practice, their life and approach to it appears to be non-prescriptive. Spirituality for them seems to be not about following rules or rituals, but something more organic or authentic, something of their whole being.

Anne-Christine Hornborg in *Are We All Spiritual? A Comparative Perspective on the Appropriation of a New Concept of Spirituality* (2011), for example, offers a comparison between the ‘new spirituality of the neo-liberal society’ (p266) and the spirituality of the Mi’kmaq, the indigenous people of eastern Canada. In doing so she highlights and

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about “*communion and co-creative participation*” (Ferrer 2002, p121): to debate whether this is considered pre-ordained or not, would probably be to miss his point.

<sup>47</sup> As for example in Fritjof Capra’s (1996) *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*, New York: Anchor Books. I inadvertently came across an earlier poem I had written that I think expresses this point well. I recount it here.

or:

*Immersed in the sea of love  
A drop in the ocean of humanity  
A leaf on the tree of life  
Dissolved, like sugar in tea  
In laughter, as a comic's audience  
Not separate  
Yet unique  
(Beasley 2006, p46)*

echoes many of the concerns expressed by other authors about ‘the new spirituality’ that seems to have replaced religion as the predominant expression of our spiritual nature. In particular she notes that the ‘unchurched religions’ (e.g. *ibid.*, p252) are often closely associated with the ‘neo-spiritual therapists and coaches’ who “use inner potential as the concept for liberation” (*ibid.*, p254). That is, there is a strong element of individualistic ‘self-development’ which, she suggests, has far more in keeping with the prevailing Western ‘currency’ than an underlying spiritual essence.

A similar claim is made by Jeremy Carrette & Richard King in their much cited work *Selling Spirituality; the silent takeover of religion* 2005, in which New Age practices and beliefs are severely criticised, as being rooted within commercial preoccupations rather than spiritual ones. It is my contention, however, that attempts to define a spiritual movement (e.g. the New Age) through categorisation of beliefs or by practice (e.g. by defining of rituals or specific technique) have severe limitations. Most significantly, the implication of a said definition is that everybody within the movement will adhere to the said beliefs or practices to differing degrees. Given the variability and vagaries of human nature, few if any, movements can be considered as comprising an homogeneous group of individuals. On any given scale of attitude or behaviour, any group will exhibit a spectrum of traits.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, some within the transcendence movement might also belong to one or more other movements, including those already acknowledged by scholarly research: the New Age Movement and Human Potential Movement (HPM), for example.<sup>49</sup>

A brief review of the HPM serves to illustrate how other movements might fulfil some of the requirements of transcendence without fulfilling them all. In common with the transcendence movement, the HPM seeks to enable each individual to fulfil their full

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<sup>48</sup> This may also be true of the transcendence movement, hence my intent to define it by the attitudes expressed and actions towards others. Transcendence, in keeping with practical philosophy, is about practicing what is preached.

<sup>49</sup> Of course, the Human Potential Movement has developed in many, different, ways since Rogers. L. Michael Hall, for example, considers that Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) might be seen as such a development (see *Could NLP re-vitalize the Human Potential Movement?* downloaded from [www.self-actualizing.org/articles/Revitalize\\_HPM.pdf](http://www.self-actualizing.org/articles/Revitalize_HPM.pdf) on 6.3.13). My analysis of NLP and its practitioners over more than a decade would agree that Hall’s suggestion may have some validity. However, I would also conclude that NLP and its practitioners, like the HPM itself, do not sit wholly within the transcendence movement. I would argue that it is the intent and authenticity of each practitioner that ultimately determines the extent of transcendence that one might find.

personal potential, to ‘rise above’ fears and conditioning to achieve the most they can. Such an aim, however, also warns of the limitations and dangers of the pursuit of such an objective. Donald Stone (1978), and Edwin M. Schur (1977), for example, both highlight how an over emphasis on self-awareness can turn quickly to self-absorption, and how excessive personal success can be detrimental to the needs of community. These dangers are avoided within the transcendence movement by the praxis of presence which positions an individual wholly within their community.

Another prime candidate for representing the trends associated with transcendence would appear to be ‘Progressive Spirituality’ as described, for example, by Gordon Lynch in *New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-first Century* (2007). Lynch asserts that progressive spirituality can be “Seen as a step beyond multi-faith tolerance and collaboration, towards the definition of a spiritual ideology.” (Lynch 2007, p21) He expands and clarifies his definition to include the, “kinds of practices, identities, experiences and relationships [that] the ideology of progressive spirituality makes possible” (Lynch 2007, p41).

With such a focus on practice and experiences, progressive spirituality would seem well aligned to my notion of transcendence, particularly as Lynch identifies that:

Progressive spirituality is a contemporary expression of deeper religious trends in modern western society such as the cult of the individual, the turn to experience, the sacralization of nature and the rise of the new mysticism. (Lynch2007, p163)

However, Lynch then attempts to quantify the extent of the progressive spirituality movement and its potential to make a significant impact on society. He estimates that 1 to 2% of the population of the US and UK think of themselves “broadly as religious or spiritual progressives” (p164) with a more significant 30 to 40% potentially within the movement, “but not actively engaged”. Realistically, he argues, this latter, larger group is not very likely to become active. Thus,

We are ultimately faced with the puzzling question of why — if progressive spirituality is so well attuned to the cultural conditions and moral sensibilities of late modernity — so few people actively engage with progressive spirituality or participate in the progressive milieu. (Lynch 2007, p166)

This is indeed a puzzling question, but one that my studies can shed some light on. By focusing on praxis and experience, rather than belief and ideology, I demonstrate within this thesis that it is the practical, non-theological, aspects of progressive spirituality that reflect the needs of our time. Shared values and concern for a common humanity, as

perceived within the transcendence movement, do not require those who pursue them to become members of any organised religious, spiritual, or any other group. Indeed, I would argue that the question posed by Lynch answers itself. That is to say, so few potential members of progressive spirituality become members of that movement because the progressive milieu is not about religion or spirituality as an organised movement. Rather, the progressive milieu, as indicated by the transcendence movement is about, to use the popular idiom, ‘just doing it’, in one’s own daily life. The impulse at the heart of the progressive milieu is, I would argue, precisely the inner need to be one’s own true self in the world: without an intermediary religion, ideology or leader to follow.

Thus, whilst progressive spirituality provides some of the elements essential to transcendence, its attempt to sacralise life and define it as an ideology sets a key tenant firmly outside the essence of transcendence.<sup>50</sup>

A similar overlap without being wholly included, can be seen between the transcendence movement and Positive Psychology. Positive Psychology as derived by Martin Seligman (see, for example Seligman 2003) offers many of the characteristics of transcendence, for example, a development of a ‘meaningful life’ by which Seligman means, “Using your signature strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are.” (Seligman 2003, p262). “Something much larger” immediately suggests a transcendence in one’s state of beingness and “in the service”, a balance between being self-centred and being a useful part of society. Likewise an emphasis on enabling “Win-win” (ibid p258) in a given scenario.

Like most psychological theories (or theologies for that matter) claims and counter-claims abound: see, for example Richard S. Lazarus (2003a and 2003b) and Seligman & Pawelski (2003). Given such fierce debate on the merits, or otherwise, of Positive Psychology (or of any other particular psychology or particular theology), it would be unwise to position any specific psychology or philosophy, or approach to wellbeing as wholly within the transcendence movement. As Lazarus argues (2003b), Positive Psychology does seem to run the risk of denying negative emotions and the reality of aspects of reality to which they refer. For this reason alone, Positive Psychology could

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<sup>50</sup> Within the transcendence movement, whether life is sacred or not is about how each of us lives it, not a matter of semantics.

be considered devoid of the holistic stance requires of a transcendence view. However, Lazarus also writes: “There is an irreconcilable difference between my own view of life and what appears to be the outlook of the positive psychology movement.” (2003b, p173). For the mind that has experienced transcendence, this proposition raises an important question: how, despite open and amenable academic debate, can personal views (in this instance on Positive Psychology) become “irreconcilable”? From the transcendence perspective, that which is irreconcilable may represent an unwillingness to see or accept views other than one’s own. To claim “irreconcilable difference” would not be considered as transcendent behaviour. Proponents of Mindfulness,<sup>51</sup> for example, who became aware of “an irreconcilable difference”, would likely take that awareness as a need to continue their practice with the hope of reaching a reconciliation.

The practice of Mindfulness and development of EI (Emotional Intelligence, as coined by Daniel Goleman: see Goleman 1995; 2003), for example, both highlight the need to be aware of one’s feelings if one is able to obtain balanced wellbeing. That is not to suggest that everybody practising Mindfulness or EI would be regarded as operating within the transcendence movement. As Arati Suryawanshi says in *The Mindful Heart* (2013), “Mindfulness and Heartfulness work together. There is no scope for your mind and heart to work separately” (p57)

That is, mindfulness on its own is not enough. EI that merely rationally analyses every feeling is not enough. As useful and powerful as Mindfulness and EI approaches are, they will have limited effect on one’s life without an equal focus on one’s deeper, inner sense of Being. Mindfulness and EI become tools towards transcendence only when used within the context of a greater sense of existential awareness and need.

There are undoubtedly overlaps and similarities between memberships of these groups. Conversely, there are also many differences. Whilst one end of the spectrum within a group may be regarded as achieving transcendence, the other may well not be. Thus, various movements can be seen as having overlapping membership.

To illustrate this here I now compare and contrast the New Age movement with the transcendence movement, with specific reference to the critique of the New Age

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<sup>51</sup> As, for example, developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005), as cited on a number of occasions later in this thesis.

provided by Jeremy Carrette and Richard King in *Selling Spirituality - The Silent takeover of Religion* (2005).

### **Transcendence within the New Age movement**

Carrette and King clearly identify the extent to which spirituality has been commercialised. I would agree that the commodification of spiritual techniques and the corporate exploitation of holistic practices has had detrimental effects: not least the bad name that the New Age has in many quarters. In my years in the holistic health and self/spiritual development arena I have seen healing techniques and relaxation methods, packaged and branded to detrimental effects. Often these methods had valid and deep-rooted origins, but once given a trademark sign they can, Carrette and King suggest—and I agree—lose their integrity. How can a spiritual seeker, in conscience, trademark a spiritual technique based on ancient wisdom and centuries of devote practice and development? Those who develop such methods will probably argue that their method is different. Indeed, they may have added their own ‘bells and whistles’ to make the technique different. However, to suggest that they have invented something new, if not a sign of excessive ego or arrogance, would seem to suggest a commercial rather than spiritual focus. Developing or promoting such trends, would not be included those characteristics I attribute to the transcendence movement.

Many New Age practitioners however, whilst running ‘commercial’ operations (in that they aim to make a living out of them) do manage to retain an integrity and genuine spiritual focus in their work. To suggest, as Carrette and King seem to, that everybody who sells a spiritual product or service is guilty of gross commercialisation is, I would argue, an unfair representation of the situation on the ground. Below I offer a critique of *Selling Spirituality* based on my twenty years’ experience preceding and during my research for this thesis. In it I identify those features of the New Age that, far from overly commercial and/or egotistical are genuine efforts to bring spiritual practices into mainstream society to benefit both individuals and community. Given the subjective nature of the situation, it is probably not possible to quantify the proportion of New Age practitioners who fall within my definition of the transcendence movement, nor what percentage are accurately described by Carrette and King. However, I would argue that the evidence presented here clearly indicates a broad spectrum of attitudes and intents amongst such practitioners. Whilst Carrette and King chose to focus on the least

spiritual, the most commercial, individuals and their practices, my focus in on the other end of the scale.

The Carrette and King criticism of New Age practitioners and the range of products and therapies that they offer may be compelling. However, whilst agreeing that a proportion of services so provided are wholly commercial with little spiritual value, I would highlight many features of other services and practitioners, that are far from commercial (in the negative sense of the word in which Carrette and King use it). In this critique I identify such features of New Age practices that fall within my description of ‘transcendent’: that is, features largely incompatible with those on which *Selling Spirituality* focuses. This is not to question the validity of the argument put forward by Carrette and King, not to deny their evidence. Rather, it provides a different perspective. Where Carrette and King looked for and found the worse aspects, I have looked for and identified what the New Age movement itself might call its best aspects. Given a random sample of New Age practitioners, both aspects would undoubtedly be present.

Whilst the commercial motive may indeed feed the ego of some practitioners, those within the transcendence movement are very aware of the ‘ego driven’ nature of some forms of healing. This is illustrated, for example, by a discussion on the Linked-In *Reiki Healers Worldwide* group (with over 5,000 members). Responses to the question “Which style of Reiki do you practice?” identified styles and teachers of Reiki that added in non-traditional features. Member Patricia Woods commented:

I have seen people add all sorts of "colorful and dramatic" touches to their Reiki healing, but I believe none of that has any bearing on the results. Dramatic touches are ego based, not spiritually based.<sup>52</sup>

Many spiritual therapists and teachers whom I have met or worked with over more than a decade, tend to work within a local community and often rely only on ‘word of mouth’ to promote their services. They thus fall underneath the radar of Carrette and King. It is their perspective, gleaned from working alongside them for over 15 years, that informs this review.

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<sup>52</sup> See [www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=117032&trk=anet\\_ug\\_hm&goback=%2Egmp\\_117032](http://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=117032&trk=anet_ug_hm&goback=%2Egmp_117032), accessed 23.8.12.

I start by considering another way in which 'commercial spirituality' has been justly criticised. In *Selling Spirituality*, Carrette and King look closely at what a number of well-known 'Mind-Body-Soul' authors have been writing and conclude

Ancient techniques of introspection and self-control designed to transform one's orientation *away* from a false identification with the individual self and leading to deep confrontation with one's existential condition become instead optional methods for relieving daily stress and allowing individuals to cope better with the stresses and strains of the modern capitalist world. An arduous path to enlightenment and liberation from the cycle of rebirths through the conquest of selfish desires becomes yet another modern method for pacifying and accommodating individuals to the world in which they find themselves. (Carrette and King 2004, pp119-120)

I agree. Many of the recent top telling self-help titles make the spiritual journey sound easy. They imply that one only have to think positively to have all one could ever desire. This, as Carrette and King and many who have practised an ancient wisdom technique for more than a few years will affirm, is not at all the case: changing one's way of thinking from a conventional western mode to a transcendent one requires decades of hard work in facing and rising above an ego mind-set. Carrette and King quote various books by Deepak Chopra and the Barefoot Doctor (Stephen Russell) as particularly good (or bad) examples of this trend. I would add *The Secret* (Byrne, 2006).<sup>53</sup> A proportion, maybe even a significant portion, of material available from the New Age market, I would agree, can lead readers into a false sense of what it means to 'be spiritual'. Such authors and their supporters would be unlikely to be included within the scope of the transcendence movement.

In these respects then, I agree that much New Age material has serious flaws, that it may even, in some respects, be helping to keep alive the commercial world that spawned much of it. To conclude just this however is, I would suggest, to see only one view amongst many. There are a number of other perspectives to the New Age movement, particularly in the context of the evolution of human consciousness (which is the focus for this current discussion) which few of the critiques of New Age texts address. These I will now consider.

The implication in Carrette and King's work is that globalisation is, of itself a 'bad thing'. This I questions on two important, and closely linked, points. Firstly, that to deny the 'one world', global culture that can be seen as almost endemic in society, would be to

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<sup>53</sup> Probably only excluded from mention in *Selling Spirituality* because it had not then been published.



deny the reality. Few would deny that humankind is, whatever one's views about it, changing from being a collection of, say, Americans and Japanese to being a single human race, with at least some awareness of a shared planetary home. Which brings me to my second point: globalisation can, as a phenomenon in and of itself, be seen as evidence that humanity is evolving into a single, unified, species. In *After God*, Don Cupitt (1997), for example, argues that:

In a globalized world we must finally rid ourselves of all those ancient ways of thinking that construct religion by separating in all spheres of life Us from Them, and the Holy from its unclean and excluded Other. (Cupitt 1997, p126)

Cupitt and my contributors see humanity not as many separate races, creeds and nations, but as individuals and groups willing and able to rise above their differences.

Humankind is, to return to the main thrust of this thesis, transcending its various national and cultural identities. In doing so, many individuals are rising above differences of colour and religious traditions (for example) and putting sectarian ways behind them.<sup>54</sup>

The process may sometimes be painful, but can be seen as a necessary and positive evolutionary step: globalisation can be seen to be bringing different strands of the human race closer together.

I would thus suggest that there are a number of positive aspects to commercial spirituality, however submerged they might be in 'neoliberalism' (as Carrette and King call it). For example, they suggest:

You can be 'spiritual' nowadays without necessarily aligning with a particular religious tradition. As we have seen, this is overwhelmingly because the dominant discourse of 'spirituality' is grounded in the modern capitalist ideology of individualism. (ibid, p180)

Whilst I would agree that the commercial concept of 'self' is probably contrary to a spiritual or transcendent way of being, it has enabled, I would suggest, some very useful and necessary steps in the development of a healthy, well-balanced, psychological make-up. As Laszlo, Grof & Russell say:

We should not necessarily see increasing individuality as a bad thing. It is an important part of our evolutionary development; without it our culture would not have developed as it has. (Laszlo, Grof & Russell 1999, p64)

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<sup>54</sup> That is not to agree that the disappearance of national (or other) identities is a desirable development. From a transcendent perspective one does not have to relinquish local and regional identities to acknowledge also belong to 'the human race'.

They go on to suggest that it is “not individuality as such [that] is a problem but isolated individuality” (ibid p65). Having found a sense of individual self, the task now is to rebalance it. This is precisely one aspect of the transcendence process: to take self-confidence and integrate it with social conscience:

This more-evolved mode of individuality is not in conflict with being a more cooperative member of society. On the contrary, it can enhance cooperation. If you moved beyond an artificially derived sense of self, then you have moved beyond a lot of the self-caring that gets in the way of true compassion. You are better able to see and feel the needs of others. (Laszlo, Grof & Russell 1999, p65)

Such a change in values is an inherent part of transcendence and requires close examination of the nature and quality of one’s relationships with others; and with oneself. Whilst the dangers of individualism becoming selfishness are wholly accepted, there is another facet of individualism that has emerged from my study: in seeking to understand who and what ‘being human’ means for an individual often comes a desire to be accepted as a unique and different individual. A common concern in discussions with those practicing transcendence is the way in which society as a whole tends to label and categorise, almost it seems at time to a point of obsession.<sup>55</sup> This might be considered as a corollary of the conventional dualistic way of thinking, but the failure to acknowledge the unique potential is each human being does little to satisfy each individuals needs for acceptance in society and to have a sense of belonging. To accept one’s own uniqueness and be comfortable in one’s personal space, attitudes does not mean being always selfish. As I have just been discussing, part of the transcendence process is about getting a realistic balance between personal and societal needs.

Contributor Nellie provides an example:

Realities! What are they? Must man ever strive and attain nothing of lasting value? He will until he accepts the possibilities that lie within the mind, the body and above all, the Spirit. All are subject of a lasting purpose and to know the importance is to accept the challenge. To discipline oneself is to use wisdom and help the possibilities within to come forth and be useful and so understand life’s purpose. Reality gives man acceptance and truth, above all other things is revealed to man his true self.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Those within the transcendence movement might also argue that this thesis, along with most academic writing, does the same. This is not say that one view is right and the other wrong, merely to highlight the difference between conventional academic convention and the perspective within the transcendence movement.

<sup>56</sup> The *Spiritual Diary of Nellie Halton*, p16, originally written 28<sup>th</sup> May 1970.

This eloquent piece reflects the philosophy of many within the transcendence movement. It is certainly individualistic in many respects but, at the same time free of the 'ego speak' that characterises the commercialised spiritual arena.

Nellie goes on:

To shelter ones-self is to over-rule that God given purpose of life. To over expose it is to seek to fill the ego with vanity. Every age serves to give man purpose, every age reveals to man his or her true self. If vanity, or greed, or fear, or conceit, or any of the base instincts take over, one is retarding progress. So ever be as God intended, unselfish in ones' desires, but be mindful of one's life and higher self and so fulfil ones' purpose for living, using at all-time wisdom gained by experience.<sup>57</sup>

The emphasis on 'wisdom gained by experience' is noticeable as, again, is the need (if one is to live a spiritual life) of getting a balance between not sheltering oneself nor over-exposing oneself (in the sense of flouting one's own self-importance). That is, in Heideggerian terms, to Be oneself in the world. Nellie, like other contributors (see Chapter 5) felt that writing down her experiences was part of her life's "service":

I feel so very sure within that I must write this all down and I hope, by so doing, whoever takes the time and the trouble to read it will learn by my own personal experiences of 72 years on Earth!<sup>58</sup>

Through this writing, as in others featured herein, comes a humility, a genuine desire to help others on their personal journey. In the sense that it is not a recorded interview taken at the time, nor has any independent verification as to Nellie's personality, it is not 'objective' in a strict academic sense. However the diary, when read as a whole, has an honesty and integrity to it that suggests that this is how Nellie has lived her life and sees life. There can be no question that "*The Spiritual Diary of Nellie Halton*" (her italics) reflects her 'philosophy of life'. I include it in this thesis as just that and claim no more of it than that it is one example of an individual's 'philosophy of life'. Having read and heard many other similar personal descriptions, it is my conclusion that Nellie's is representative of the 'philosophy of life' adopted by many within the transcendence movement.

George E Lockett (2009), for example, expresses very similar sentiments:

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p18, originally written 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1971.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p24, originally written 18<sup>th</sup> June 1974.

We can be one with this field of love, this presence of the divine which is within us and surrounding us in each moment of our lives. All we need to do is just be present, and our awareness will naturally settle and become one with its divine nature.

We leave behind our physical nature and connect with that presence of love that underlies the physical. We connect with our true Self, the silent witness to our life and experiences. (Lockett 2009, p84)

In talking about 'true self' Lockett, like Nellie, is talking of a personal identity that emerges from divine presence; an individual that is unique and has 'divine nature', but without the self-centredness associated with individualism. Their philosophy, their experiences, their evidence for this research is in some respects, like transcendence itself, intangible. The concept of 'objectivity' in the context of such evidence is almost impossible to quantify. Without measurable quantities to assess objectivity, as a researcher I have to fall back on my engineering experience, and question its 'fitness for purpose', does the evidence of these writings contribute to the body of knowledge about those who practice transcendence?

The answer to this question is an unquestionable 'yes' for two reasons. Firstly, each piece of such evidence is given freely and with an intent to assist both my research and others spiritual seekers: there is no personal bias, no ego intent. Secondly, there is a tremendous degree of consistency between the many contributions on the features that I have indemnified as significant. It may be true that I, as an insider, share these understandings as to the nature of reality, but that does not invalidate the significant, self-consistent evidence from a range of other contributors. That commentators outside the transcendence movement might question the experiences and interpretations of them or disagree with the conclusions reached is accepted and not the issue. I claim only that the evidence presented and conclusions reached from it are representative of the views and experiences of those within the transcendence movement.

How others see us and how we see others thus changes during the transcendence process. In explaining why 'Human Relations' is a key issue for humanity to address in the coming decades, Bryce Taylor in *Forging the Future Together* (Taylor 2003) summarises the huge changes to human society over recent decades:

The rise of consumerism, the impact of greater disposable income, the breakdown of traditional patterns of living, the growth of travel and leisure all serve to increase contact between people. (Taylor 2003, p5)

He admits that the consequences of such changes are hard to predict:

On the one hand, they create unprecedented opportunities for individuals to stay in touch with one another, connect to people of like mind across the globe or to stay in touch in even the remotest places. On the other hand, they also bring with them the danger of exploitation, the corrosion of social trust and the demeaning of human values. (ibid)

These dangers thus reflecting the concerns of Carrette and King that consumerism is full of risks and concerns. This thesis however, like the work of Taylor, focuses on the opportunities and positive possibilities arising from globalisation, internationalisation and related consumerism.

This is not to deny the risks nor existing challenges resulting from these trends, but to highlight the other perspective, the “unprecedented opportunities” available. This is a key feature of ‘transcendence’ as I use the term: within the transcendence movement, rather than criticise the doubtful aspects of change (such as globalisation), the often paradoxical nature of ‘development’ is accepted and all efforts made to work with it. This is also the approach taken by Taylor in *Forging the Future Together*. The increased opportunities for a wider range of inter-personal relationships is seen as providing the ideal opening for transpersonal development and thus transcendence.<sup>59</sup>

### **All prevailing?**

There is another important factor that Carrette and King fail to mention: God (or The Oneness or other preferred term) is bigger than Microsoft, Google and all other multinationals put together. No organisation is immune from the effects of extreme weather and resulting floods, or from say, a tsunami. Concerns that such natural occurrences are becoming increasingly common due to climate change (whether or not this is the case) are forcing a re-evaluation of human’s ability to control the environment. See, for example, Gregory Bateson’s (1972) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*.

Carrette and King seem to imply that commercial interests are all prevailing and that all spiritual seekers are being absorbed by the tide of commoditisation. Such a suggestion, I would argue, is to diminish, even demean, the significant efforts by many individuals on a spiritual path. To these, those within the transcendence movement, market forces may indeed represent a challenge but not an insurmountable one. With the help of transcendent experiences, this proportion of spiritual seekers is able to access and align

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<sup>59</sup> That transcendence, at the daily, practical level is about relationships is a factor that I develop in Chapter 3. There I describe how transcendence is evidenced within various forms of relationships by those within the transcendence movement.

to the greater force inherent in the divine, thus distancing themselves from commercial pressures.<sup>60</sup> That the global market is powerful is not in question, but even it, dominant within world-wide culture as it currently is, can be seen as insignificant compared to the forces inherent in life itself and the many, varied, and profound ways in which the divine forces of nature and life work.

Judging from accounts received for this research, once an individual has consciously committed to a spiritual path, even if a commoditised one, life has a habit of challenges that person's perspective on life, their values and priorities. As Joseph F. Colletti, writing in the journal of *Spiritual Directors International* says, a spiritual journey is not about individualism or the competition of the market place:

Just when you thought that the spiritual journey was an individual venture, it draws you to recognise the unity and connectedness of all things. (Colletti, 2009)

That is, those who have had first-hand transcendent, religious, spiritual, mystical or other experience, have often known a consciousness beyond the lure of commercialism.<sup>61</sup>

As I discuss in Part Four, there are few predictors as to what might, or might not, enable or trigger a transcendent experience. Thus, just because some 'spiritual' events are overtly commercial spiritual events, does not mean that some people will not be affected by them. Take for example an individual on a self-confessed spiritual journey who goes on two weekends retreats, each offering 'a glimpse of enlightenment' and a chance to 'feel inner peace'. One may be based in a five star hotel, be presided over by a top name speaker or guru and cost, say, £1000. The other event costs a fraction of this figure, is accommodated in yurts, requires participants to help with the washing-up and is a sharing of techniques and ideas between those who feel ready and willing so to do. Which event will actually provide the promised heightened mental states and lasting benefits? One cannot say. Even if I attended both events myself and gave my preference, it would be foolish to predict that a significant proportion of other attendees would agree

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<sup>60</sup> Reports of transcendent experiences often prompt the respondent to talk of feeling protected or loved, such that fear subsides and concerns are put into perspective. Questionnaires received from my participants 13 & 15 fall into this category.

<sup>61</sup> Such experiences may also explain why an increasing number of individuals would consider themselves spiritual but not declare a religious affiliation or, if they did, state 'interfaith', 'interspirituality' or a similar all-embracing term. That is, the experience transcend religious labels.

with me. Whether or not a 'spiritual' event is deemed successful is not only a matter of cost or public profile. As I have discussed elsewhere, each individual needs different enablers at different stages of their lives and even overtly commercial events may provide the trigger that they need. It may come through a conversation with a fellow attendee over lunch or may, paradoxically, be a feeling of anger at overt commercialisation.

Having spoken to many participants at many such events over many years, I would conclude that there is a significant awareness and often cynicism at the take-over of spirituality by 'big business'. There are, undeniably, hugely successful 'spiritual' products that have little authenticity or divine value. Conventional marketing methods can, and do, fool many of the people much of the time. However, beneath this headline superficial spirituality there is, I content, an undercurrent of a more profound, liberating and positive nature. It is this that underlies the transcendence movement.

The point can also be made, that without the commercialisation of spirituality, many individuals would not be seeking a spiritual solution to life. It could be argued that large numbers of individuals have had enough of the material focus to life, are down-sizing, and are genuinely looking for some depth to their lives. It could also be suggested that overt materialism is sowing the seeds of its own destruction, if only by providing the first steps for those ready to move into a new phase of human development.

Thus, although the relentless pressure of commercialisation may have taken its toll on spiritual techniques and religious traditions, I would consider the trend part of mankind's evolutionary progression. Without the shift towards globalisation, there would probably not be the opportunities for learning to live together despite our differences.

That one of the main commonality between a large proportion of the earth's population, at this point in human history, is internationally known commercial brands,<sup>62</sup> may be a depressing thought for some. At other levels of society however, beneath the media's radar, in the transcendence movement, a deeper, more profound and positive aspect of globalisation seems to be emerging. It may even be an aspect that stems from the commercially promoted New Age movement.

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<sup>62</sup> Coca-Cola™ and i-Phone™ for example.

As Carrette and King say, much of New Age material may be lacking in spiritual depth, but it has, I would argue, encouraged and enabled millions onto some sort of spiritual path. It has begun the process of 'opening up' these individuals to ideas and practices that, in turn, provide access to alternative levels and modes of consciousness. It may be true that the books on the heaving 'Self-Help' sections in the book stores or on-line are not providing spiritual teaching as traditionally understood, but this is part, I would suggest, of a broader underlying process. As one learns (or is reminded) how to transcend, so one becomes comfortable in finding one's own truth. This, as I discuss further in Chapter 7, is a typical stage in transcendence process; that is, a breaking free of imposed frameworks of beliefs and the ability to become one's own, divinely guided, self.

The commodification of spirituality is, I would suggest and in my personal experiences, merely a passing phase. It may, to those used to conventional religions, be disheartening, but it can also be seen to be fuelling a much needed quest for meaning to life. Whilst one may be unlikely to find such depth and transcendence in the global marketplace, that very same marketplace is making available a myriad of tools and techniques that have significant potential for personal and collective transformation.<sup>63</sup> The commercialisation of spirituality is, I would argue, contributing to a grass-roots spirituality that is not acknowledged by Carrette and King.

In *Selling Spirituality* the focus is exclusively on just a small part of the Mind-Body-Spirit literature. These paint, I would argue, a very misleading image as to the bigger picture of 'spirituality' at the start of the twenty-first century. Carrette and King have, it seems, attempted to analyse the scene from the outside, by looking at the most obvious, external, signs available, that is, from the area in which big business tends to be most prominent. When one instead looks at the grass-roots spirituality which exists alongside the big-name books and prestige venue events, an altogether different picture emerges. Key features of this facet of the new Age, which I equate to the transcendence movement and which Carrette and King seem to have largely ignored, can then be identified.

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<sup>63</sup> It could even be argued that by taking humanity to such extremes of meaninglessness, capitalism is bringing about its own demise



Firstly, in my discussions within the transcendence movement, I have found a personal commitment by those involved not just to inner reflection and personal self-development but to the broader issues of global peace and sustainable local community. My Chapter 3, for example, provides examples which are by no means uncommon.

Secondly, and also clearly present within the transcendence movement, is an active resistance to many of the more commercial aspects of the spiritual growth movement. There is, at this level, an acceptance of the real issues and willingness to face the dangers that Carrette and King identify. Whilst some may read Deepak Chopra (for example) and be taken in by the promises therein, others are more discerning. They take from such books those ideas and techniques that seem to help but also, maybe after a few years of trying these methods, eventually see their limitations.

Evidence for such conclusions comes in many forms. Most of the teachers, mentors, therapists, authors and others who offer their services to the 'marketplace' of spirituality, for example, are self-employed. They do not work for large corporations. On the contrary, most have consciously and deliberately set up in their own right in such activities precisely to be free of overly commercial attitudes and ways of doing business.<sup>64</sup>

In many geographic regions around the UK,<sup>65</sup> networks of like-minded people who work together 'for the greater good'. Such kindred spirits develop their spiritual communities (which might cover a single town or whole region) in order to offer mutual support to each other and to show solidarity against commercial interests. A few examples, many with decades of community service behind them, include: Network News (in Wales), Wessex Alternative Connections, Pathways (London & SE and Pathways North).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> That is not to suggest that all those who are self-employed would be included in my scope of the transcendence movement. The factor that would point to inclusion is whether due account of the individual circumstances and feelings of individual clients are taken into account.

<sup>65</sup> And probably internationally, but an assessment of this beyond the UK is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>66</sup> See respectively: [www.thewholeguide.org](http://www.thewholeguide.org), [www.wessexalternativeconnections.com](http://www.wessexalternativeconnections.com) and [www.pathwaysnetwork.co.uk](http://www.pathwaysnetwork.co.uk), accessed 6.8.12. The latter, whilst active to my knowledge for at least ten years now seems to be in abeyance. Many other similar groups have existed for a number of years including *Oxfordshire Green Pages* and *Sailing with Spirit*. The latter was the holistic magazine and network for Northamptonshire from 1997 to 2002. As secretary and editor for *Sailing with Spirit* I gathered much of the 'grass-roots' understanding of those who were active in such networks: there were typically 100 individuals advertising in, subscribing to or otherwise contributing to this network during its 5 years of existence.

Interestingly these networks usually comprise a broad spectrum of individuals with a wide variety of understandings of the term 'spirituality'. A typical group will be made up of, for example, holistic and complementary therapists, environmental campaigners, religious groups, philosophical societies, retreats centres, artists and musicians. What they have in common, besides a mistrust of corporate ideals, is a deep sense of spiritual interconnection that binds them together. Their differing definitions of spirituality, far from being a 'problem' (as Carrette and King seem to see it) is their strength. It gives the network breadth and depth, it demonstrates 'on the ground' the very powerful and positive effects of transcending differences for a collective benefit.

In addition to the physical networks and groups there are now numerous on-line networks and communities dedicated to spirituality, both as forum on the main internet communities (LinkedIn,<sup>67</sup> Facebook, etc.) but also as separate and specifically spiritually oriented internet communities. Examples include, but in no way are restricted to: Beliefnet, The Ascension Network and Spiritual Short Stories.<sup>68</sup> The following (from a Blog on the first of this sample of sites) is typical of the stories shared:

We were a room of strangers, instantly connected. Our common ground ... the Olympics, bringing people together.<sup>69</sup>

The ability of sports in general and the Olympics specifically to transcend cultural barriers, despite criticism often levelled at its over commercialisation, is nicely illustrated, as is the fact that the story concerns watching TV in a Bed & Breakfast in London.

Obviously the many sites available span a large range of specific topic areas and an equally wide spread of level of awareness and discernment. I would have to agree that many do revolve around the more materialistic movements and related 'big name' teachers, but many others do not. On these sites are to be met individuals who are genuinely seeking a world beyond the commodity marketplace and who are working hard to bring about such a shift of consciousness. Whilst it is virtually impossible to

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<sup>67</sup> For example the 'Spirituality and Consciousness' group: see [www.linkedin.com/groups/Spirituality-Consciousness-152776?gid=152776&mostPopular=&trk=tyah](http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Spirituality-Consciousness-152776?gid=152776&mostPopular=&trk=tyah) (accessed 6.8.12)

<sup>68</sup> See respectively [www.beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com), [ascension.net](http://ascension.net) and [www.spiritual-short-stories.com](http://www.spiritual-short-stories.com) accessed 6.8.12.

<sup>69</sup> See [www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/2012-Olympics/Galleries/16-Days-of-Peace-NEW.aspx?p=2](http://www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/2012-Olympics/Galleries/16-Days-of-Peace-NEW.aspx?p=2), accessed 6.8.12

quantify what proportion of the members of these sites collectively fall within 'the transcendence movement', there are sufficient examples of transcendent traits on display to demonstrate, I would argue, a groundswell of public interest in things spiritual. Such web sites bring spirituality out into the open and allows discussion of the related issue. They help that proportion of humanity that is ready to open up previously closed minds; i.e., to transcend.

Typical of the events and activities promoted by the physical networks are: global peace meditations, healing circles, circle dancing, drumming workshops, community environmental action. i.e. shared experiences. Whilst much of the personal intent underlying the more aware spiritual development practices require time in solitude and a focus on our own personal issues, the spiritual experience that many members of these groups seek (in contrast to Carrette and King's emphasis) are shared experiences: the opportunity to heal, dance, create with kindred spirits. Such events rarely make large amounts of money and rarely involve corporations yet, or perhaps because of this, they are the lifeblood of the many, thriving, holistic and spiritual networks around the globe.<sup>70</sup>

Members of these local groups often have in common only a general commitment to a spiritual approach to life. Each might come with a very specific spiritual outlook based on one philosophy or teacher, but they have a shared interest in subjects that brings together individuals from a very broad spectrum of communities, background, ages and races, for example. Within these 'spiritual safe havens' humans are able to transcend their old labels (each based on its own specific belief system) and work to understand what it means to be a human in a global community. Such understanding and acceptance is, I argue, a key feature of transcendence.

Carrette and King point out that the commercialisation of religion and spirituality, both traditional and New Age, is not so much a conspiracy theory or even a conscious action on behalf of the business world, but an endemic and underlying ethos that exists in the world. That is, it is part of the new reality in which all humans live, part of a new

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<sup>70</sup> For examples of the range of such events on offer see, for example, *Network News*, published monthly and sub-titled '*a guide to inspiring events in north Wales*'. A listing of events for June 2012, chosen at random, includes a Tibetan Yoga session (suggested donation £3), Summer Solstice Walk (£14.75 including refreshments) and 'Spiritual Development' (£4). This (typical) selection, representing grass-roots spirituality, is a far cry from the commodity spirituality of Carrette and King.

emerging collective consciousness. It is a 'phase we are going through'. Strangely, although this notion is mentioned a few times in *Selling Spirituality* they do not draw the obviously corollary: if this is a phase, it will pass. Within the transcendence movement, as I describe through my models in Chapter 7, the general global materialism and spiritual commoditisation is usefully considered as a transitionary phase. It is part of our individual personal development and collective evolution.

As *Selling Spirituality* concludes “we must *go beyond* Marx” i.e. We must transcend 'religious and secular' and 'spiritual and material'. They offer a number of excellent examples of groups and movements who are already doing this and whom I would acknowledge as part of the transcendence movement:

They include Third-World liberation theologies (articulating a Christian concern for the poor and the disadvantaged), the Zapatistas (reflecting an indigenous but very contemporary blend of Mayan and Catholic traditions in direct confrontation with neo-liberalism), the 'tree-hugging' Chipko movement of the Himalayas (grounded in Gandhian-inspired social resistance and ecological concern), the Swadhyaya movement for social upliftment in western India (developing a model of social justice and redistribution based upon the teachings of the Hindu Vedanta traditions), the various forms of Socially Engaged Buddhism (such as Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing and the Ambedkarites) rooting their critique of social injustice in Buddhist principles, to name but a few. (Carrette and King 2005, pp180-181)

I would suggest that anyone pursuing a path based on personal transcendence (as described in this thesis) is also an active part of the resistance to capitalism that, as this book so clearly and sensibly points out, our society needs. I wholeheartedly concur with Carrette & King's closing two sentences which, in many ways, follow naturally from a pursuit of transcendence:

The emergence of new forms of engaged spirituality grounded in an awareness of our mutual interdependence, the need for social justice and economically sustainable lifestyles, may yet prove our best hope for resisting the capital excesses of neoliberalism and developing a sense of solidarity and global citizenship in an increasingly precarious world. Our future may depend on it. (Carrette & King 1995, p182)

This “sense of solidarity and global citizenship” is reflected in the commitment to community of those within the overlap between the New Age movement and the transcendence movement, as I have illustrated above.

It could also be argued that such collective responsibility is present in many individuals who naturally live life authentically. I shall now compare the characteristics of this grouping to those of the transcendence movement.

## **Authenticity and natural transcendence**

The spirituality expressed by Hornborg's *Mi'kmaq*, for example, offers an authenticity that might provide a more realistic measure of the capacity for human spirituality.

Indeed, the value of the praxis and philosophy of indigenous cultures is increasingly highlighted in recent research. Nora Marie Christiani (2011), for example, uses: "The training of indigenous midwives as a focal point through which to discuss the intersection of global reproductive health and local practice." (Christiani 2011, p6)

Christiani identifies that Mayan Midwives are willing to embrace biomedical methods, where this has practical advantages to patients. However, this does not mean that they accept the underlying biomedical epistemology, preferring their own, traditional holistic perspective. Such an approach illustrates two key features of transcendence. Firstly an open-mindedness to new and different perspectives. Secondly a focus not on epistemology or theory but on the needs of those involved (in this case their patients) and on pragmatic considerations.

Such dual focus of intent plus praxis, without engagement in theoretical debate, describes the approach of what I call 'naturally transcendent' individuals. That is, those who transcend thought in their day-to-day lives naturally without the need for any help in doing so: the salt-of-the-earth sort of person, or friend, family member or neighbour who is always there helping and supporting at times of need. Such men and women always seem to know exactly what help is needed, without needing to be told or to engage in lengthy debate in order to find out. Characteristics of ease and a lack of pretensions would also be present.

The idea of a "naturally transcending individual" or "naturally transcending person" does not seem to be present in the readily accessible in the relevant literature,; neither in a range of Arts & Humanities or Health & Behavioural Sciences databases, nor even the main Google search engine.<sup>71</sup> Whilst it is outside the scope of the current research to explore these notions more fully, an investigation into individuals who—to use the parlance common in the transcendence movement "just are"—could offer additional

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<sup>71</sup> Searches undertaken on 15.3.13. Including (but not restricted to) the following databases: JSTOR, Philosopher's Index, British Humanities Index (BHI), British Periodicals, COS Conference Papers Index, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses: UK & Ireland: History, Literature & Language, The Arts and Health & Medicine.

valuable insights, evidence even, on the nature of transcendence as an inherent human trait.<sup>72</sup>

Although the phrase “naturally transcendent” (without its association to a particular or general ‘person’ or ‘individual’) does occur within literature that is relevant to our inquiry, it does so infrequently. Significant to my debate is its use by Etienne Gilson in *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (Gilson 1937), who writes,<sup>73</sup>

The knowledge gathered by a naturally transcendent reason in its search for the first principle, of the first cause, of whatever is given in sensible experience. (Smith 1938, p67 referring to Gilson 1937, p308).

The seekers of the transcendence movement would certainly identify with a “search for the first principle, of the first cause”; in other words, they would affirm that which gives life itself meaning. Likewise the notion of “sensible experience” resonates with the reports of the powerful transcendent experiences and their effects of the contributors within my fieldwork.

Equally significant is the following statement from the Foreword to Gilson’s work: “There is a centuries long experience of what philosophical knowledge is—and that such an experience exhibits a remarkable unity”. (Gilson 1937, pxiii)

That is to say, when one looks (as those in the transcendence movement would look) for a common basis to the experience of philosophical knowledge (as opposed to a theory of philosophical knowledge), “a remarkable unity” can be found, thereby suggesting such an experience is inherent to us as human beings. This could thus be regarded as an indicative of a *natural* transcendence.<sup>74</sup>

Other authors use the phrase in a variety of contexts. Marie-Luise Schubert Kalsi (1987), for example, in her work on *Meinong* writes that, “perception is naturally transcendent” (Schubert Kalsi 1987, p24). Such an idea would seem to add weight to the notion that an

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<sup>72</sup> Whilst a few of my contributors might fall under the heading of naturally transcendent, most freely admitted that they did not find it easy to adopt a transcendent praxis. That they were intent on transcendence through conscious commitment, rather than pursuing transcendence without conscious thought, would identify them as outside the naturally transcendence category.

<sup>73</sup> Being the final form of the author’s lectures at Harvard in honour of William James in 1936-1937.

<sup>74</sup> As I shall discuss in Chapter 3, this is a similar stance adopted by the Interspiritual movement, and as compared to a transcendence based on a specific practice or theology, for example.

ability to engage fully in life, that is, to perceive it through our ontological makeup, as being part of it, is an inherent human capacity; even if rarely actualised.

Thomas Meisenhelder (1982) claims that:

Hope is a naturally transcendent mood, that opens one to the future, it allows the individual to liberate him or herself from the captivity of the present situation, whatever it may be. (1982, p202)

Again, the juxtaposition of hope, natural transcendence and liberation resonate strongly with the perception of those within the transcendence movement. Likewise the use of ‘allows’ and ‘present’ illustrates a striking similarity to many of themes that are found critical in transcendence praxis, as I described in detail earlier.

Melvin A. Kimble, in describing *Viktor Frankl's Contribution to Spirituality and Aging* (Kimble 2001), goes one step further to claim: “The human spirit is, then, naturally transcendent, always seeking beyond itself because in God's grace humans were created that way”. ( p26)

Clearly such a claim cannot be substantiated in any quantitative and objective manner, and it is accepted that many philosophical, theological (and other) challenges could be levelled at it. This does not however negate the consistency between the references to natural transcendence included above. Nor do any counter-claims limit the extent to which these theories can be shown to reflect and be reflected in the experiences of my contributors. It is such a self-consistency and broad spectrum of supporting experiences and conceptual frameworks that I present herein.

Hornborg identifies a number of features of beliefs and practices (of what I would call naturally transcendent people) which, I would agree, demonstrate a spirituality very different from that ‘sold’ at New Age workshops. Amongst the characteristics that Hornborg describes are the following that reflect an inherent spirituality or ‘transcendence of being’. Firstly, the emphasis on community.

Of course, one could debate what is meant by community. Taking Hornborg’s descriptions of the *Mi’kmaq* and comparing them with other descriptions of indigenous people (e.g. those by David Abram, 1996), his notion of community seems to include extended family, village members and also those sharing language and traditions. That is, its principal feature is one of caring for those one lives amongst; it is about feeling part of a unit that works, lives and breathes together. This is of course nothing new: all

faith traditions include something akin to the Christian ‘Love Thy Neighbour’ or the ‘Compassion for all’ of most Buddhists (for example).<sup>75</sup> But where is this trait in the new spirituality movements?

The answer to this question is where I would disagree, at least in part, with Carrette & King, and with Hornborg too. I agree that within the new spirituality are many teachers, authors and followers who enter personally into the various practices they offer with little more than a desire to follow the fashion of the times. I do not deny that in many cases the intent and degree of commitment is shallow and any depth of spiritual meaning or connection sadly lacking. But such a criticism cannot and I would argue, should not, be levelled at everybody within the New Age, NRMs or other facets of ‘the new spirituality’. For these terms embrace a wide range of beliefs, practices and individuals and thus a broad spectrum of attitudes. If one end of this spectrum corresponds to superficial commitment to a spiritual depth, at the other end are—as my experiential accounts and fieldwork demonstrates—those whose practices and ways of being correspond far more closely to those of Hornborg’s *Mi’kmaq*. It is these individuals who I would include as representatives of the transcendence movement and their ethos which form the basis for this thesis.

For the *Mi’kmaq*, as for others within the transcendence movement, simplicity and practicality of philosophy are uppermost, as perhaps illustrated well by the following well known Serenity prayer of Niebuhr:

*God, give us grace  
to accept with serenity  
the things that cannot be changed,  
courage to change the things  
that should be changed,  
and the wisdom to distinguish  
the one from the other.*<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Such an ethos, considered central to all faiths, is often called ‘The Golden Rule’. See, for example, Karen Armstrong, (2011) *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, London: Bodley Head, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr is generally accepted as the author of this prayer written, according to his daughter, Elisabeth Sifton, in 1943. See Sifton, E. (2003) *The Serenity Prayer*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003, p7.



This prayer often, but mistakenly, attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, provides a simple and understandable theology of life. That there is some question-mark over its authorship does not alter its message or impact. Having said that, the identification of true authorship would still be considered important: in order that that author be duly acknowledged and respected.<sup>77</sup>

In such timeless wisdom, theoretical paths to happiness are easily stated. The day-to-day practice for most ‘seekers’<sup>78</sup> however is itself very different: according to many sources that I will refer to in the following pages, suffering is also part of the process.

Despite this however, it is my contention that, as mankind moves through the second decade of the 21st century, a significant body of humanity is willing to suffer. Those within the transcendence movement, for example, are committed to the ethos so eloquently stated in the Serenity Prayer above. This movement, and the associated dedication to patience and acceptance, is present not only in ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’ circles but is, I contend, also an integral part of general human experience. In business, for example, it is simply and directly illustrated by the *Stockdale Paradox*, which states:

You must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, *AND at the same time* have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be. (Collins 2001, p13)<sup>79</sup>

The similarity between this and the Serenity Prayer is striking. To succeed, be it in business or life generally, there is, as both statements concede, no substitute but to face the harsher realities of life with determination and an inner conviction that all will be well in the long-run. To change from, for example, victim mentality to living the essence of Stockdale Paradox is indeed what I call the process of transcendence. It is a process of

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<sup>77</sup> The ontology within the transcendence movement is illustrated by how one responds to this uncertainty over the origin of this, and other sets of words that seem to provide ‘pearls of wisdom’. Whilst individuals outside the transcendence movement, those still living the conventional ontology, will typically seek certainty as to origin, individuals within the transcendence movement typically do not. What is more important to them is the gist, the essence of the prayer: its underlying value. Since the words seem to have an inherent meaning and power, why (they would argue) does it matter who wrote it? They would support this argument with a second: that the words of this prayer reflect the wisdom from many other quarters throughout human’s literary history.

<sup>78</sup> I use the word ‘seeker’ in the same way as both the Sufis and Quakers for whom it describes an individual, of any faith, who is on a conscious spiritual quest.

<sup>79</sup> The Stockdale Paradox is named after Admiral Jim Stockdale, the highest-ranking United States military officer to be held and tortured in the “Hanoi Billon” prisoner-of-war camp, Vietnam, from 1965 to 1975. (See Collins 2001, p83)

personal development both reflecting and reflected by an evolutionary shift in one's way of thinking and thus praxis.

To the individuals and groups cited within this study—suffering, or rather the engagement with suffering—is accepted as a necessary part of this personal and collective purification and development: “Pain and suffering are a mystery to engage with as well as endure, to be lived and cherished as well as anguished over”. (McKenna 2008, p72)

Quotes such as the above can be found within many traditional theological texts and within more recent books on personal development. As a Spiritual Director, Megan McKenna, who wrote the above, demonstrates the common ground between these (and many other) genres. And by doing so she helps those she guides to see and feel the nature of suffering, free of the restrictions imposed by the language of any particular faith or discipline.

This thesis is an exploration of the practice of transcendence where suffering is considered a shared human reality.<sup>80</sup> Within the transcendence movement there is, as I shall elucidate, such a feeling of mutual concern and interconnectedness that all suffering is seen as one's own, and by the same token that the burden of one's personal suffering can be shared and thus alleviated through one's connection to the Oneness of the human race as a whole. With this comes an acceptance of the need for each individual to face their deepest fears, and to subsequently realise their fears are shared and dissipated within this sense of community. This can be seen as a process that is undertaken as the *practise* of transcendence. By equating the risks of engaging with one's fears to the dangers of riding on the back of a tiger, McKenna goes on to say:

They [pain and suffering] are richer and truer when shared with others, even if nothing can be done to stop the pain. Some ease comes with presence, with embraces and with grasping the tiger together. (McKenna 2008, p73)

As important as shared suffering to those within the transcendence movement are personal experiences of transcendence, and attainment of longer periods of transcendent states of mind. Such states are, as I shall demonstrate, obtained not necessarily through religious or even explicitly spiritual activity but through engagement with the depth and breadth that is life at its most whole and complete.

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<sup>80</sup> Other features of my definition of transcendence are discussed in Chapter 2.

This thesis is a quest to begin to make sense of the nature and dynamics of this *depth*, and not in order to ascertain a definitive explanation of it or even a theoretical justification for it, but in order to outline its pragmatic truth, its practical meaning. Advocates of this process of transcendence as an attitude and way of life, tend to feel that it adds value to their lives, not so much in what they do, but in the manner in which they do it; in their attitudes and approaches. This is tantamount to what Heidegger called “the self-dissimulation of the unveiling of the ‘meaning’ of what we call ‘Being’” (Heidegger 1949, p350). That is to say, transcendent experiences are a personal experience of having seen, sensed or otherwise experienced a higher level of Being, and this entails an on-going process of ‘unveiling’ of higher states of consciousness for and of itself.<sup>81</sup>

In the pages that follow I shall identify common features found within reports and theories of transcendent experiences. In the course of doing so, we shall establish the grounds for supporting the ideas that our personal experiences are interconnected and thus part of a broader, object human perspective: a shared notion of transcendence. Already in the literature we find similar ideas expounded, such as, for instance, the ‘holographic principle’ and Wilbur’s integrative theory of consciousness. The former concludes that that which occurs at one level of life (e.g. the microscopic level) reflects and is reflected in all other levels (e.g. the macroscopic). Francisco Di Biase (2009) summarises it best as follows:

We could compare [this] universal informational interconnectedness with the following metaphoric quotations from various spiritual traditions: As above so below (Alchemy). All that is outside is inside (Upanishads). The father is inside us (Christianity). As in the earth so in the heavens (Christianity). This universal interconnectedness could be perfectly understood as a Cosmic Holographic Consciousness. (Di Biase 2009, p662)

According to this theory, what goes on in one’s mind is a reflection of and is reflected by what is happening in the world around. That is, the boundaries between ‘I’ and ‘life’ are transcended.<sup>82</sup> Scholars David Bohm and Howard A. Jones follow this notion with

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<sup>81</sup> For ease of writing and of reading, “‘Being’” is from hereon-in written as Being, meaning “to be living in a transcendent state, to be ‘in the flow’, immersed in the world but not attached to it in any material or emotional way” and embracing the Heidegger, Buddhist and Taoist senses of the term. The parallels to the specific Heideggerian use of the word is discussed in Chapter 8.

<sup>82</sup> The relevance of living on boundaries is discussed in Chapter 11, with particular reference to the work of Paul Tillich.

their own similar respective concepts of the ‘implicate order’ (e.g. Bohm 1980), and holism as a blueprint for 21<sup>st</sup> century living (Jones 2008<sup>83</sup>).

Ken Wilber (1996) notion of an ‘Integral theory of consciousness’, likewise asserts that truth has four ‘validity claims’, each of which needs to be embraced. These claims, he argues, represent four perspectives on reality, the subjective and objective facets of the ‘Individual’ and the subjective and objective facets of the ‘Collective’. Together they “are the ways that we connect to Spirit itself” (Wilber 1996, p109). To feel whole and fulfilled in life, Wilbur argues, all four views are necessary and need to be integrated together and embedded into one’s whole approach to life. In the context of Wilber’s ideas, my notion of transcendence can be equated to a state of mind that embraces both ‘Individual’ and ‘Collective’ views, and in both cases, find comfortable resolution in both subjective and objective perspectives on life.<sup>84</sup>

By applying the holographic and integrative principles in the writing of this thesis I aim to illustrate how the practice of transcendence embodies these key ideas. Extending the integrative and holistic concepts brings awareness to two further key concepts that underlie both this thesis and the transcendence movement to which it refers. Firstly, the commitment by those involved to transcend barriers, i.e. actively seeking to live the integrative and holistic principles even if it means having to face and break down inner, mental, blocks or physical and practical barriers to transcendent living. It is as part of this process that suffering is shown to be a prominent and somewhat controversial issue. Likewise, for the individuals and groups studied, transcendent experiences are considered vital tools in negotiating such barriers.

The second supplement to the integrative and holistic concepts, which I then apply to those seeking personal fulfilment, is that their theories and practices are inclusive, i.e. to

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<sup>83</sup> Jones summarises it thus: “Any activity we think of as an isolated and complete entity is in fact part of a wholly interacting hierarchical chain that interacts with other holarchic complexities”. (2008, p13)

<sup>84</sup> That a new integrated age is emerging is highlighted by Kurt Johnson & David Robert Ord in *The Coming Interspiritual Age*, Vancouver: Nameste, 2012.

acknowledge that, as John Donne (1572-1631) famously said “No man is an island”. We are, as he also reminds us, “involved in mankind”.<sup>85</sup>

The inclusiveness suggested by Donne is a key element in the transcendence movement, indicated not only by organisations<sup>86</sup> and individuals,<sup>87</sup> and their respective practices, but also by trends now embedded in the education system within the UK. From being narrow and elitist, higher education is seeking to be inclusive in its policies and practices. Thus,

The current context in which higher education is operating exerts particular pressure upon universities to ‘evolve’ ... We believe that addressing inclusivity is central to remaining an educational institution. (Nunan et al 2005, p258)

According to Lani Florian (2005) the call for inclusiveness in education is part of a broader social trend. In charting the changing attitude of the education system towards those with disabilities, Florian highlights how ‘normalisation’ (treating everybody equally, irrespective of disability, race, etc.) was first replaced by ‘integration’ and then by ‘inclusiveness’ as the preferred approach to teaching those with identifiable differences. ‘Inclusion’ she argues represents positive progress for two particular reasons. She claims: “(1) that the term inclusion ‘goes beyond simply integrating people’, and (2) that it ‘acknowledges a history of exclusion that must be overcome’.” (Florian 2005, p31)

My thesis adds a further dimension to this call for inclusiveness by illustrating how arguments for inclusiveness are used by the interspiritual movement as it seeks to embrace as one a spirituality that is inclusive of all faiths.<sup>88</sup> Inclusiveness, Florian argues, is about embracing differences between human beings and seeing each individual as unique and valuable in their own right. This is also, I argue, a crucial aspect of transcendence: it requires acceptance and embracing differences between oneself and others.

Such inclusiveness is key also to my approach to writing this discourse: my intent is to embrace a broad spectrum of academic disciplines, to demonstrate that the notion of

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<sup>85</sup> In his *Meditation XVII*.

<sup>86</sup> That I describe in Chapter 3.

<sup>87</sup> Whose experiences are analysed in Chapter 6.

<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 3.

transcendence is found not only in religious discourses but also in, for example, in those disciplinary narratives of psychology, sociology and education. I aim, in both my language (see Chapter 2) and content, to include theories and practices that demonstrate a trend and need within human endeavours that is indicative of the transcendence movement.

Whilst one focus for this work is to establish the validity of a perceived, human evolutionary trend that is inherent within our capacity of experience as human beings, another is on the relevance of the individual and personal ‘journeys’ of its adherents. The inclusion of both a general and particular focus might appear contradictory, but as I noted earlier, it is precisely within contradiction that transcendence is found. Likewise, in transcendence it is possible to accept and even to see the beauty of a paradox and to feel no attachment or need to engage with or re-establish the rational dualisms we have been conditioned to find in the Western epistemological outlook. Such features of transcendence are discussed in Chapter 2. Suffice to say, a transcendent thinker sees no conflict between a human-wide focus and an individual focus: one is merely the ‘holographic’ reflection of the other.

I thus explore my theme in the general global and historical context of the beginning of the 21st century. One possible contemporary case study that could be used to express the issues under scrutiny is that of climate change and the general human response to it: that is to say, of those involved in assessing the effects of climate change, and those who seek ways to ameliorate them express continually their concern for the lack of interest of concern amongst the populous as a whole.<sup>89</sup> Of particular concern to them is a perceived unwillingness to accept personal and collective responsibility for changing weather patterns and their effects, even though these can be seen in increasingly severe weather patterns, rising global temperatures and sea-level rises.

A willingness to accept responsibility is key to the attitude of those committed to transcendence but seems to be sadly lacking in much of mainstream society, as commentators and politicians are now beginning to recognise. It has taken two

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<sup>89</sup> As, for example, expressed by a number of speakers at the post-graduate conference on the subject held in Cardiff in 2010 and discussed in Appendix 4.

significant events to help UK political parties to see the: “Slow-motion moral collapse that has taken place in parts of our country these past few generations”.<sup>90</sup>

UK Prime Minister David Cameron goes on to admit, “we can’t shy away from the truth anymore” (ibid). Facing the truth being another indicator of transcendent thinking. What brought about such realisations was the UK being “hit by the worst riots since the 80s”<sup>91</sup> and “a volatile August that has wiped more than \$3.8 trillion (2.34 trillion pounds) off global stock markets”.<sup>92</sup>

Both commentators suggest there is a lack of trust, worsened by selfish behaviour across society. But the response from Downing Street and other leaders indicates that a new era in human history may well be beginning. Their response, along with the groundswell of individuals around the world who support it, are prime examples of ‘the transcendence movement’, a commitment to develop alternatives to the individualistic culture that can be seen as underlying the stock-market collapse and rioting of August 2011.

Not only does this global context provide a good cause for a shift in human consciousness but the above context forms an important part of the evidence that I present within this thesis. It is my contention that the very developments in the world at large that are affecting the populous as a whole are indicative of the change in ways of thinking that I am calling ‘transcendent thought’.

Throughout this thesis my intent is to demonstrate that the transcendence-related theories and abstract philosophies quoted in academic texts of previous generations are not only endorsed by current generations, but *practised* by a significant number within it. Furthermore, that the transcendence-related concepts from anthropological sociology, theology and humanistic psychology, for example, are become integrated into a single, integrated and holistic view of evolving human life on this planet. To illustrate this, my approach has been to juxtapose established academic texts with examples from the time of writing (2009-2013) from web-sites, personal life experiences of my contributors, and popular texts used by millions around the world to help them see and connect with a

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<sup>90</sup> Prime Minister David Cameron speaking on 15.8.11. See: [www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-on-the-fightback-after-the-riots/](http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-on-the-fightback-after-the-riots/), accessed 16.8.11.

<sup>91</sup> See [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-08-09/news/29867134\\_1\\_tottenham-boris-johnson-riots](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-08-09/news/29867134_1_tottenham-boris-johnson-riots), accessed 16.8.11.

<sup>92</sup> Reuters, 9.8.11, see [www.iii.co.uk/news-opinion/news/reuters/17011](http://www.iii.co.uk/news-opinion/news/reuters/17011), accessed 16.8.11.

deeper reality of *Being*. My objective and approach is to illustrate the sheer number of established ideas on an evolving consciousness and 'higher' states of Being are now becoming mainstream and popularised, and thereby demonstrate a personal and collective shift beyond the conventional overly-rational world-view.

The religious and spiritual context offers a further insight into the direction in which humanity is moving, with the decline in numbers attending traditional religious services in the last fifty years being well known. Likewise the rise in the West of interest in both East Asian and South Asian religions and philosophies and the growth of NRM: New Religious Movements.<sup>93</sup> Whilst such trends are relevant to the present study, it is not the intent to repeat, review or critique the analysis of trends and movements that are specifically religious. The focus of this project is on shifts in attitudes, behaviours and experiences outside conventional religious groups, i.e. to study spirituality as represented by a concern for and interest in the depth and breadth of life in general. This broader and deeper perception of spirituality can be seen as a facet of transcendence. Whilst examples from some religious groups and activities will be used to illustrate my points, or as a comparison to trends outside of 'religion', I intend to demonstrate how 'spirituality' can be usefully considered outside a religious framework. An important part of this is to focus on transcendence and spirituality not as abstract concepts, but on their practice in daily life; not as occurrences to be described purely objectively, but as first-hand subjective experiences.

I use the term 'spirituality' in a way that embraces both religious and secular understandings of the term and in a manner that transcends the religious: secular divide typical of the modern era. From the perspective of the former, it might be defined as *Finding God in Each Moment* (the title of the 2006 book by Carol Ann Smith & Eugene F. Merz). This very practical book uses *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* to assist in the process of discernment: "Discernment as a process guides us as we seek to recognise and respond to God's presence and action in our lives and the world." (Smith & Merz 2006, p215)<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> See for example York, M. (1995) *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-pagan Movements*, Lanham, Maryland & London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995.

<sup>94</sup> *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* was written by the founder of the *Society of Jesus* (the Jesuits), St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and was derived mostly from St. Ignatius' conversion experiences of 1521-1523. It is perhaps paradoxical that such powerful and



Such a definition may also be applied to the process of transcendence as described in this thesis. Thus, ‘spirituality’ as used here, relates to an on-going process, synchronous with one’s daily life, of being reverent in all circumstances:

Human beings are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls. The other things on the face of the earth are created for humans beings to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created. (Smith & Merz 2006, p73, quoting *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* No.23)

This quote provides a sense of the inner driving force of both the spiritual and transcendent. This, as I discuss in Chapter 9, is closely related to the evolutionary imperative of the process (of discernment or transcendence) as perceived by those within the transcendence movement. It is important in such debates, as I have already argued, not to attempt to distinguish between these different terms (spiritual, transcendent, discerning), but instead to acknowledge that which they have in common. St. Ignatius makes it clear that spirituality is neither more nor less than working with one’s divine essence. Such is the nature of transcendence as a topic.

In the secular context one would not refer to St. Ignatius nor talk of ‘saving one’s souls’, but the same essence is present: spirituality is about living life with depth and acknowledging one’s interconnectedness with the fullness of life. The UK’s Department of Education defines *spiritual development* for school children thus:

Pupils' spiritual development involves the growth of their sense of self, their unique potential, their understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, and their will to achieve. As their curiosity about themselves and their place in the world increases, they try to answer for themselves some of life's fundamental questions. They develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, qualities and attitudes they need to foster their own inner lives and non-material wellbeing.<sup>95</sup>

Whilst one could engage in semantic debates on the meaning of the ‘sense of self’ and ‘unique potential’ compared to the meaning of soul, both embrace a definite non-material aspect and are seen (in their respective contexts) as essential if mankind is to take its place in the world. Thus, spirituality can be seen, both in religious understanding, secular description and in the context of this thesis, to refer to that aspect of being human concerned with a sense of purpose and inner meaning and one’s

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accessible tools for ‘finding God’ should come from the Jesuits who, as I discuss in Chapter 5, were far from supportive of the work of Teilhard de Chardin, which also aimed to make Christian theology more widely accessible and understood.

<sup>95</sup> See: [www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/a00199700/spiritual-and-moral](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/a00199700/spiritual-and-moral), accessed 17.2.12.

connection into the depth and breadth of life. The nature and dynamics of my subject is thus a very personal matter and one in which one's own background will inevitably have an influence.

It is thus my own exploration of these concepts over more than two decades that provides a final, personal, context for this work. In topics such as transcendence it is impossible for there not to be personal influences at work in any in-depth research. Rather than see this as a weakness, I argue in line with the views of John Heron (1992) and of the principles of co-operative enquiry that my own prior and on-going experiences of transcendence provide a unique and powerful baseline from which to begin this research. Whilst Chapter 4 provides descriptions of my specifically transcendent experiences, at this point it is I think appropriate for me to describe earlier situations and activities that I now realise have provided me with important background ideas and experiences that have assisted the progress described herein.

Having been brought up in a typical English village during the 1960s and 1970s and with active Christian parents<sup>96</sup> it is inevitable that, often sub-consciously, my religious understandings developed with an explicitly Christian flavour. I enjoyed hymn singing as a boy and was confirmed into the Anglican Church as a teenager, though more because it was expected within my family than through a personal desire to make such a commitment at that time. Whilst not a regular church goer for a large portion of my life (1976 to 2008), I would still attend services at for key festivals, such as Christmas and Remembrance.<sup>97</sup> Having embarked on this theological study I find it appropriate and rewarding to attend Christian services fairly regularly.<sup>98</sup>

Although very much comfortable in a church or chapel of any Christian denomination, I am equally at home in a secular healing circle<sup>99</sup> or a Buddhist meditation group.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> My parents were both active in the Church of England community of Croughton (Northamptonshire); my mother being secretary to the Parochial Church Council and my father a sidesman and churchyard groundsman.

<sup>97</sup> Attending services of remembrance was not something I was particularly conditioned into as a child. It was something I 'found myself doing' in my 30s.

<sup>98</sup> I periodically attend Quaker Meeting and services at the Anglican Chaplaincy in Bangor, although will occasionally visit other churches to sample a range of religious experiences.

<sup>99</sup> I have often, since 1996, hosted Reiki healing sharing groups or attended organised gatherings for healers of any background. These I consider to be as important a spiritual activity as attending a church.

Equally I obtain much pleasure and find a great deal of kinship at pagan gatherings, for example to celebrate Beltane (May Day, the beginning of summer). During my thirties I would describe myself as ‘interfaith’; now, if pushed, I would describe my religion as ‘Interspiritual’.<sup>101</sup> This shift, which I would call an evolution, from Christian to Interspiritual has been part of an on-going process of personal and spiritual seeking which began immediately after my first transcendent experience.<sup>102</sup>

In parallel with on-going transitions to my religious affiliation over these twenty-plus years has come a significant shift in my work and corresponding modes of thinking which I would again describe as a transcendent evolution. From 1996 until 2008 I was self-employed as a personal, self-development guide and workshop facilitator, with a specialisation in teaching Reiki healing as a technique for personal and spiritual development. This period also saw my own awareness in such topics increase significantly, both from a professional and personal standpoint. It was a period during which I could focus on the development of my intuitive abilities and seek a balance between what I then perceived as my rational and intuitive modes of thoughts. Trained as an electronics engineer<sup>103</sup> I had become aware that my logical thought processes were often dominant. Such insights flowed strongly from the transcendent experiences that I was then beginning to have and which are discussed in Chapter 4. My mind then was working in a rather different manner to the way it had been brought up.

For seventeen years until 1996 I worked in a highly respected, world-class, Research and Development (R&D) facility. Part of the then Plessey Company (later GEC-Marconi), it was amongst the pioneers of the silicon chip on which most of our current electronic based technology is totally dependent. It is not too strong a statement to say that without the sort of research carried on at such establishments, I would not be typing this thesis into my PC nor communicating my ideas via the internet.

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<sup>100</sup> Over the course of two decades I have experienced meditation from a range of Buddhist disciplines. Rather than identify one particular branch of Buddhism as providing meditation that is effective for me (and conversely some that are not), it was my observation, that it was the individuals running that meditation sessions that either made it work (for me) or not. Such features of spiritual practice are discussed further in Part 4.

<sup>101</sup> The term ‘interspirituality’, as coined by Teasdale, is discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>102</sup> As described in Chapter 4.

<sup>103</sup> I gained a BSc in Electronic Engineering from Bangor University (then UCNW) in 1979.

In my time at the then Allen Clarke Research Centre<sup>104</sup> I was actively involved in numerous research and R&D projects and often presented papers at international conferences on research related topics either of a technical scientific or a business management nature: see, for example, Holden, Allen, Beasley, & Parker, 1988; Beasley 1991; Beasley 1992, Beasley 1995 and Beasley & Robinson, 1995. As a Fellow of the Institute of Quality Assurance (FIQA), Chartered Engineer (C.Eng.) and acknowledged expert of the European Commission (on ‘Reliability of Integrated Circuits’, ICs – i.e. silicon chips) I had built up a reputation for being able to integrate (i.e. transcend) the often conflicting realities of microelectronic device physics, design & manufacturing processes and customers demanding high levels of quality & reliability in a cost effective manner. With this background, my understanding and praxis of transcendence has always been grounded in practical realities. Whilst accepting that this is a different perspective to the conceptual, literary grounded focus within academia, I would argue that it is both a valid and valuable perspective. Indeed, it provides, I contend, an important and original stance from which to study transcendence.

Whilst many of the projects in which I was involved were in collaborations with university partners, my grounding in research methods was within the commercial world of the electronics industry. This required ideas, projects and products which were of benefit to the world at large. Even where pure research was carried out, there would always be a pressure to apply that research in some profitable way.

I thus approach my research into transcendence with the above grounding in innovative research. I had learnt that whilst a need existed to understand the underlying science or philosophy (where this is appropriate and possible), worthwhile research (as most if not all research funding bodies would now agree) must have real and practical impact; preferably to a significant number of people. My intent in this project is thus to present research findings, conclusions and insights that will be of direct value to those actively engaged on journeys of self and/or spiritual development.

Thus, whilst this project represents only four years of academic research it reflects over two decades of seeking. With such a personal context this research needs to be

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<sup>104</sup> Later GEC-Marconi Materials Technology at Caswell near Towcester, Northants.

considered not as a stand-alone thesis, but as a stage in my own process of growth.<sup>105</sup> My aim has been to further integrate my on-going (transcendent) experiences with the intellectual understandings that are continually emerging from humankind's process of questioning and development. If my aim, both personally and in this discourse, has been to integrate practical and conceptual understanding of transcendence, then my approach must, necessarily, reflect these aims. As I have already indicated, an holistic and integrative approach is, for example, essential. Likewise an inclusive and multi-disciplinary approach. I will now discuss further ways in which my approach and methodology have been determined as the most appropriate for this study.

### **Further factors affecting approach and methodology**

Effective research in areas involving the depth of human experience, whilst still considered problematic in some quarters, is increasingly being addressed by 'action research' methods.<sup>106</sup> The 'co-operative inquiry' approach of Heron (1992), for example, emphasises 'experiential research' which acknowledges a reality beyond the objective/subjective divide. This epistemology embraces mind, body and soul; inner-self and outer world. Such a transcendent approach is eminently suited to research into transcendence:

In traditional research on people, the roles of researcher and subject are mutually exclusive. The researcher only contributes the thinking that goes into the project, and the subjects only contribute the action to be studied. In co-operative inquiry these exclusive roles are replaced by a co-operative relationship of bilateral initiative and control, so that all those involved work together as co-researchers and as co-subjects. They both design, manage and draw conclusions from the inquiry, and they undergo the experience and action that is being explored. This is not research on people, but research with people.<sup>107</sup>

My study of the transcendence movement concerns these individuals and groups, and seeks to combine the mutual understanding of the praxis of transcendence with its

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<sup>105</sup> It could indeed be argued that, as research for a Doctor of Philosophy it is right and proper that it should embrace the deep personal and philosophical journey described herein.

<sup>106</sup> The application of such methods have also been instrumental in the success of an AHRC/ESRC funding programme for which I was project administrator. *The experience of worship in late medieval cathedral and parish church* is an innovative research project funded by the 'Religion and Society Research Programme', which produced enactments of medieval worship. See [www.experienceofworship.org.uk](http://www.experienceofworship.org.uk), accessed 24.10.11.

<sup>107</sup> See [www.human-inquiry.com/cionepag.htm](http://www.human-inquiry.com/cionepag.htm), accessed 24.10.11.

scholarly understanding. As such my research includes on-going ‘action’ as required of action research.<sup>108</sup>

That is to say, my action as researcher has been the engagement with both practitioners of transcendence and with appropriate academic organisations (such as those listed in Appendix 5) to encourage and enable an integration of experiences and conceptual understanding related to transcendence. In so doing, it has been my own intent to facilitate such an integration into my own conceptualisation and praxis of transcendence: an essential features of action research. Likewise (in meeting McNiff’s second criteria, as outline in footnote 106), my intent of putting into action both academic and transcendence principles has provided the underpinning values for my chosen methods. None of this would have been possible without (the third criteria) without this being “insider” research.<sup>109</sup>

Action research is, of cause, only one form of insider research; itself a topic of on-going debate. As Bruce Lincoln (1999) writes in the *Conclusion* to Russel T. McCutcheon (ed, 1999) *The Insider/Outsider problem in the study of religion*, it is essential in using such techniques to “distinguish between “truths,” “truth-claims,” and “regimes of truth,” (Lincoln 1999, p398). Indeed, such a conclusions mirrors a key contention of this thesis: that transcendence (like scholarly insider research) requires an attention to the attainment of the whole truth and a consistency between experience and theoretical framework of the subject under study.

In the same anthology David J. Hufford (1999) asserts that “A reflective analysis of our scholarship enables us to distinguish among the beliefs of our informants, our scholarly knowledge, our personal beliefs and our occupational ideology” (Hufford 1999, p306). That is, it is precisely the approach used within the transcendence movement to enable

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<sup>108</sup> Jean McNiff, Pamela Lomax and Jack Whitehead (1996) in *You and Your Action Research Project* describe the elements of action research thus:

Action research is different from other research because:

- it requires action as an integral part of the research process itself
- it is focused by the researcher’s professional values rather than methodological considerations
- it is necessarily insider research, in the sense of practitioners researching their own professional actions. (McNiff 1996, p14)

<sup>109</sup> Further discussion on the significance of this being an action research project would detract from the primary focus on the nature and dynamic of transcendence. Further work might, however, pursue this perspective.

transcendence (reflective practice or similar techniques) that can enable a scholar to obtain objectivity. It must be conceded that reflective analysis does not always produce this result but, as Hufford says, it has the potential to so do.<sup>110</sup>

If being an insider enables the best action research, then narratives are also essential elements in this thesis: accounts of transcendent experiences are, by their nature, narratives. The value of narratives in academic research is well established. For instance, Amia Lieblich et al (1998) in *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation*, explains that narrative research is based on:

Its underlying assumptions that there is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text. The narrative approach advocates pluralism, relativism, and subjectivity. (Lieblich 1998, p2)

Such an approach is thus of direct relevance to transcendence which itself values pluralism and subjectivity. Narrative evidence might still, however, be criticised as being *merely* anecdotal. In response I would argue that first-hand reports are effectively eye-witness accounts, whereas anecdotes are only second or third-hand reports. As such, they carry significantly more weight than anecdotes in a court of law, or academic argument.

Secondly, I refer to over 30 separate accounts all saying similar things: I am not relying on a single anecdote. Thirdly, the evidence of accounts that I present is supported by established theory from many disciplines: theology, philosophy, neuroscience, psychology, psychotherapy. All of these testimonies are self-consistent, thus providing convincing weight of evidence.<sup>111</sup>

To the above counter-arguments, I add the following situation present in many faith traditions: narrative in the form of parables and fables are given considerable weight in

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<sup>110</sup> The question as to what determines whether or not a given reflective analysis is wholly effective parallels the key question of this discourse: what distinguishes the transcendent state of mind from others? The application of reflective practice within Higher Education, including possible answers to this question, is the feature of my pedagogical paper included within my PGCertHE portfolio (Beasley 2013). The paper, *The nature of Reflective Practice as a soft-skill: enabling a conducive T&L environment*, has also been submitted to the *Reflective Practice* journal and, at the time of writing, is under review. Other notable contributions to the debate can be found in *Beyond Reflective Practice* by Bradbury, et al (eds 2010).

<sup>111</sup> Further concerns are sometimes levelled at the use of the researchers' own, personal, accounts. These are discussed in Chapter 4.

many faiths.<sup>112</sup> Yet whether the incidents related actually happened is, at best, uncertain. In these cases it is not the identity of the witness that matters, nor indeed whether the event took place. What is important is the underlying message, the meanings conveyed by the events described.<sup>113</sup> In the reports of transcendent experiences that I include as evidence, it is the essence that underlies all the stories that I have identified and presented.

It is accepted that first-hand reports can become distorted over time and with personal agendas. However, for the accounts included here, the weight of evidence and consistency between reports and with the theory suggest that, even if such distortion exists, it does not invalidate my conclusions.<sup>114</sup>

Whilst important, the use of first-hand reports is only one of the approaches that I have taken. No one method can be expected to provide all the evidence or perspectives, particularly for topics concerned with the depth, variability and breadth of human emotional and spiritual nature. Support for using a variety of methodology was evident at the recent *Beyond the Field* conference (Aberystwyth, November 2012)<sup>115</sup> where many authors described the challenges of research in areas involving strong human emotions: for example, Feerick in *A Political Minefield: Remembering and Articulating the German Perspective on the Holocaust in Contemporary Literature* and De Vita's *Ask the Dust. Subjectivities, historical narratives and the presence of the self in international relations*.

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<sup>112</sup> For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:27-37 and the parable of the blind men and the elephant to which I refer in the next chapter.

<sup>113</sup> A similar point is made by McNiff, in the context of using narrative and storytelling in action research. See McNiff 1996, p21.

<sup>114</sup> In any case, my argument concerns the perspective within the transcendence movement: I make no claims as to the validity of these perspectives to those outside of the movement. A stark contrast could be made to the claim of extremists using interpretations of similar experiences to justify what many would consider atrocities. These are very different situations: their intent is divisive, exclusive; their evidence used to justify hate. Their 'justifying experiences' are exclusive (one extremist movement of one faith), whereas mine come from across faiths and disciplines; the presented experiences and views represent an intrinsic human position & 'way of being'. Those in the transcendence movement (see, for example, the description of Rosenberg's NVQ approach in Chapter 3) would want to pray/meditate with the extremists and encourage/enable an experiences of a transcendent common humanity, that is, to transcend words and their potentially narrow interpretation.

<sup>115</sup> For a description of the conference see: <http://beyondthefieldconference.wordpress.com/> - last accessed 9.1.13. Whilst it was intended for full papers to be made available on-line, this has not happened at the time of writing.



The need for a multiplicity of approaches was the key feature of the paper by Yanyue Yuan:<sup>116</sup> *There are infinite ways to tell our stories - Merits and Challenges of Methodological Pluralism*, and was also the subject of the Plenary Session: *Method Beyond Positivism? What Use Methodology in the Social Sciences Today?*<sup>117</sup> This discussion concluded that researchers require training in a much broader range of approaches to research than has typically been the case to date and that such skills are essential in reflecting the depth and complexity of emotionally charged research topics.<sup>118</sup>

In my own presentation, *Beyond 'isms & 'ologies: Being a Researcher, Being Human*,<sup>119</sup> I suggested that to best identify human features of a research topic, researchers need, first and foremost, to acknowledge the fundamental human nature of their subjects. How can this be achieved I asked, unless one's own inherent human-ness is also acknowledged? Strong support for this stance came in both the immediate response to my paper, in discussions during the conference and in many of the other papers. Most speakers identified one of a number of subjective or creative aspects of or approaches to their research. Various papers, for example, discussed the value and challenges in utilising participants' memory<sup>120</sup> and imagination<sup>121</sup> to provide the depth and strength of feelings related to their subject. Alternatives to written prose as a means of disseminating results were also discussed, with Poetic Spaces,<sup>122</sup> and performance<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Of Cambridge University.

<sup>117</sup> Although the conference had a focus on the Social Sciences, it was multi-disciplinary in its scope and attendance.

<sup>118</sup> That is not to deny the view of those who argue for greater detachment and objectivity. The overwhelming view of those at this conference, however, was that such over-emphasis on detachment and objectivity leaves researches out of touch with their subjects and unable to understand the nuances and subjectivities of research subjects. This is also the perception, by definition, of those within the transcendence movement.

<sup>119</sup> For abstract see: [www.onereality.co.uk/Books/Aber%20proposal%20KB.docx](http://www.onereality.co.uk/Books/Aber%20proposal%20KB.docx), accessed 26.3.13.

<sup>120</sup> Dmitry Chernobrov (University of St. Andrews) in *Challenges of Exploring and Measuring Perception and Memory of Conflict*; Stephanie Bostock (Bangor University) in *Memory as Method: Remembering 1950s Material Culture in French and German Museums* and Lorena De Vita (Aberystwyth University: see main text above).

<sup>121</sup> Ben Mueller (London School of Economics) in *"Imagine...": counterfactuals, causality and change in IR*. (IR, refers to International Relations)

<sup>122</sup> Dr. Dawn Mannay (Cardiff University) in *Creative, Visual and Poetic Spaces of Activism in the Academy*.

found to be beneficial in being able to express the range and power of the emotional content to the subjects under scrutiny.<sup>124</sup>

Whilst I have not felt the need to recourse to alternatives in dissemination beyond the inclusion of a few song lyrics and lines from poems, the difficulty in expressing, in words, the depth and quality of a transcendent state of mind is certainly acknowledged. I discuss this further in the next chapter in the context of terminology.

Given their relevance to my subject, the recommendations of the Aberystwyth conference have been adopted here. Thus, whilst I am aware that my methodology may seem unconventional, even unfocussed, it evolved during the course of my research as being the approach best suited to the nature and dynamics of transcendence. I have, wherever possible, allowed my data and findings to guide my studies, rather than attempt to constrain or restrict my investigations through narrow or inappropriate methodology. Criticality, as Gareth Morgan and Linda Smircich suggest in *The Case for Qualitative Research* (Morgan & Smircich, 1980), research methods have, in social sciences, become “almost as ends in themselves” (p491). They call for:

A focus of attention on the ground assumptions of social theory and research in order to transcend the abstract debate about methodology on its own account and its abstracted forms of empiricism. (p499)

They argue that much in the research of human behaviour has become side-tracked in discussions around qualitative versus quantitative methodology. Rather than semantic debates on research method A versus method B, they urge instead the asking of questions more useful to humankind, such as (I would offer) “what does it mean to be human”. This is precisely my aim in the current work.

Morgan and Smirich argue that much research includes far too many assumptions on the nature of knowledge and “about the nature of the phenomena to be investigated”. They provide an impressive table (p492) correlating “Core Ontological Assumptions” with

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<sup>123</sup> Katalin Halasz (Goldsmiths, University of London) in *Doing Performative Social Science*.

<sup>124</sup> A workshop held at Bangor University on Tuesday, 19th March 2013 also illustrated the growing interest amongst academics in such approaches to dissemination: *A Creative Workshop in Using Poetry for Disseminating Research Findings*, featured Stewart Henderson, a poet, songwriter and a regular broadcaster on BBC Radio 4.

“Assumptions about human nature”, “Basic Epistemological stance”, “Favoured metaphors” and approach to research.<sup>125</sup>

Whilst many researchers might want to argue which of these different characteristics are more real or valid, as a researcher from within the transcendence movement, I take a stance in keeping with Morgan and Smirich. I, and my contributors to this thesis, would say, through personal experience and reflection, that all the traits and approaches identified by Morgan and Smirich are valid: that reality has both subjective and objective aspects. Whilst the balance between them might vary depending on circumstances, the important point, they argue, is a post-dualistic acknowledgement of the different facets of the reality under study. My research, thus, does have a bias towards inclusive, non-dualistic, definitions and methods. This, I would argue, is far more representative of the nature and dynamic of my topic and thus essential for a scholarly understanding of what it means to be human.

An implication of this tactic is my approach to counter-arguments: in a post-dualistic way of thinking, counter-arguments represent alternative perspectives rather than an alternative truth. To those within the transcendence movement, as reflected in most of my citations throughout this thesis, arguing for one perspective over another would be tantamount to denying one perspective and thus not in keeping with the inclusiveness of transcendence. The reasoning goes thus: each individual has, due to their particular set of experiences and factors of upbringing, their own views on a subject. If all individuals are to live together in cooperative harmony, the first step is to acknowledge both the views of each other and their related feelings.<sup>126</sup> In keeping with this view, and as a demonstration of the praxis of transcendence within academic writing, examples of counter arguments are included as indicators of alternative views. In so doing, my intent is to show respect for such views and those who hold them.<sup>127</sup> Give the breadth and scope of my subject, it would be impossible to include all such counter-arguments.

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<sup>125</sup> Assumptions range from “reality as a projection of human imagination” to “reality as a concrete structure” and “Approaches to Social Science” range from “Subjectivist” to “Objectivist”.

<sup>126</sup> This approach is utilised, for example, by Rosenberg, as discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>127</sup> Sutherland, in *Irrationality* (2007, as referenced in Chapter 9), makes the important point (Sutherland 2007, p255) that challenging a strongly held position often serves only to strengthen the underlying belief. The transcendence approach, of accepting alternative views (at least as valid for others) rather than arguing against them, might thus be a useful when seeking reconciliation.

Given that the focus of the current study is the perspectives and praxis within the transcendence movement, discussion on alternative hypotheses is, necessarily, kept to a minimum.

The aim of transcendent thinking, far from using logic to defend one particular perspective, is to seek to understand alternative views (and related feelings) and to develop models and practical ways of working that acknowledge a breadth of views. Thus my models presented in Chapter 7 are designed to embrace alternative perspectives on, for example, the state of human consciousness.

Another key factor in my chosen methods and in my general approach to this research has been the on-going use of reflective practice which, in keeping with the ethos of transcendence itself, provides a depth to the research process, enabling a connection with the contextual situation and multi-layered reality of my subject. Paul McIntosh, in *Action Research and Reflective Practice* (2010) illustrates many of the points which are essential in planning effective research on the human condition. Key to the impact of this persuasive book are two factors: firstly that McIntosh, rather than shying away from difficult subjects, as is required of critical thinking he faces them head on and is willing to challenge many established norms of research methodology. Secondly and almost certainly underpinning the first, is that this book results from his own *Action Research and Reflective Practice* that was neither funded by a Research Council nor planned. His research arose through being confined to a hospital bed for eight weeks, after a serious road accident.

The reflection by McIntosh (perhaps, like my contributors, justifying the description 'soul searching'), whilst rare in academic literature, is precisely the personal story common to those who have transcendent experiences. When faced with life-changing experiences through whatever cause (including, like McIntosh, accidents, profound experiences in nature, with music or in spiritual practices) it is often the case that one begins to see life differently, to reflect and take action to change one's attitudes and behaviour: this being the essence of Action Research.

The conclusion drawn by McIntosh could equally be applied to my work:

Does the work presented here constitute 'evidence'? In my view it most certainly does, but of a different nature: that of the human condition - of normal responses to both ordinary and extraordinary events. It does not need quantifying or pathologising as we appear so keen to do through our desires for absolute truths and professional power

games in the current social and professional climate. It simply requires to be heard and to be seen. What we glean from it may be different to the reason for its being, but that is no bad thing, for it opens up the infinite possibilities of its interpretation from our own unique lens on the world. (McIntosh 2010, pp186-187)

Through critical analysis, review and reflection, as an on-going process underpinning this research, has come an understanding of the value of stepping back from the data and allowing an underlying, I would say transcendent, picture to emerge. Whilst this may, in some quarters, be considered as lacking in rigour, I would counter-argue that this is precisely the point: to fully understand the nuances and depth of transcendence requires the loosening of control and a relinquishing of undue attempt to constrain or restrict it through methodology designed for topics that are objective in nature.

Just as my methodological approach is chosen to best reflect the subject under scrutiny, so too is my terminology, the justification of which forms my next chapter.

# Chapter 2

## Terminology and definitions

As I have already indicated, the notion of transcendence that I employ is an inclusive one. Indeed, transcendence, in the sense of transcending barriers, is by definition about embracing a broad spectrum of ideas and perceptions of a given subject. Thus, throughout this discourse, rather than utilising the traditional academic approach of reducing a term down to more precise or definitive definitions, I endeavour to ‘open up’ or elicit a variety of meanings in my key definitions. This thesis strives to emulate what Bertrand Russell calls “true philosophic contemplation” (Russell 1912, p93) which is to say, a contemplation that finds “its satisfaction in every enlargement of the not-Self, in everything that magnifies the objects contemplated, and thereby the subject contemplating.” (Russell 1912, p93)

As Russell goes on to remind us, philosophical enquiry and our use of words should:

Enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination, and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation; but above all because, through the greatness of the universe which philosophy contemplates, the mind also is rendered great, and becomes capable of that union with the universe which constitutes its highest good. (ibid., pp93-94)

According to this perspective, it is perhaps wise to remember one of the few statements that philosophers generally agree upon, and of which William James writes:

“Knowledge about a thing is not the thing itself” (James 1902, p488). Whether one uses a precise definition or broad description of an experience, the actual experience is always far more than the description of it: even everyday experiences have a depth and breadth to them that is impossible to portray in words.<sup>128,129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> This point is illustrated with reference to first-hand experiences in Part Two, metaphysical and philosophical models in Part Three and identified features of the nature and dynamic of transcendence in Part Four of this thesis.

<sup>129</sup> This definition of ‘experience’, used to describe events that are beyond words, is not that used by Martin Buber. His usage, in *I and Thou* (1937), relates to his *I-It* view of the world which is purely objective and bound by form and literal meanings. My usage embraces much of the

Likewise, rather than choosing between competing epistemological paradigms to make sense of the phenomena under discussion, it is my contention that all have validity and are, within the transcendence movement at least, accepted as having value. Indeed, in an increasingly multidisciplinary academic world, it would be surprising if one could find a 'one paradigm fits all' solution. Thus, exploring the *Anthropology and the Biological Interface*,<sup>130</sup> Geoffrey Samuel says:

There will increasingly be a plurality of ways of knowing on the global scale, and none of these approaches to knowledge is going to have absolute authority or primary status. (Samuel 1990, p3)

The discussion of topics that span disciplines should be transparent across that spectrum of subject areas. I therefore intend to adopt inclusive language within this thesis, language that it is as accessible to a scientifically trained psychologist, for instance, as it is to an historian, theologian, member of a New Religious Movement or a spiritual sceptic.

Inevitably this means offering a range of explanations for each term used. This does not, I contend, diminish the definition. Rather, I argue, it reflects the reality in the current multicultural, multi-disciplinary society: each individual sees everything according to their own background. No one definition is better than any other since each perspective and definition is valid. That each description is different however, emphasises the need to embrace a broad range of viewpoints. This is aptly illustrated by the famous parable of blind men gathered around an elephant. None of them had ever come across or heard about an elephant before. Each is asked to describe the item under his hands:

And those blind men, O Bhikkhus, who had felt the head of the elephant said: 'An elephant, Sir, is like a large round jar.' Those who had felt its ears, said: 'it is like a winnowing basket.' Those who had felt its tusks, said: 'it is like a plough-share.' Those who had felt its trunk, said: 'it is like a plough.' Those who had felt its body, said: 'it is like a granary.'<sup>131</sup>

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'relationship' focus of Buber's *I-Thou* mode. Indeed, I might describe the sort of learning and transcendent experiences under discussion here as 'relationships with the present'. That Buber should adopt such a limited usage of the word experience is, I would suggest, another example of the way in which the meaning of many words has been diminished by popular usage. Buber's 'experience' thus compares with the conventional ('non-Being') usage of 'language' and 'knowing' as discussed by Heidegger. I discuss this in more depth in Chapter 8.

<sup>130</sup> Being the sub-title of his book *Mind, Body and Culture* (Samuel 1990).

<sup>131</sup> There are many version of this story: in the Jain tradition, for example, it is used to illustrate their doctrine of Anekanta, the 'manysidedness' of things. This version is from the Buddhist

None of the blind men were able to describe the whole animal and so they argued as to its nature. Only a sighted person could see the whole animal and give an overview. But what each of the blind men described was very much a valid description of the bit of the elephant they were touching. Likewise, someone observing the movement of a herd of elephants from the air would provide yet another, equally valid, but very different account of this thing known as 'elephant'. Naturalists will no doubt claim that a species needs to be observed from all angles, at different times of day and season and at different ages and in the context of its environment to describe that creature adequately.

Big and impressive though an object such as an elephant is, it is nothing compared to all the experiences and nuances and ideas covered by the term transcendence. To even vaguely outline, let alone adequately describe, this very nebulous term one needs to examine it from as many different angles as possible. Unless a broad perspective is taken in this task then, like the blind men describing the elephant, one is likely to come to seriously erroneous conclusions.

In his now famous lecture of 1902 and as a preface to his book *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James maintains that: “A large acquaintance with particulars often makes us wiser than the possession of abstract formulas, however deep.” (James 1902, p11). That is to say, to understand a subject one needs to engage with it in a practical way and in as many of its guises as possible.

In this thesis I shall explore a wide range of perspectives on the notion of transcending thought, aiming to identify the bigger picture: to tease out the gist of transcendence in the context of human wellbeing; to identify the valuable common core perspectives and values that encourages those seeking transcendence to face the less pleasant aspects of reality, even if that means suffering in the process.

Having identified these features through analysis and reflection,<sup>132</sup> I have the task of describing them. In practice I have no choice but to use the English language of the early 21st century and, for the purpose of inclusiveness, non-technical, jargon-free English. But this imposed choice is far from ideal for the task in hand. Abram, for example, in his

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Udana, (Strong, G.M. (1902) *The Udana: The Solemn Utterances of the Buddha* Charleston, South Carolina: Forgotten Books, 2007, pp97-99)

<sup>132</sup> Reflection, as a valuable practice enabling transcendence, is discussed in Chapter 13; also with reference to the importance of reflexive thought in teaching and learning.



ground-breaking *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) argues for a language (such as that used by many indigenous cultures) that connects a community to the fabric of their lived landscape; one that enables both an inner and outer sense of time and place. He contends that the literal use of language in society today contrasts this position by disconnecting us from the world around us, with disastrous consequences. Abram claims that if one were to live wholly like a shaman, he or she would find within themselves:

The ability to readily slip out of the perceptual boundaries that demarcate his or her particular culture - boundaries reinforced by social customs, taboos, and most importantly, the common speech or language - in order to make contact with, and learn from, the other powers in the land. (Abram 1996, p9)

As the above quote suggests, the use of conventional language in subjects as ethereal and variable as ‘transcendent experience’ can be limited and limiting. Indeed it could be argued that as soon as I, or anybody else, attaches a label of any sort to an idea, experience or person, then that very act of labelling shifts the attention outside of the essence of transcendence. A criticism could thus be levelled at this thesis that it is no more than a set of words which prove little if anything and is thus of little value. If such a criticism is true of this study, it must *ipso facto* be true of any scholarly discourse. To discuss such a contention is beyond the scope of the current study: my own contentions relate wholly to the perspectives and praxis within the transcendence movement.<sup>133</sup>

Conventional words are, however, all that I have available within an academic thesis. Below are thus my chosen definitions for key terms used, together with my reasons for such choices, utilising literature search results as appropriate. For ease of later reference, these terms (and other secondary terms used in later chapters) are summarised in the Glossary which is included as Appendix 1.

In keeping with the aim of interdisciplinary inclusiveness I have chosen to use definitions closer to those used in society as a whole, rather than from any specific academic discipline. For such mainstream definitions I have used as my source the 1990 edition of the Chambers English Dictionary (denoted CED).

In some cases it has been necessary to select from the range of meanings offered by the CED definition. The word ‘normal’ for example can mean “a rule: an authorised standard”, implying a single agreed value. This meaning is inappropriate in the context

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<sup>133</sup> Based on many discussions within the transcendence movement, their response to such a debate might be a silent, knowing smile.

of transcendence. A second meaning given by the CED is “a pattern: an accepted standard of behaviour”, which I use to imply the *spectrum* of generally accepted ideas across society as a whole, rather than a single ‘most common’ idea or feature. This usage is both consistent with my intent of inclusiveness and the view prevalent in mathematics and science which refers to a ‘normal distribution’. For example, whilst the average height of a human adult male is around five feet ten inches, the height of such individuals ranges, at its extremes, from below four feet to over seven feet high.<sup>134</sup> All could be considered perfectly ‘normal’ human beings, since they are, otherwise, naturally themselves. More importantly, however tall or short someone may be they may well still consider themselves to be ‘normal’. It would be unethical to judge or label them otherwise.

And thus the crux of the matter is identified: use of the words ‘normal’, ‘ordinary’ or ‘usual’, typically means ‘that which is normal, ordinary or usual *to us*’. That is, those things or ideas with which each of us, personally, are familiar and comfortable.<sup>135</sup> Much of this is cultural: different societies have different conceptions of what is normal. Whilst the views and experiences expressed here may seem unusual or even extreme to some, within the transcendence movement they are considered ‘normal’.

Just because something (be it an attitude or way of doing something) is accepted as normal, does not mean that it is the only way, or indeed the right way. There were times, even in the UK, when it was normal to trade in slaves or for women to have no vote. It is my contention that the transcendence movement of today is similar, in the sense of being at the leading edge of an emerging, more aware, society, to the anti-slave and suffragette movements in their respective eras. This view is endorsed, for example, by Don Miguel Ruiz (1997) speaking from the perspective of ancient Toltec wisdom: “The mind is so wounded and full of poison ... that everyone describes the wounded mind as normal. This is considered normal, but I can tell you it is not normal”. (p113)

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<sup>134</sup> See for example Web Ref: <http://hypertextbook.com/facts/2007/SimasCeckauskas.shtml>, accessed 4.3.10.

<sup>135</sup> It could be argued that this situation is indicative of the individualism which currently seems so endemic. Here, the idea of ‘my’ view being different from the collective view does not even occur.

He argues that humanity needs to change what it considers normal; that is, to develop ways of thinking such that what is currently considered extraordinary (for example, ‘normal’ only to shamans) becomes the norm in society as a whole.

Underlying my current discussion is the dichotomy of natural and supernatural. By natural, I mean anything that occurs naturally or, indeed, can occur, without the technological intervention of humans. This is consistent with the CED definition: “pertaining to, produced by, or according to nature: furnished by or based on nature: not the work of man”.

The CED includes one definition with which I disagree: “not miraculous”. Is not the way that an acorn turns into an oak tree ‘miraculous’? Yet such growth is the very essence of nature. I likewise consciously and deliberately make no distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’, since the transcendent, although traditionally considered supernatural is, to those within the transcendence movement, the most natural thing in the world – a claim I will argue for in subsequent chapters.

In this respect, though in few others, my terminology differs from the celebrated scholar of religious experience, Rudolf Otto (1923), who uses the word ‘natural’ in the sense of the ordinary, the usual; as opposed to the ‘supernatural’, by which he means anything with a numinous quality. This may be a fair usage, but through this study I argue that Otto’s view on this particular point is becoming outdated. With more and more individuals regularly having the sort of numinous experiences described by Otto, the previous boundaries between natural and supernatural are both shifting and becoming blurred.

Throughout this treatise I demonstrate that perceptions are changing as human societies and cultures evolve. Indeed, Otto himself talks at some length (for example Otto 1923, pp.29, 133,194) about the evolution of numinous experiences and one’s subsequent interpretations of them, so that those of ‘primitive man’ are markedly different to those of Otto’s own time. Given that the evolution of humankind is not disputed, it can be confidently concluded that awareness of the numinous today is similarly advanced from that of Otto’s era. Indeed, as I highlight in Chapter 9, humanity is seen by a significant range of commentators as currently going through a rapid change in consciousness. Humanity is evolving or ascending, depending on one’s preferred choice of words. In

this context it seems inappropriate to describe transcendent experiences as not being natural.

Thus it is demonstrated that meanings change over time. The definitions offered below are thus provided, not as a definitive set of meanings, but as an underlying framework for the discussions in subsequent chapters. To enable such discussion on 'transcendence', my definitions for two other key concepts need first to be described: 'states of consciousness' and 'mystical'.

### **Consciousness and states of consciousness**

The term 'consciousness', like other terms within this thesis, is understood inclusively to embrace closely related concepts and understandings of the term from other disciplines. My understanding of consciousness does not favour one disciplinary understanding or named concept over another. Thus, by consciousness I refer as much to a Heideggerian concept of Being as I do the many levels of the human psyche discussed by C.G. Jung:

Our psyche is set up in accord with the structure of the universe, and what happens in the macrocosm likewise happens in the infinitesimal and most subjective reaches of the psyche. (Jung 1963, p368)

Clearly a current day neurological definition of consciousness cannot be equated directly to 'Being-ness', nor parallel precisely the activities or levels of the psyche. Like the blind person's description of an elephant, however, each can shed light on a broader notion of consciousness. Each perspective on the subject is valid but different. Most authors would agree however that the workings of the human mind is almost impossible to describe accurately, being perhaps mirrors of the universe in its complexity. Clearly there is significant scope for aspects of consciousness above and beyond our basic rational state. It is my intent to identify key ideas common to the variety of states of consciousness beyond the normal, rational thinking state, that are seen (within the transcendence movement at least) to be of benefit to human wellbeing. I make no distinction between, nor attempt to differentiate what others might call for example altered, anomalous, heightened or extraordinary<sup>136</sup> states of consciousness. I consider them all transcendent. My thesis is concerned instead with the practical questions of how these states can be reached and how one might benefit from them.

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<sup>136</sup> See for example the e-mail list: [www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=EXPLORINGTHEEXTRAORDINARY](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=EXPLORINGTHEEXTRAORDINARY), accessed 27.1.10.

Such a use of the term consciousness in relation to experiences is consistent with that used by Rankin who notes that “experience itself may be considered a modification of consciousness” (2008, p11) and that it is variation in intensity and interpretation that determines the different terms used to describe them. She describes 13 sorts of relevant experiences: Religious Experience, Spiritual Experience, Transcendental Experience,<sup>137</sup> Paranormal Experience, Exceptional Human Experience (EHE), Peak Experience, Limit Experience, Ecstasy, Cosmic Consciousness, Mystical Experience, Absolute Unitary Being; Out of the Body Experience (OBE) & Near Death Experience (NDE). This list adds support for my inclusive definition of transcendence as variations in consciousness.

The approach of Alan Wallace to such studies of consciousness, like mine, is to emphasise the phenomenal, rather than mechanistic features; that is to say, ““to refer to the *phenomenon* of being conscious, not to the neural events that make this first-person experience possible”(Wallace 2000, p6, emphasis in the original).

My concern is thus not with the mechanics of consciousness but how transcendent states of consciousness can be obtained and how this is seen by its recipients to improve their overall wellbeing. Again in agreement with Wallace I see consciousness as a spectrum<sup>138</sup> of possibilities.<sup>139</sup>

Rather than postulating a simple dichotomy of pure and impure states of consciousness, it may be more useful to consider a spectrum of conscious states, ranging from those that are highly structured by one's language and concepts to those that are less structured. (Wallace 2000, p118)

Whilst Wallace defines the ends of such as spectrum on the degree to which the conscious state is structured by language, one could equally postulate spectra of consciousness ranged along alternative axes. For instance, one could refer to spectra of consciousness between extremes such as ‘reasoned’ to ‘imagined’, or ‘mentally

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<sup>137</sup> On a number of occasions during my field work, as I was describing what I meant by ‘transcendence’, many individuals thought I had said ‘transcendental’ and immediately thought I was talking about Transcendental Meditation™ (TM). To help to reduce such confusion, I have refrained from using the term ‘transcendental’, although Rankin includes it in her list of types of experience. Rather than debate whether those who promote and practice Transcendental Meditation belong to the transcendence movement, I would suggest that whilst some individual practitioners of TM may fall within my defined scope, others do not.

<sup>138</sup> Or perhaps a two dimensional array – see my proposed models in Chapter 7.

<sup>139</sup> Rankin thinks similarly. She says: “It may be useful to think of a continuum of different types of awareness” (Rankin 2008, p11).

conceptualised' to 'felt'. Arguments could be put forward for any number of spectra and related models. At this point in human history, as more humans explore the vast territories of the mind, the more theories are devised, and a greater array of conflicting models is presented. I shall therefore use what I consider to be a simple definition of consciousness, one provided by the CED. This is: "the waking state of the mind: the knowledge which the mind has of everything: awareness: thought".<sup>140</sup> Any other description of consciousness, no matter how validated (for instance, through neurological imaging), is still only a *description* of it. Such descriptions cannot compare with, nor ever fully convey, the depth and breadth of the phenomenon that I seek to describe. Mystical states of mind are a good case in point.

### **Mystical states**

If, as James asserts: "Personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness" (1902, p379), then it is essential that I begin with a clear definition of 'mystical'. James himself associates the mystical with the following characteristics: it has about it an ineffability: a state of mind that "defies expression" (ibid p380), and/or a noetic quality, wherein "states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect" (ibid). James also identifies the transience of such states, that "cannot be sustained for long" (ibid p381). James suggests that an hour or two seems to be the limit. He also suggests a passivity wherein the will has been "grasped and held by a superior power" (ibid).

Whilst I am in full agreement with the first two of these 'marks' of the mystical (to use James' word), and likewise accept that many mystical states are also transitory and of a passive nature, I will argue in subsequent chapters that as mystical states become more embodied and 'normal' to certain humans then so too do they become integrated so as to express an on-going state of mind (rather than a merely transient one). Similarly, just as a mystical approach to life is integrated with on-going activities, so too can the noetic state be accessed in an active manner. That is to say, it becomes possible to be connected both to the divine and to remain engaged with the more ordinary world around us. This is what I refer to as 'mysticism with activity' in a sense that James could perhaps not

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<sup>140</sup> 'Knowledge' also in the broadest sense. This term includes an inner 'knowing'. Whilst some forms of consciousness imply learnt, intellectual, knowledge, others do not. From the transcendence point of view, both forms of knowledge are valuable and necessary.

have imagined. I intend to demonstrate that the human quest for spiritual nature has evolved since James' time and thus that his mark of passivity is no longer valid.

I thus define a 'mystic' as 'one who is, at least part of the time, mystical in their approach to life and way of living'. Note that this in no way requires mystics to belong to a religion or to be religious in the conventional sense of the word—an issue I discussed at length in the previous chapter. Rather, a mystical approach to life is available to all. Indeed, James goes on to say, in relation to the human response to poetry and music: "We are alive or dead to the eternal inner message of the arts according as we have kept or lost this mystical susceptibility." (1902, p383).

In later discussion on the interspiritual (Chapter 3), I indicate how each individual has the potential to be *A Monk in the World* (Teasdale 2002). To be a mystic then, is to be open to the magic and mystery of life, to be willing to immerse oneself in a depth of one's being. Or, as the CED defines it, a mystic is: "one who seeks or attains direct intercourse with God".

Having provided definitions for key terms and criteria that I will use in the course of this thesis, and having described mysticism, the inevitable question poses itself: how, if at all, would I equate the mystic and the transcendent?

From the above it is clear that mystical experiences are 'beyond normal' experiences and mystical states of mind are beyond rational thought. Therefore what is typically described as mystical is certainly within my definition and scope as transcendent, and thus embraced in this study. However, from the inclusive perspective and according to my chosen broader definition of transcendent, I include in this study transcendent experiences that are not regarded as mystical according to the above definition. Indeed, it is the interplay between the mystical and non-mystical aspects of transcendence which, as I shall demonstrate, helps to provide an understanding of how and why transcendent experiences are found by some to be so beneficial.

I define 'transcendent', in accord with the CED, to mean "to rise above: to surmount: to surpass: to exceed: to pass or lie beyond the limit of", so that 'transcendent states of consciousness' means "beyond the limit of" normal perception.<sup>141</sup> Whilst this definition includes mystical or numinous states, it is not restricted to them.

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<sup>141</sup> 'Normal', as previously defined.

Embracing feelings, states of mind and related processes, such ideas of transcendence are well established in the literature. Albert Einstein, for example, provides some useful indicators as to the nature and dynamic of transcendence in what he calls “cosmic religious feeling” (Einstein 1930, p2), although he admits that it is: “very difficult to elucidate this feeling to anyone who is entirely without it, especially as there is no anthropomorphic conception of God corresponding to it.” (ibid)

Two key, interrelated features of transcendence are immediately obvious: it is beyond description and has to be ‘felt’; it is beyond mental conception and thus rational thought. Einstein continues:

The individual feels the futility of human desires and aims and the sublimity and marvellous order which reveal themselves both in nature and in the world of thought. Individual existence impresses him as a sort of prison and he wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole. (ibid)

Three further features of transcendence are identified in the above: that they are “revealed” through experience; they are intrinsic “in nature and in the world”, and “human desires and aims” seem futile in comparison to them. That is, the transcendent state is altogether of a different, perhaps higher, order to the normal state of man’s consciousness. Indeed, this is the context of Einstein’s words: they come from a short article entitled *Religion and Science* (1930), wherein he describes three levels of motivation for religion: the ‘fear impulse’, the ‘social impulse’ and the “cosmic religious feeling”.<sup>142</sup> It is the latter, he argues, that each human aspires to and is what underlies the breakthroughs of science and is reflected in the great works of art.<sup>143</sup> Such also is the essence of transcendence as discussed in this thesis.

Another valuable perspective as to the meaning and significance of transcendence, can be found in Marghanita Laski’s much cited *Ecstasy in secular and religious experiences* (1961). Laski, like myself, seeks to move the discussion on what she calls ecstatic

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<sup>142</sup> Also significant is the title and aim of Einstein’s article: to show that science and religion need not be seen as being in opposition to or contradictory of each other. This post-dualistic challenge is also taken up by Teilhard de Chardin and by Alister Hardy, as I shall describe in subsequent chapters. They are by no means alone in showing an underlying unity embracing ‘science and religion’. See, for example, White, V. (1952) *God and the Unconscious*, London: Fontana, 1960.

<sup>143</sup> The use of creative art to help instil an understanding of the “cosmic religious feeling” of the natural world is increasingly to be found in mainstream teaching and learning. See, for example Lyle, S. (2011) ‘Ocean Environments 2 – Aesthetic Understanding’, *Creative Teaching and Learning* Vol 2.3, pp66-71.



experiences (which I would embrace within my definition of transcendent) beyond the realms of theological discourse. In her later *Everyday Ecstasy* (1980), Laski continues this development, making further claims as to ecstatic experiences being every bit part of ‘ordinary’ life as a religious one.<sup>144</sup> One feature she calls upon to justify this claim is the ‘adamic’ nature of such experiences whereby Christians might, “Describe these experiences in terms of feeling 'renewed into the state of Adam, which he was in before he fell', as the Quaker, George Fox, put it.” (Laski 1980, p15). Whereas:

A typical modern experiencer might say that he felt that both he and the world were cleansed of habitual cruelty and dirt and all the implications of the rat-race, that he felt suffused with love for everyone and especially for people and creatures usually regarded with repulsion; and he will often say that this feels like a return to something once known, (hat this is how things once were and ought to be. (Laski 1980, p15)

Thus, although the words are different, the experience they attempt to describe are of similar quality: what I call transcendent. Whilst this similarity between Laski’s ‘ecstasy’ and my ‘transcendence’ is important to note, what is of more significance, is how she has developed her theme over the twenty years between the two books being published.

Whilst *Ecstasy* focussed on the classification and analysis of the accounts of ecstatic experiences, in *Everyday Ecstasy* the focus is on the real benefits of such experiences to ordinary people. To understand transcendence in these terms requires a wholly deeper awareness and level of engagement with the subject. This progression from rational analysis to a deeper, felt, understanding of the subject concerned is, I contend, an important example of the transcendence process. Laski, as with the both the authors referenced in Chapter 5, the individuals who contributed to Chapter 6 and organisation described in Chapter 3, seeks to ground the concepts and theories relating to transcendence within one’s daily life. As she concludes: “Judgement of ecstatic experiences at all levels must be of its fruits as perceived in the light of common usage.” (Laski 1980, p147)

It is clear from Laski and other authors that I have consulted that the notion of transcendence, albeit under a variety of names, is well established. My intent is to

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<sup>144</sup> Strangely, Laski’s 1980 book is far less cited than her 1961 volume. (15 citations compared to 279: Google Scholar 21.2.12). An investigation as to the reason for this is outside the scope of the current work, but one might speculate that, at the time of its publication, her subject was too ‘everyday’ and too ‘personal’ to be considered of value for academic study. With the emphasis now on ‘impact’, ‘public engagement’ and ‘action research’ it may be timely to re-assess *Everyday Ecstasy* and its relevance to the study of transcendence.

continue the work of Laski (and others identified in the previous and subsequent chapters) by tracing the gradual but essential embodiment of transcendent ideas and experiences in individual and collective lives.

Such a task is undertaken in the context of my contention (outlined in Chapter 1) that to focus on semantic debates over details of terminology and definition is to miss the essence of transcendence: it is to bypass the fact that its meaning is found in its very experience, an experience that cannot be encapsulated within the rational framework of literal description. However, a range of literature from across disciplines is referenced in order to position the terms used in this discourse within the pre-established terminology. In addition to the works discussions above, Chapter 8 for example compares my practical perspective on transcendence with Martin Heidegger's concept of 'Being'. Also pertinent is the term 'peak experience', which I will now consider.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow defines 'Peak Experience' thus:

An ordinarily brief and transient moment of bliss, Rapture, ecstasy, great happiness, or joy. We usually feel such emotions as awe, reverence and wonder in such moments; also, we feel more alive, integrated. "here and now," and yet in touch with the transcendent and the sacred; more frequent in self-actualizing people. (Maslow 1996, p206)<sup>145</sup>

Maslow's 'peak experience' thus shares many of the same features of transcendence as discussed here, or at least of the initial transcendent experience: the aliveness and 'being present', for example. The connection between occurrence of peak experiences and the process of self-actualization is also of critical importance. Peak or transcendent experiences can, as I shall elaborate (particularly in Chapter 7), be considered a useful element to the process of personal self-development.

Closely related, and equally relevant to the current discussion, Maslow also defines a 'Plateau-experience'. This I would also include within my broad term of transcendence, embracing as it does a longer-term 'mental peace'.<sup>146</sup> He defines it as

A serene and calm, rather than intensely emotional, response to what we experience as miraculous or awesome. The high plateau always has a noetic and cognitive element,

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<sup>145</sup> Note that Maslow uses 'transcendent' in the narrow sense of being other-worldly, and not in the broad sense I have chosen to use here.

<sup>146</sup> Such peace of mind, taken with this being a 'cognitive element', I would equate to 'mental transcendence' (see below) and of 'acceptance', a feature of transcendence which I discuss throughout this treatise.

unlike the *peak-experience*, which can be merely emotional; it is also far more volitional than the peak-experience. (Maslow 1996, p206)

Maslow defines these terms in the context of the development of what he calls ‘Third Psychology’ (Humanistic Psychology) and ‘Fourth Psychology’ (Transpersonal/Transhuman Psychology). In the preface to the 2nd edition of *Towards a Psychology of Being* (Maslow 1968), he emphasises that:

This psychology is *not* purely descriptive or academic; it suggests action and implies consequences. It helps to generate a way of life, not only for the person himself within his own private psyche, but also for the same person as a social being, a member of society. (Maslow 1968, piii, emphasis in the original)

The reports of those individuals who participated in my fieldwork wholeheartedly agree that the detailed definition of terminology is largely irrelevant.<sup>147</sup> To underscore this chief point again, but this time from the perspective of my participants: having experienced transcendence, knowing how that experience *personally feels*, is of primary importance. They report that of greatest interest is how these transcendent experiences change their perspectives and attitudes to their own lives and life in general. Such changes are ‘the fruits’ of experience of transcendence, of which I discuss in detail in Chapter 6. Maslow too emphasises the value of the emotional stability and self-respect that comes from having worked with and through the self-actualizing (or, as I call it *transcendence*) process. He notes:

Authentic persons are those who have discovered and accepted their own, biological, temperamental, and constitutional cues, the signals from within. In a sense, this description relates to intuition as well. If you achieve this ability to hear your own impulse voices, then you have attained an inner "supreme court" from which come virtually infallible suggestions and even commands. (Maslow 1996, p178)

That is, as one works with the process of transcendence so one becomes more aware and able to respond to the ‘inner voice’ and live more authentically to its call.

To help in the understanding of such practical implications of transcendence I identify two facets or dimensions of transcendence. These, as I elucidate in subsequent chapters,<sup>148</sup> provides a framework in which to analyse the assimilation of transcendent experiences and to understand how such experiences can benefit one’s life. My two

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<sup>147</sup> The description of my ‘interview’ with Ilze, with which I start Chapter 10, is a particularly striking example of this: shared silence was found to be a much more appreciated and meaningful way of sharing our respective ‘understanding’ of transcendence.

<sup>148</sup> A model for this process is developed in Chapter 7.

facets are ‘mental transcendence’ and ‘whole-body / non-local transcendence’, which I define below.

I equate mental transcendence with integrated rational thought. That is, a normal level of consciousness but transcendent in the sense that ideas that are normally apprehended as separate to or isolated from each other are now apprehended as if integrated and part of a larger overall scheme. Mental transcendence occurs when ideas previously considered separate are seen as part of a single, larger, picture.<sup>149</sup> I illustrate this diagrammatically in Appendix 2.

By contrast, whole-body / non-local transcendence is a mode or level of consciousness different to the normal. This facet bears many similarities to the ‘mystical’ of James and the ‘numinous’ of Rudolf Otto’s idea of the Holy (1923). This facet of transcendence is felt or sensed rather than thought. Whilst it may include a mental response, it is both perceived and understood to exist beyond the physical brain and subsequently outside the conventional rational, consciousness of mind.

An example of mental transcendence would be an acceptance of ‘Integrated Health’,<sup>150</sup> as a concept; i.e. being able to see that health, lived environment, diet, exercise, stress reduction, creative and spiritual expression, and so on, are inextricably related to each other.

An example of the latter facet of transcendence might be a Near Death Experience (NDE), or experiences one might label ‘divine’.<sup>151</sup> Whilst ‘divine’ can mean “belonging

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<sup>149</sup> The idea of an integrated mode of thinking is argued strongly by Wilbur in his *Integral Theory*. See, for example, Wilber 1996.

<sup>150</sup> Discussed further in Chapter 6.

<sup>151</sup> The religious and spiritual significance of NDE is the subject of Mark Fox’s (2003) *Religion, spirituality and the near-death experience*, London & New York: Routledge, 2003. Fox identifies the essence of NDE as transcending religious boundaries and adds: “Perhaps in these instances something is occurring which transcends the limits of both language and logic. Certainly that is, and has been, the contention of many NDErs whose experiences appear to them to be ineffable precisely *because* they transcend the traditional categories of quantification, description and analysis”. (Fox 2003, p120, authors italics)

In pursuing this assessment of NDE as an “expansion of consciousness” (Fox 2003, p61) Fox reviews the attempts by neuroscience to explain NDE. He concludes, as I do, that neuroscience on its own probably cannot explain it: only by bringing together philosophy, experiential evidence and relevant science, can such a “subjective reality” (Fox 2003, p170) be explained.

Whilst transcendence is very much concerned with “subjective reality” and much of Fox’s work is highly relevant to my study, NDEs are a particular and very specific form of transcendent

to or preceding from God” (CED) it can also mean “excellent in the highest degree” (CED), I use it more in the latter case, applying it to a perceived or experienced depth, which could be understood in common terms as beauty, love or truth. This is consistent with the popular usage, where ‘Divine’ is often used to identify something as being special, as in a cake or meal that is exquisite, divine.<sup>152</sup>

Unless otherwise stated I thus use the term ‘God’ in the broadest, rather than specifically Christian, sense of the word. I am not concerned with proofs for the existence of God, but with how a positive and psychologically useful shift in human consciousness might be facilitated. I discuss how transcendent experiences can assist this process, irrespective of whether they are attributed by the subject to God or a religious cause. This process, I argue, transcends beliefs, and thus requires no particular religious alignment. Whilst religious practice and theological understanding may help in the attainment of transcendent states and in their assimilation, they may also block this process with their associated prescribed and ‘religion specific’ understanding of such experiences.<sup>153,154</sup>

In this work I am not concerned with whether transcendent experiences are natural (naturalistic) or as ‘originating in God’. I contend that both perceived causes create similar effect. It is generally accepted that description of such experiences are informed by one’s beliefs. Embraced within my definition of transcendence is the notion of rising above beliefs.

For the purposes of this discourse I consider a transcendent experience to be any experience that induces or is perceived as a transcendent state of mind. It may be

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experience. It is not my intent here to focus on any one such type of experience, but to explore the spectrum of such experience, of which NDEs are at one extreme.

<sup>152</sup> This is in no way intended to diminish any religious or spiritual meaning. On the contrary, the intent in using terms in this way is to emphasise that God (for those who believe in one), being omnipotent, is, quite naturally, in all things.

<sup>153</sup> In later analysis and discussion, I describe how each person responds differently. Transcendence (as I define it and discuss herein) is, and encourages one to go ‘beyond beliefs’ in one’s way of thinking.

<sup>154</sup> This disabling effect was seen to be the case for a number of individuals during *The Experience of Worship* project enactments. See Beasley, K., Aveling J. & Moss, J.F. (2014 forthcoming) 'Reflections on the Enactments: Voices from the Nave' in Harper, S., Barnwell, P.S. & Williamson, M. (eds) *The Experience of Late Medieval Worship*, TBA, 2014 (forthcoming).

perceived as lasting mere fractions of a second (which I describe as short-term or ‘of the moment’ ) or hours, days, weeks and longer periods of time (i.e. long-term effects).

Both my usage of the term transcendent, my aim for inclusiveness and my interpretation of the term ‘normal’ (see above), points to a wide spectrum of experiences of what I regard as varying qualities and degrees of transcendence. I draw no single dividing line between an ordinary (day-to-day, non-transcendent) experience and a transcendent one.<sup>155</sup> Rather, I acknowledge a continuous range of experiences embracing slight to deep immersion into a transcendent state; for example, from a simple feeling of peace to a profound numinous or mystical experience.<sup>156</sup> To insist on labelling, categorising or otherwise distinguishing between these experiences is, I claim, to create unnecessary boundaries that distort the reality of a continuous spectrum of experiences.

Within the scope of ‘transcendent experiences’ I include the concepts of ‘mystical experience’ and ‘numinous’, as popularised by Otto. Much of his description remains valid today, in its reference to those experiences that have the characteristic feeling of alterity, as connoting, he says, the “Wholly Other”. Such mystical moments or periods typically have—but are in no way limited to—a number of features. They cannot be defined or even described in their totality; that is, such experience are beyond rational conceptualisation. Secondly, they are experiences that give meaning to one’s life: by taking one out of ordinary level of thinking and feeling, so that, for instance, previous doubts and worries are put into a totally different perspective, and responded to with a different attitude. Thirdly, they have an associated feeling of submergence or sense of immersion into something much greater than oneself, which is at the same time both humbling and invigorating.

Note that the above descriptions, although largely consistent with Otto’s are mine, based on both my fieldwork from the collation of other people’s reports of experiences of transcendence, and also those of my own, garnered over many years. I use them here to

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<sup>155</sup> That is not to say that such categorisations might not have a value in other discussions. How one defines and separate out features of, in this case, transcendence, depends upon the aim of the discussion and purpose for the analysis. Thus, James, in exploring the ‘religious’ aspects of experiences inevitably uses terms and distinctions between experiences that will differ from those I make in exploring the value of experiences to our wellbeing.

<sup>156</sup> That such a spectrum exists and offers a useful understanding to extraordinary or transcended phenomena was the general consensus of speakers at the *Exploring the Extraordinary* Conference held at York University on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2009.

distinguish whole-body / non-local transcendence from mental transcendence. However, there is one characteristic of Otto's numinous experience that he describes as occasionally present, that I do not think part of an experience of transcendence, and this is their capacity to incite stupor within the one who experiences them (see, Otto 1923, p26). Otto asserts that such experiences effect the subject in such a way as if he or she has been struck dumb and is incapable of speaking.

As I argue in the context of other features of the more mystic of transcendent experiences, humanity had moved on since Otto's day. As I will illustrate through contemporary examples within the transcendence movement, it is entirely possible to be in a 'connected' (whole-body / non-local) state of consciousness, and also be present in the physical world. Although transcendent states are 'above and beyond' our normal states, they embrace rational states rather than establishing an alternative state. Being in a transcendent state, far from disallowing rational thought, enables both aspects of transcendence to be realised. As my investigations confirm, it is quite possible to be both intuitive and rational at the same time. Such is the enlightened state of mind attributed to gurus and ascended master, as my literature review of such sources demonstrates.<sup>157</sup> I hypothesise that what appears to be changing at this point in human history is that such higher states of consciousness are being realised, to lesser or greater degrees by ordinary people, and perhaps increasingly so.<sup>158</sup>

It is widely accepted in theology that one's background determines the language one uses to describe religious and spiritual experiences, if not the experience itself. Whether specific religious upbringing and beliefs affects the qualities of transcendent experiences is not the focus of this study. Instead, by examining common experiences and effects across the spiritual/secular spectrum, I aim to identify fundamental features of transcendence that are considered by those who experience them to be valuable to us. Thus, for the purposes of this thesis and for the sake of clarity, I will use the following

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<sup>157</sup> That transcendent states can connect one into the world around, rather than being stupefying (and so making one unaware of the world around) is aptly illustrated by Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer who writes of periods of opera performance "as though it were somehow singing me" and of playing hockey when it was as if "The game were somehow playing me". See: Mayer, E.L. (2007) *Extraordinary Knowing: Science, skepticism, and the inexplicable powers of the human mind*, New York & London: Bantam, p60. That is, in the full extent of a transcendent state, one is totally immersed in the events of each moment.

<sup>158</sup> Such individuals may or may not have a religious or faith tradition or practice.

terms to identify differences in the *circumstances* that give rise to transcendent experiences, rather than to differentiate between the qualities that are experienced in each: a ‘religious experience’ per se thus refers to a transcendent experience during a specifically traditional religious practice, activity or environment; and a ‘spiritual experience’ per se, to a transcendent experience during any other specifically spiritual or therapeutic practice or activity (but excluding ‘religious experiences’ as described above).

I thus use the broad ‘transcendence’ term to include transcendent experiences obtained during specifically religious or spiritual activity, experiences obtained during day-to-day activities and, for example, during artistic pursuits or when engaging with the natural world. Although this terminology and categorisation would allow a direct comparison between experiences obtained under religious and those obtained under spiritual but non-religious settings, such a comparison is not within the scope of the current work.<sup>159</sup> Rather I am exploring traits and effects common to transcendent experiences wherever or however obtained. Through such analysis I intend to demonstrate that when considering effects of wellbeing, it is not our chief concern to ascertain whether the context for the experience or activity is best described as religious, spiritual or otherwise.

Neither is it the purpose of this study to enter another classic debate on the topic of religious experiences: the question of ‘transcendent v immanent’.<sup>160</sup>

One typical use of the term ‘transcendent’ is “to pass or lie beyond the limit of” (CED) as opposed to ‘immanent’ meaning “indwelling; pervading; inherent” (CED). To pose such a transcendence / immanence question would be to enter a dualistic debate which, as I have already said, is part and parcel of the epistemological framework that experiences of transcendence seeks to depart from and overcome, and thereby an inappropriate approach in which to frame and critique this research. In the context of wellbeing, and how a given individual feels, it matters little if the source of the feeling of transcendence is perceived as from within or from outside. What matters is that it

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<sup>159</sup> During analysis of first-hand accounts in Chapter 6 however, I do examine the activity that seemed to trigger such experiences.

<sup>160</sup> Likewise it is not my intent to discuss the question of the existence (or otherwise) of God. Much has already been written on such topics, for example the invaluable work of Caroline Franks Davis (1989) *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.



facilitates a change in attitude and helps one to reframe one's life or being within the world. In any case, given the holistic principle<sup>161</sup> the dualism of 'from within' and 'from without' are seen as reflections of each other, and any debate as to the prevalence of one over the other is deemed irrelevant.

Likewise, whether an experience is interpreted as 'divine intervention' or 'God working through nature' has (so long as one is at peace with that personal interpretation) little impact on the capacity of that experience to uplift one's spirits and effect a substantial change in attitude. The explanation given for a transcendent experience does not change the experience. To suggest it does would be like arguing that the words of a song printed out from an i-Mac™ are somehow different to those printed out from a PC running Windows™. i.e. that would be to confuse the mechanism with the effect. This thesis is primarily concerned with the result of transcendent experiences and the embodiment of them and not, as I explained in Chapter 1, the mechanics of the mental processes involved.

Debates such as 'from within' or 'from without'; 'from God' or 'from ourselves' are typical examples of the dualistic tendencies still prevalent in what I construe to be the ebbing years of modern times. Since the transcendence movement on which this work is based is concerned with exploding such dichotomies, and is in essence 'post-dualistic', it is necessary for me to expound briefly in this section what I mean by the terms 'dualistic' and 'post-dualistic'.

Since my thesis is of an interdisciplinary nature, for 'dualism' as for many terms, I use a basic English language (as opposed to discipline-specific) definitions. The Chambers English Dictionary of 1990 defines dualism thus:

That view which seeks to explain the world by the assumption of two radically independent and absolute elements – e.g. (1) the doctrine of the entire separation of spirit and matter, thus being opposed both to *idealism* and to *materialism*; (2) the doctrine of two distinct principles of good and evil, or of two divine beings of these characteristics.

Just as important as the 'big issue' philosophical examples given in the above definition are the numerous day-to-day examples of dualism: a politician has to be 'left-wing' or

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<sup>161</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1 and expanded upon in Chapter 8.

‘right-wing’; an individual is expected to be ‘extrovert’ or ‘introvert’. Dualism is an ‘either-or’ mentality.<sup>162</sup>

Based on the above definitions, I offer my working definition for post-dualism: an ‘either–neither-or-both’ mentality. That is, the ability to hold and accept two seemingly contradictory views in one’s mind at the same time and/or to accept that one might not need to label or judge (whatever is being discussed) at all. The post-dualistic way of thinking is also associated with the ability to embrace a paradox (such as the Stockdale Paradox discussed in Chapter 1).

Such definitions could be linked to those for the modern and postmodern eras. It is generally accepted that the ‘Modern’ age began with the Enlightenment of the 18th century and is now, at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, on the wane. As with any transition between historical periods that span many centuries, there is no single end date and thus no clear beginning to what follows. Also, as Steven Connor (2004) says:

The great difficulty for expositors of the postmodern is that there are so many separate histories of postmodernism that are internal to different disciplines and areas of culture, even as, from its beginning, postmodernism has consistently acted to knock individual disciplines off centre. Postmodernism was always a phenomenon of cultural interference, the crossing or conjugation of ideas and values. (Connor 2004, p17)

Thus, ‘postmodern’ means many different things to many different people. It is not the intent of the current study to position transcendence within these numerous definitions. Rather, my aim is to identify some of the key factors that distinguish, in the context of wellbeing, the modern and postmodern from the transcendent. In the quote above, for example, words ‘to knock’ and ‘interference’ are typical of the words used to describe the postmodern. And the following extract aptly illustrates why postmodern attitudes have a deleterious effect on our wellbeing:

In postmodern culture, after the end of the old metaphysics, nothing any longer has any assured and objective value, basis, or foundation. There is no fixed order of things out there. Everything is contingent, an outsideless flux of energies-read-as-signs that just pours out unceasingly and flits away. To repeat popular phrases already used, *This is it*;

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<sup>162</sup> Another example of the transcendence of dualism might be found in the work of John Donne (1573-1631). His famous *A Hymn to God the Father* (Quiller-Couch, A. (ed. 1919) *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250–1900*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1919, §201), for example, includes the line “When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done;”. A Google search (5.3.13) finds over 400,000 hits for the above line indicating that Donne’s apparent contradiction continues to fascinate and inspire many including, I would suggest, those within the transcendence movement.

*this is all there is*—and now we are suddenly overcome with vertigo, because we have no idea whether to say that this fleeting life of ours has become infinitely important or infinitely *unimportant*. The juddering back and forth between weightiness and lightness is very difficult for many of us to bear right now, (Cupitt 1997, pp88-89, author's italics)

Such definitions and descriptions set this work into context: the rationalism, materialism and individualism of the modern, often taken to extremes in what Don Cupitt (1997) calls the postmodern, have brought into question a reliance and emphasis on the literal meanings of words and mental constructs. All too often these words and concepts become the cause of conflict or contribute, intentionally or otherwise, to exasperating conflicts. Guilain Denoux (2002), for example, describes the many inconsistencies and associated dangers of using words such as “Islamic fundamentalist”. Those in the transcendence movement, by contrast, tend to reassess life values and allow themselves to experience a new (transcendent) depth beyond words in general and isms in particular.

In this thesis I thus distinguish between modern and the transcendent not so much as set period of times, but as a set of values, attitudes and approaches to life. Whilst rationalism and dualism might seem to categorise the modern attitude, individualism and deconstructionism categorise postmodern attitudes. In the emerging transcendent view, as this thesis highlights, there is a conscious intent towards a more peaceful and inclusive state of mind and culture, and a consciousness that is felt rather than thought. These ideas and the language that is typically used in their descriptions and designations, for each, modern, postmodern and transcendent, is summarised in Appendix 3. Whilst postmodernism may seem to be idealistic or materialistic, in the transcendent view, ‘isms’ feature to much lesser extent. The stance within the transcendence movement is to get on with living life with depth and compassion and not to get caught up in trying to figure out—with inevitable futility—the logic and language that rationalises one’s corresponding experiences. A big part of this is a commitment to the process of acceptance, again as used in the Serenity Prayer cited earlier. That is to say, to “grant me the patience to accept those things I cannot change”.

Acceptance can be seen as aligning one’s inner view of the world with an outer view as perceived through our senses and in interactions with other humans, creatures and the environment. When one’s internal model of reality is itself harmonious and in reasonable agreement with that which is seen and heard in day-to-day life, then that life is harmonious and flowing. When one insists on one’s personal inner view as being

‘real’ and deny the evidence of the senses however, one condemns oneself to conflicts and disappointments. This is a ‘critical acceptance’, defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005) as:

an inward gesture that inclines the heart and mind (seen as one seamless whole) towards a full-spectrum awareness of the present moment just as it is, accepting whatever is happening simply because it is already happening (Kabat-Zinn 2005, p61)

When an individual insists that ‘my world’ is the only one that matters and treat all other views of life as separate and unreal, they have fallen into the trap of duality. This is not untypical of the human condition, at the start of the twenty-first century: the extreme manifestation of individualism, where sense of self tends to mean a selfish, ego-centred, ‘me’ divorced from all ‘other’. Throughout this thesis I describe the emergence of an alternative view: in the post-dualistic epistemology, there is no separate ‘me’, rather an interdependent self-immersed in ‘The Oneness’ of life.<sup>163</sup> Such a shift of perspective requires a significant degree of acceptance. This thesis examines the roles of suffering and transcendent experiences in this acceptance process.

Before analysing this transcendence process, I finally need to provide my definition of ‘suffer’:

*v.t.* to undergo: to endure: to be affected by. *v.i.* to feel pain or punishment: to sustain loss: to be injured: to die: to be executed or martyred: to be the object of an action.  
(CED)

This definition is as broad as the numerous ways in which we can be said to suffer. What some enjoy, some suffer; there is no ‘normal’ when it comes to this very human failing. Suffering is a very personal thing. This thesis is concerned with those aspects of suffering that are common between different people going through what might appear to be very different forms of suffering. My intent is to find an understanding of suffering (in the context of transcendence and wellbeing) that integrates the theological and psychological views. The following, fairly typical theological explanation of Andrei Bloom, provides a useful starting point: “The root of pain and of suffering, whether physical or moral, the root of every disharmony, lies in our severance from God”. (Bloom 1971, p23). In future chapters I will extend this view to embrace other philosophies and disciplines and illustrate how, through accounts of first-hand

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<sup>163</sup> As discussed in Chapter 7.

transcendent experience, pain can be regarded as part of it and can have a very real impact within an individual's life.

Whilst I personally have not suffered to the extent of some of the other individuals whose stories are related in subsequent chapters, I maintain (as I justify in Chapter 4) that it is through comparison with and empathy enabled by my own suffering that a deeper appreciation and understanding of the role of suffering can best be gained. In Chapter 4 I therefore share examples from my own process of transcendent experiences. These personal accounts, together with accounts from biographies (Chapter 5) and the collected accounts of Chapter 6 from Part Two which, with a different perspective in each chapter, presents a cross-section of the praxis of transcendence from which its nature and dynamic can be discerned.

A key feature of transcendence is the way in which the personal and individual are seen not in isolation, but in terms of their relationships with others. In the following chapter I describe the transcendence movement in terms of the ethos and praxis of those within in, particularly in their inter-relations.

# Chapter 3

## The transcendence movement and its common themes

It is my hypothesis that there exists, albeit scattered and often ‘beneath the radar’ of the mainstream media, a significant and growing grass-roots movement, made up of individuals who, rather than living according to a modern, rational epistemology choose to adopt what Eshelman (2000), for example, refers to as a more instinctual ‘performance’ approach to life. Whilst, as discussed in the ‘Scope’ section of Chapter 1, it is impossible to present a full or even representative picture for the each and every person, it is my intent in this chapter to identify and describe a sufficiently broad and geographically distributed range of examples so as to leave little doubt regarding the size and significance of this movement.

This thesis is concerned with a broad range of human organisations, activities and associated ideas that, I contend, reflect a growing awareness of and commitment to a way of thinking and behaviour that can be described as ‘transcendent’. I thus refer to this pattern of growth as ‘the transcendence movement’. My study examines the ethos and practices prevalent within this movement in order to identify the key features of it. Such features are, I argue, indicative of a change in our Western epistemological outlook and are based on a conscious intent and ability to enter into all relationships from a position not of reason per se, but of ‘love’, whereby, as Eshelman notes: “Love, as *the* optimal condition of innovation, enables *any* subject to be loved - that is, to enter with another, alien subject into a whole, salvational space or frame.” (Eshelman 2000)<sup>164</sup>

Related indicators of such trends include the intent and ability to relate to others with compassion (rather than calculated hate or misunderstanding) and to see duality (for

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<sup>164</sup> This paper was accessed from [www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0602/perform.htm](http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0602/perform.htm) on 12.10.09.

example ‘us’ and ‘them’) as a paradox to be overcome by embracing it rather than promoting one side over the other.<sup>165</sup>

Important issues emerging from this research revolve around the question—often central to debates on transcendence—of the boundaries (if any) between the individual, inner, self (what is often referred to as ‘ego’) and the communal, collective or ‘sense of other’ that (if one is speaking in dualistic terms) exists (or is perceived as existing) outside the self. Such discussions inevitably focus on relationships, which are seen as critical areas for attention and action, whether concerned with for example, personal relationships, relationships with the divine, the natural world, or indeed, with ourselves. Whilst present-day society is often characterised by individualism, it is my intent to demonstrate that such selfish focus is largely overcome within the transcendence movement, wherein a Oneness of life is found to be prevalent in the underlying world-view of those involved.

An important corollary to this finding is a willingness by individuals and groups within the transcendence movement to allow for and in some cases encourage engagement with pain and suffering. As I have already argued, pain and suffering are integral to the process of personal self-development and these enable movement beyond the barriers traditionally associated with our ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds. In describing a range of organisations, each with its own area of interest in human endeavours, I also present a spectrum of views and related practicalities on the issue of suffering that clearly illustrate how the landscape of relationships is undergoing a radical transition.

Whilst it is impossible to prove quantifiably that this movement is inherent to an underlying evolutionary trend<sup>166</sup> it is my contention that, given the sheer breadth and broad base from which this movement operates, it is evident that there is a significant indication of some shift in the collective human awareness and a reflection of a very real change towards a transcendent way of relating to the world.<sup>167</sup> As I shall demonstrate in subsequent chapters, this mirrors the same heightened state of mind and evolution of

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<sup>165</sup> Post-dualism is seen as a key feature of post-postmodern. This I debate in subsequent chapters.

<sup>166</sup> Since this would require a comprehensive global assessment of matters that are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify.

<sup>167</sup> As per, for example, the ‘Two dimensional Model’ proposed in Chapter 7.

consciousness anticipated by key thinkers in such fields as philosophy, psychology and theology from across the world's faiths and academic disciplines.<sup>168</sup>

Empirical evidence of personal experiences, as presented and analysed in Part Two, are corroborated by the study of smaller movements and organisations within the transcendence movement, which is the subject of this chapter. There are, in addition countless New Age activities which demonstrate similar ideas. These are already widely accepted, as discussed for example by Sutcliffe & Bowman (2000) and by York (1995), and are thus not discussed in detail here.<sup>169</sup> There is thus strong evidence from a cross-section of society to support my contention that there is an identifiable shift towards transcendent ways of 'thinking' (in the broadest sense of the word), behaving and even, we might say, of Being.

In order to illustrate trends in society generally, this chapter will focus on movements and related organisations that are external to formal academic and research institutions, and which are open to wider, public participation. By focusing on the activities of organisations that are within the mainstream of popular society, yet not identified with it,<sup>170</sup> the referenced material in this chapter tends, by its very nature, to be less academically conventional and also, one might therefore claim, less reductive in its conception and expression. In particular we shall see that, as I have already identified in Part One, transcendence embraces the two critical issues of inclusiveness and subjectivity.

For instance, in terms of inclusiveness, the transcendence movement respects religious and cultural identity but regards it to be less important than the ethical implications of a shared humanity. Whatever one's religion (if any) and country of birth, every individual

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<sup>168</sup> Whilst the trends in consciousness discussed have been predicted in ancient as well as more recent works, it is, I contend, since the 1960s that outwards signs have become publicly observable. Furthermore, it is only since the 1990s that the 'Transcendence Movement' has become coherent in its activities. Issues of historical context are discussed in Chapter 1 and of evolutionary significance in Chapter 9.

<sup>169</sup> These include the whole spectrum of mental and physical exercises such as meditation techniques, Yoga, Tai Chi and other spiritual or healing practices. Whilst the depth and breadth inherent in such techniques (and thus potential efficacy) is not in question, in Chapter 13 I will examine which practical aspects of such provisions within the transcendence movement are considered most conducive to the attainment and positive assimilation of transcendent experiences.

<sup>170</sup> That is participating within mainstream society but not attached to conventional beliefs or values.



is, first and foremost, related to the next as a human being. Within the transcendence movement the intent is always to include, whether in expression or activities, every individual, irrespective of their perceived difference.

Furthermore, individuals within the transcendence movement tend to recognise existence as subjective experience. Key to this view is an ability to understand and appreciate the lives of others as if they were one's own. Such capacity to emphasise is, one might argue, fundamental to research in most areas pertaining to the humanities.<sup>171</sup>

In this chapter I demonstrate the growing engagement with the transcendence process through a study of the nature and dynamics of human relationships. I do so by considering relationships with the divine, with the natural world, with ourselves and with other humans.

In the first of these discussions, I will explore how the interspiritual and interfaith movements, for instance, are not only concerned with relationships between individuals and groups of different faiths, but also with the relationship between one's rational or finite selves and the divine. Immediately, even in phrasing this relationship, a key emphasis in transcendent thinking is highlighted: rather than 'the divine', I could equally well have proposed the notion of 'one's inner, divine, self'.<sup>172</sup> As I shall illustrate, in exploring the human relationship with the divine, there is no dualism in the transcendent epistemology: the divine is considered as being both within and without.

Equally important, as an analysis of ideas and practices within interspiritual and interfaith circles will demonstrate, it is through transcendent experiences and our willing engagement with them, that those within the transcendence movement put this post-dualistic view into practice. They are willing and able to identify and transcend whatever barriers they perceive to be keeping them separate from God or other human beings,

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<sup>171</sup> Take, for instance, the following description by Phillips & Pugh (2005) in their work pertaining to gender issues:

For feminists it's impossible to separate oneself from one's work. Writing oneself into the thesis and not being invisible is a gender issue.' This particular problem of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity occurs in many fields. (Phillips, E.M. & Pugh, D.S. *How to get a PhD* (4th Edition): Maidenhead & New York: Open University Press, 2005, p122)

<sup>172</sup> Indeed, some argue there is in fact no phenomenological difference, see for instance, C.G.Jung's notion of the 'Self', that aspect of ourselves that has transcended the ego, and which, he argues, is equivalent to an experience of 'God' (1963),

even if that means suffering in the process. As I will demonstrate, through examples that such barriers are apparent in personal, conditioned attitudes. One's capacity for transcendence requires an awareness of and willingness to move on from those beliefs and habits that restrict or inhibit natural expression. This process is inevitably painful. A willingness to endure such pain is accepted by individuals and groups within the transcendence movement on the basis that it is inevitable and required in the name of personal enrichment and transformation as 'part of the process'.

My second concern in this chapter is the sphere of human activity related to the natural world and our relationship to other life forms. Here one finds the 'deep ecology' movement<sup>173</sup> and, within it, a personal engagement with other creatures, often through an empathic resonance with their perceived suffering.<sup>174</sup> It is this empathic link through suffering that, I contend, enables individuals to transcend the traditional divide between 'us' (humans) and 'them' (other living creatures). Through such empathic resonance a sense of belonging to one interconnected consciousness of life is often experienced, with powerful effects on the minds of the humans involved.

Next I turn to our relationship with ourselves, in particular between one's own rational and non-rational selves, that is to say, our capacities to employ both reason and non-reason in our experiences and comprehension of those experiences, and the interrelationship of the two. This is illustrated with reference to ways in which science is increasingly receptive to the mystical<sup>175</sup> and by consideration of the holistic and integral health movements. Within these movements there is a contention that whilst our bodies have previously been considered as mechanical systems, they are from a transcendence perspective better considered integral to one's whole being. Acknowledging and enabling interactions across the 'Mind-Body-Soul' divide is thus seen as paramount.

Finally I will focus my attention on relationships with other humans and more specifically with a 'significant other', i.e. close personal relationships. Here (Section 4) I identify an inherent quest for depth and meaning in an individual's life which creates a

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<sup>173</sup> Closely linked to ecological philosophy or ecosophy.

<sup>174</sup> Although animals suffer in many ways, it is perhaps relevant (although outside of the scope of this thesis to discuss further) that much of their suffering (for example through destruction of habitat) is often at the hands of humans.

<sup>175</sup> My meaning of the term 'mystical' is given in the terminology section of Chapter 2 and by examples and in subsequent discussions throughout this thesis.

trend towards relationships with a definite soul or spiritual emphasis. For such relationships to work, however, requires a willingness to grow beyond selfish conditioning. To honour both the masculine and feminine aspects of the divine, for example, requires that old, rigid boundaries are dissolved, and in so doing brings rewards of joy, peace and love. This can rarely be achieved without sacrifices and associated personal suffering.

Although the above four areas of focus can be identified, it is perhaps not surprising when discussing the transcendent, that clear distinctions between them are often difficult to maintain: there is inevitably much overlap between relationships with the divine, with nature, with ourselves and our fellow humans. Indeed, this inter-relation is, as I shall demonstrate, is itself an important facet of the transcendence movement.

I shall now develop my arguments in each of the four identified area of relationships: with nature, with ourselves, with other human beings and, firstly, our relationship with God.

### **Relationships with the divine**

To explore human relationships with God from a transcendence perspective requires investigation beyond the more conventional arena of religious studies. In this respect a more fruitful arena is the study of ‘interspiritual’; a term coined by Brother Wayne Teasdale (1945-2004) in his paper *The Interspiritual Age: Practical Mysticism for the Third Millennium* (1997), which he goes on to describe in more detail in his later work, *The Mystic Heart* (1999):

Global spirituality or interspiritual wisdom has become possible because of a tangible sense of community among the religions and the real necessity for the religions to collaborate on the serious challenges to the world, notably the ecological crisis. Only spirituality can move us from within to change and become more responsible for the Earth and one another. Global spirituality is basically a consensus on the practical values, practices, and insights found in all traditions of spirituality, including moral life, deep nonviolence, solidarity with all life and with the Earth, spiritual practice and self-knowledge, simplicity, selfless service, and prophetic action. (Teasdale 1999, p74)

Whilst deeply committed to his Roman Catholic roots, Teasdale became interested and active in interfaith dialogues (i.e. relationships), through which he deepened his own faith and understanding of spirituality. In *The Mystic Heart* he argues that this powerful personal journey of spiritual self-realisation is particularly relevant to the spiritual seekers prevalent at the turn of the 21st century.

The emphasis of Teasdale, and his mentor Benedictine monk Father Bede Griffiths<sup>176</sup> was threefold. Firstly, they sought what they referred to as a ‘higher truth’ and ‘deeper spiritual understanding’ that embraced both their original Christian faith and other religious faiths, in particular the Hindu and Buddhist faiths.<sup>177</sup> Secondly, they applied this common core spirituality in their daily lives and in relationships of a personal, organisational and national nature. This approach, as I demonstrate, is also the underlying concern of the interfaith movement. Thirdly, Griffiths and Teasdale recognised the importance of the mystical approach:

People [of any faith] who have reached this kind of contemplative awareness carry it with them into all life situations. Their mystical perceptions, insights, intuitions - indeed, who they are - saturate their actions. Everything is transfigured by their mystical consciousness. All activity becomes redefined by the power, truth, and depth of what they have become. (Teasdale 1999, pp96-97)

This mystical element underlies their theoretical understanding of interspirituality.

In his subsequent book, *A Monk in the World: Cultivating a Spiritual Life* (2002) Teasdale brings the idea of a ‘modern mystic’ into secular society, in order to indicate how interspirituality provides the basis for each and everyone to live more peacefully and harmoniously. Again he emphasises the mystical approach which, he claims is grounded in silent contemplation:

The Divine Consciousness<sup>178</sup> makes a home with us, not simply in our hearts or in the depths of our subjectivity, but in every nook and cranny of our actual home. Everything becomes charged with the Divine's Presence and energy. This awareness is an enduring and palpable experience for me and is powerfully reinforced in silence, which allows it to emerge in bold relief. (Teasdale 2002, p34)

Importantly, although talking about divine presence and often using Christian phraseology, Teasdale also recognised and made regular comments on the role of consciousness; irrespective of whether or not it is in association with ‘God’.<sup>179</sup> He saw a

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<sup>176</sup> Bede Griffiths (1906-1993) who lived at Shantivanam, an ashram on the banks of the sacred river Kavery in Tamil Nadu in southern India from 1955 until his death. For a full account of the life and works of Griffiths, see his autobiography: *The Golden String* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1980).

<sup>177</sup> Teasdale writes particularly about the Hindu Vedantic tradition and Mayanan Buddhism.

<sup>178</sup> Which can be equated with the ‘whole-body / non-local’ consciousness of my proposed ‘Two dimensional model’ of consciousness, as discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>179</sup> The interspiritual approach provides excellent examples of mental transcendence, as in their multi-faith discussions on mutual understanding and respect for the terms “God, Spirit. The

need for humanity as a whole to realise higher levels of consciousness, for only through such a way of thinking and behaving, he argued, can mankind collectively survive and prosper. In introducing key ‘elements of awareness’, he says:

The elements of awareness encompass conscious knowing, the ability to read hearts, to be a healing, loving, compassionate presence, situated in the Now.<sup>180</sup> They also encompass practical wisdom in every situation, the ability to enlarge perspective, to affirm others and promote dialogue and mutual understanding. (Teasdale 2002, p208)

Interspirituality for Teasdale, is thus about living as spiritual beings in one’s day-to-day lives whilst recognising the common need of each individual to love and to be loved.

The importance of this work can be seen in a number of organisations which, since the death of Brother Teasdale, have continued to promote and enable the ideas that Teasdale developed and wrote about. Organisations such as the *InterSpiritual Dialogue 'n Action* (ISDnA),<sup>181</sup> *The Aspen Grove*<sup>182</sup> and the *Edinburgh International Centre for Spirituality and Peace*<sup>183</sup> epitomise the interspiritual focus on an emerging ‘heart based consciousness’, i.e. relationships, at all levels, based on divine love:

Bro. Wayne believed that this millennium is a time for sharing from this Consciousness of Oneness and witnessing it unfold in what he called a “civilization with a heart”.<sup>184</sup>

Whilst ‘heart’ and ‘soul’<sup>185</sup> may still be unpopular words for academic studies, within interspiritual practitioners these scholarly taboo subjects characterise both the focus of interspiritual work and the approach to it. Whatever one’s faith (if any), to do something ‘from the heart’ will always be appreciated by those on the receiving end: “*The Aspen*

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Divine, the Source, the Tao, the One, the Unmoved Mover, the boundless consciousness, the perfected state of enlightenment, the Great Mystery.” (Teasdale 2002, p189)

<sup>180</sup> The eternal ‘Now’ as discussed, for example, in Eckhart Tolle’s best-selling *The Power of Now* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999).

<sup>181</sup> An informal, US based, international network (becoming the *InterSpiritual Multiplex* in 2009), open to any individual or group with an interest in interspiritual community, dialogue or activities.

<sup>182</sup> A retreat centre in Colorado (America) which is typical of countless retreat locations around the globe. Whilst inspired by Teasdale, this organisation, like most in the transcendence movement, is open to inspiration and wisdom from all traditions.

<sup>183</sup> An events-led Scottish charity (No SC038996).

<sup>184</sup> See [www.isdna.org/about.php](http://www.isdna.org/about.php), accessed 1.7.09.

<sup>185</sup> Other expressions to convey this notion include: from deep within, guided by compassion, with loving kindness.

*Grove* believes it is time to intentionally enter that consciousness which exists beyond personal and global discord.”<sup>186</sup>

If transcendence is to go “beyond personal and global discord” (ibid) then, I argue, key organisations within the transcendence movement are those that enable a more direct and intimate relationship with the divine. Whilst all religions might claim to offer this ‘service’, there are some that, I contend, more fully demonstrate key features of transcendent epistemology. Foremost amongst these are the Quakers.<sup>187</sup> Officially a denomination of Christianity, the Quakers are considered by many Christians as non-conformists. The reasons for this, I claim, are also the reasons why I include them as an organisation within the transcendence movement: the Quakers’ whole mode of operation seeks to improve the direct relationship between members and God.

There is, for example, no preacher, nor preaching during Quakers meetings. The word of God is not conveyed via priests or written texts but directly to each of us on a moment by moment basis. As Quaker author Harvey Gillman (1988), drawing heavily on the life of Fox, writes: “... faith is something they live rather than put into particular words” (Gillman 1988, p7).

Whilst priests (or the equivalent) may, in some cases, facilitate experience of and relationship with God, religious ‘authority figures’ are often perceived by Quakers to be a barrier to such a union. Remove the intermediary (between a given individual and the divine), they argue, and the chances of a direct and personal relationship are actually improved.

This argument is further emphasised in Quaker meetings (they do not use the word ‘service’) which does not involve hymns or recited prayers. Instead, those attending the meeting sit in silence for an hour. This time is considered “a quiet waiting on God” (Gillman 1988, p22) and “contemplative and meditative experience and above all a corporate activity”. Or as George Fox himself says: “Be patient and still in the power, and in the light that doth convince you, to keep your minds to God; in that be quiet, that ye may come to the summer.” (Fox 1850, p138)

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<sup>186</sup> See [www.theaspengrove.org](http://www.theaspengrove.org), accessed 1.7.09.

<sup>187</sup> Also known as the ‘Religious Society of Friends’, founded by George Fox (1624-1691).

As I shall argue, there is often considerable power to be found in contemplation and silence, particularly when it is shared communally. Rather than recite or sing words, which Quakers would argue can ‘get in the way’ and create barriers to our union with God, silence enables an opening up to the divine.

The Quakers are not the only religion with such features. Playing an equally key role within the transcendence movement are The Bahá’ís. It is my contention that the phenomenal growth of the Bahá’í Faith<sup>188</sup> has been as a direct result of features of its organisation that parallel those of the Quakers discussed above.

Members of the Bahá’í Faith consider that its status as the youngest of the world’s independent religions is one of its strengths: it is able to position itself in today’s world and thus relate directly, without having to deal with historical precedents, to the issues faced in modern times. Bahá’ís are thus free of the barriers of dogma and out-dated language that can worsen the ‘barriers of words’ which I have already identified as being recognised and transcended by the Quakers.

To help those in need to rise above ‘barriers of words’ and other blocks to divine communion is the aim of Spiritual Directors International or SDI,<sup>189</sup> established in response to the growing demand from ‘seekers’ for guidance on their spiritual journey and from the broad spectrum of ‘spiritual directors’,<sup>190</sup> who themselves felt in need of guidance and support from within their profession. The organisation’s mission statement claims:

Throughout human history, individuals have been called to accompany others seeking the Mystery we name God. In this time, Spiritual Directors International responds to this call by tending the holy around the world and across traditions. (e.g. Wagner 2009, p2)

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<sup>188</sup> Founded by Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892); according to their web site: “What was once regarded by some as an obscure, tiny sect is now recognized by the Encyclopaedia Britannica as the second-most widely spread independent religion in the world, after Christianity.” See [www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org), accessed 24.5.09.

<sup>189</sup> Founded in 1989 with the aims of, amongst others, publishing, both on-line and in hardcopy, a world-wide directory of Spiritual Directors and organising international conferences, workshops, congresses, and online teleconferences on all aspects of spiritual directions. See web page: [sdiworld.org/events/spiritual-directors-international-outreach.html](http://sdiworld.org/events/spiritual-directors-international-outreach.html), accessed 15.7.09 and SDI (2009) *Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors*, Bellevue, WA: SDI, 2009.

<sup>190</sup> Or ‘spiritual mentor’ or guide, meaning anyone (whether from a specific religious background or not) who offers guidance and support to others on their personal, spiritual journey.

As a multi-faith organisation, SDI recognises that one of its strengths is to enable interfaith and interspiritual dialogue and in so doing help its members, from any faith or no faith, to better understand and allow their personal means of divine connection: The emphasis within SDI work is always on supporting directees to develop their own conclusions about the spiritual nature of life and how it affects their own lives. For example, in a recent *Presence*<sup>191</sup> article, JoAnn Campbell commenting about spiritual direction for college students writes:

For those students without a faith community, spiritual direction can offer a nondenominational, nonthreatening arena in which to examine changing and developing spiritual practices, beliefs and related matters. The spiritual director should focus on the meaning that her young adult spiritual directee is making from the events and relationships he discusses during spiritual direction. (Campbell 2009, p35)

This paper also emphasises the huge need for such services, particularly within college environments:

A growing number of studies (e.g. Chickering; Johnson) give voice to the desire for higher education to bridge its historically sharp division between intellectual and spiritual development. Yet even faculty at faith-based institutions have been found to be “more comfortable with the head than the heart”... (Campbell 2009, p34)<sup>192</sup>

Living from the heart but with the head in harmony (i.e. with barriers between our deep, inner, divine and mental selves removed) is an important intent within the transcendence movement. Amongst the most established and respected organisations providing instruction and guidance in this field, through the esoteric and metaphysical, is the Theosophical Society (TS).<sup>193</sup>

The TS, through its active branches throughout the world, offers a range of respected and deeply considered teachings on relationship with the divine, for example: Atlantis,

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<sup>191</sup> *Presence* is the journal of Spiritual Directors International.

<sup>192</sup> Quoting a study of ten religious institutions by Larry A. Braskamp (‘How College Fosters Faith Development in Students’, *Spirituality in Higher Education* Vol 2 Iss 3, July 2005, p3).

<sup>193</sup> Founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and others in New York City, 1875. Its objectives (amongst others) are “to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science” and “to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man”, quoted for example, on The Theosophical Society’s *Programme of Events in North Wales* Spring 2009.



The Chakras, Crop Circles, 'The Mystical Teachings of Meister Eckhart' and Sacred Geometry.<sup>194</sup>

Popular authors Alice Bailey and Dr Douglas Baker<sup>195</sup> are amongst the followers of the TS founder Blavatsky who have done much to promote the society and extend its teachings both globally and into public arenas. Although firm supporters of Blavatsky they did not follow her through blind obedience nor unquestioning belief. Rather, as is typical within the transcendence movement, they built on their own first-hand experiences and, above all, their sense of courage. Of this Baker says: ““Discipline is not a substitute for courage” A disciple is one who practices discipline, who follows the disciplines taught by their leader ... but you can’t teach courage.”<sup>196</sup>

Courage is seen to be a recurring theme within the transcendence movement: first-hand accounts (see Chapters 4 to 6) often suggest that transcendent experiences are an important source of courage. Within theosophy one man in particular demonstrated such courage in abundance: Rudolf Steiner.<sup>197</sup> Now best known for founding the Waldorf Schools and bio-dynamic system of agriculture,<sup>198</sup> Steiner epitomises the dedication and commitment of the leaders of such movements by not just developing a new understanding of the world but also leaving behind practical methods and ideas that benefit whole communities.

Steiner, like many active within the transcendence movement, was concerned with (and recognised the connection between) all personal relationship: with God, with each other and, for example, with the land. Such a growing intimacy in relationships with the natural world is my next focus of study.

## **Our relationship with nature**

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<sup>194</sup> This selection of public talks was provided by the TS in Conwy and Bangor (North Wales) during 2009.

<sup>195</sup> See for example [www.douglasbaker.com](http://www.douglasbaker.com) (18.5.09)

<sup>196</sup> See: [www.douglasbaker.com/courageandcourage.html](http://www.douglasbaker.com/courageandcourage.html), accessed 17.5.09.

<sup>197</sup> In 1913, he and his followers broke away from The Theosophical Society to found what he called Anthroposophy, meaning 'Wisdom of or about Man'.

<sup>198</sup> For a brief history of Rudolf Steiner see, for example, [www.kheper.net/topics/Anthroposophy/Steiner.htm](http://www.kheper.net/topics/Anthroposophy/Steiner.htm), accessed 20.7.09.

Since the founding of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1961 and Greenpeace in 1971, there has been a growing concern amongst ordinary individuals for the non-human species with which we share planet Earth. Underlying the ‘eco’ campaigns of such organisations is the idea that humans are of equal importance to all other species, that the world and its ecosystems (and thus humanities future) requires that all beings live together in mutual respect and cooperation. Indeed “WWF’s ultimate goal is to build a future where people live in harmony with nature.”<sup>199</sup> In line with my arguments of the transcendence movement in general, the WWF’s aim is no less than that of improving the relationship between humans and the natural world by engaging with it.

Another organisation clearly indicating the trend towards a deeper engagement with environmental issues is *Compassion in World Farming Trust*.<sup>200</sup> The very name of this body is indicative of transcendence, in that the juxtaposition of ‘compassion’ and ‘farming’ simply does not occur in the hard-headed modern world-view. Two of their reports illustrate humankind’s growing awareness of and commitment to the lives and, I would argue, the feelings of other creatures:

*In Too Deep* (Lymbery 2002) investigates “farmed fish”, “the UK’s second largest livestock sector after broiler chickens” (p51) and concludes:

Intensive rearing methods, together with often appalling cruel and widely used slaughter practices such as suffocation in air or on ice ... are unacceptable on welfare grounds. (Lymbery 2002, p17)

Likewise *The Gene and the Stable Door* (Turner 2002), reviewing *Biotechnology and Farm Animals*,<sup>201</sup> says “Farm animals are sentient beings, with intelligence and complex social and family behaviour” and thus deserve respect by humans. From such literature it can be seen that the European Union is finally agreeing with the wisdom of indigenous cultures around the world who have always said this of other members of the animal kingdom. The report also identifies the role of both science and theist religions in promulgating and maintaining the notion that man is somehow superior to other life-

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<sup>199</sup> See: [www.wwf.org](http://www.wwf.org), accessed 5.8.09.

<sup>200</sup> Founded in 1967, this charity sponsors research, reports and campaigns to improve awareness of the dangers of many commercial farming methods and to promote alternatives that benefit not just producers and consumers but also the animals being farmed. See: [www.ciwf.org.uk/about\\_us/history\\_achievements/default.aspx](http://www.ciwf.org.uk/about_us/history_achievements/default.aspx), accessed 7.8.09.

<sup>201</sup> Referring to an EU Member State legally binding protocol that was added to the European Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997.

forms. Such is the rational epistemology that, I argue, needs to be and is being challenged. The notion that human intellect is considered superior to natural, intuitive, wisdom has no place within the transcendence movement.

Kusumita Pedersen,<sup>202</sup> for example, in identifying the points of agreements between the world's faiths, says:

Non-human living beings are morally significant, in the eyes of God and/or in the cosmic order. They have unique relations to God, and their own place in the cosmic order (quoted by Braybrooke 2005, p123)

Such a sentiment is shared by most, if not all, active participants in the transcendence movement and enables activists of several causes to work across many boundaries. From its early days the Bahá'í Faith, for example, has been global in its membership and international in its activities.<sup>203</sup> This intent and ability to transcend national boundaries 'for the greater good' is fundamental to its perceived role in the world:

One of the most distinctive aspects of the worldwide Bahá'í community is the hopeful and yet pragmatic way in which its members face the future. Far from fearing it, Bahá'ís the world over are dedicated to creating a new and peaceful world civilization based on principles of justice, prosperity, and continuing advancement.<sup>204</sup>

An example of this commitment is the tireless efforts by Bahá'ís at international, national and local levels to implement *Agenda 21*,<sup>205</sup> this being the first global acknowledgement of the need to change human behaviour in respect of our relationship with the planet. Adriance (1994) clearly demonstrates the Bahá'ís' commitment to transcendent ideals in his *Implementation of Agenda 21: A Bahá'í Perspective*:

Consultation must replace confrontation; unity must replace divisiveness; compassion, empathy, and respect for nature must replace selfishness and greed. These spiritual principles must form the core of the philosophy of human values which is to serve as the foundation of the strategy to implement Agenda 21. (ibid, pp101-102)

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<sup>202</sup> *Environmental Ethics in Perspective*, reproduced in *Earth and Faith*, p78.

<sup>203</sup> Bahá'í representatives were present, for example, in 1945 in San Francisco at the founding of the United Nations.

<sup>204</sup> See web page: [info.bahai.org/article-1-7-0-1.html](http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-0-1.html), accessed 30.7.09.

<sup>205</sup> My own introduction to the Bahá'ís was through sitting with their representative on the Environmental Forum of Northamptonshire County Council in the late 1990s. This series of community-based meetings was typical of attempts by local authorities throughout the UK (and indeed the world) to implement *Agenda 21* (otherwise known as the 'Rio Declaration on Environment and Development') which was adopted by more than 178 Governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992.

Whether seeking union with the divine or happiness within oneself and in personal relationships, the primary barriers can be attributed to the rationalistic mind-set of ego. Indeed, one of the most cited references to transcendence is on this topic: Jean-Paul Sartre (1960) in *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*.<sup>206</sup> Once ego has accepted that it is but part of a Oneness of life, there are no barriers to any relationships. It is my contention that a combination of mental and whole-body / non-local transcendent experiences are major contributors to such ‘ego deflation’. Deeper experiences with nature are thus essential to developing a true sense of self. Alf Seegert,<sup>207</sup> for instance, says:

How we experience ourselves has no small effect on how we take care of that which we call “self” in the first place. Such a claim is at the heart of deep ecology’s notion of the relational or ecological Self. (ibid, p2)

Expanding on the link between feeling pain and our own potential for developing wholeness and happiness, Seegert begins his paper with a quote from Kahlil Gibran’s *The Prophet*: “The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.” Living with depth, as those in the transcendence movement aim to do, requires, I contend, experiences of ‘highs’ and ‘lows’:

For we will only treat as self what we experience as self. We therefore need to be willing and able to feel the pain of the world as our own pain and to embrace the earth’s joy as our joy - in order that we can respond to suffering with healing, and respond to healing with celebration. But how do we achieve this? There are, of course, many ways to answer this question. (ibid, p5)

He continues:

One of [the] many ways to help deepen and widen your sense of self would be to interact concretely with your immediate ecological context, working to become intimately aware of your shared identity with it. For instance: grow a garden; plant a tree; trace where the water in your tap finds its origin; say grace and mean it (ibid, p7)

To the countless volunteers around the world, willingly giving their time and effort to a conservation or animal welfare cause, what matters is a perceived deeper sense of

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<sup>206</sup> Whilst of obvious academic interest, the Sartre text has little to say about practical transcendence. A critical review of it, particularly in the context of ‘public engagement’ and ‘impact’ identifies a conceptual and abstract emphasis and approach which seems to offer little value to an individual seeking transcendence, nor to an understanding of transcendence as a praxis.

<sup>207</sup> Presented at The University of Utah Humanities Graduate Conference in 2003. See web page: [vegeta.hum.utah.edu/hgc/papers/seegert.pdf](http://vegeta.hum.utah.edu/hgc/papers/seegert.pdf), accessed 30.9.09.

connection to the Oneness of life to which, instinctively if not culturally, they know they belong. As I have shown in Part Two, such experiential relationships are seen consistently in the first-hand and biographic accounts of transcendent experiences. Underlying the transcendence movement, a clear acknowledgement that there is but one world and that mankind's future requires an engagement with it, and one with openness and a depth, not just of understanding, but of compassion.

This is as true of relationships with other creatures as it is of a personal relationship with oneself.

### **Relationship with ourselves**

In this section I demonstrate, by examining the ethos and practices of groups within the transcendence movement, how my two-facet model of consciousness can be used to explain and underpin ideas that are prevalent within the transcendence movement.

In the modern epistemology, there is only a mental consciousness, a consciousness that is borne from ego with its penchant for rationalising its experiences and thereby reducing them to terms that it has learnt through social and cultural conditioning. It is the mode of brain functioning that enables us to reason, analyse and theorise.

Transcendent thought does not deny nor seek to replace this way of thinking. Rather, it acknowledges the need to extend, broaden and, eventually, embrace it.<sup>208</sup> This can happen in two ways, as I shall now illustrate by exploring human relationships within the context of the 'thinking' self. I demonstrate my arguments by reference to groups within the transcendence movement: firstly, the integrative and the holistic movements.

Whilst the 'integrative' and 'holistic' movements can be seen as having different roots and focus, from the point of view of organisations active at the grass-roots level, they represent two sides of the same coin: one cannot be truly integrative in one's approach to life without also being holistic. Ken Wilbur, effectively the founder of the integral movement, explains this using the concept of a 'holon', as coined by Arthur Koestler:<sup>209</sup>

A whole atom is part of a whole molecule, and the whole molecule is part of a whole cell, and the whole cell is part of a whole organism, and so on. Each of these entities is neither a whole nor a part, but a whole/part, a holon.

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<sup>208</sup> The inter-relationship between facets of transcendence and the evolutionary shifts in consciousness is described in my discussion of models in Chapter 7.

<sup>209</sup> In *The Ghost in the Machine* (London: Hutchinson, 1967, p48)

And the point is, everything is basically a holon of some sort or another. There is a two-thousand-year-old philosophical squabble between atomists and wholists: which is ultimately real, the whole or the part? And the answer is, neither. Or both, if you prefer. (Wilbur 1996, pp17-18)

Wilbur, rightly I suggest, questions the wisdom of categorising or separating everything into ‘parts’. Being integral in one’s view and approach to life, he argues, requires that we do not ‘ring fence’ different areas of our life. I agree with him that there is a need to recognise how dependent human is upon so many other parts of creation. One’s health, for example, is dependent on many factors including, but in no way restricted to, housing, what one eats (and thus on those who produce it) and on attitudes.<sup>210</sup>

Whilst holistic, or whole-istic, can often be used in this same sense of integral, complete or all-embracing, to the more aware transcendent practitioners, such a definition, I argue, is only one of two dimensions: there must also be depth. This is holistic in the sense of the ‘holon’ and the ‘hologram’.<sup>211</sup> Thus, at the practical level, conflicts within a community reflect conflicts within the minds of its individual members, which in turn is often reflected in the physical body (i.e. through ill-health).

There is, I conclude, no ‘us’ and ‘them’. Each individual’s relationship with the collective has to acknowledge a need for that collective, if they are to flourish. Not only are ‘we all in this together’, but all the things one sees, feels and reacts to in life are best seen as part of both a personal, and collective, growth path. A change in the collective requires a change in the personal.<sup>212</sup> As C.G. Jung—who was a notable influence on Wilbur—says, to be complete in ‘wholeness’, requires one to raise above the ethics bound up in words and instead know, from within, one’s own post-dualistic self:

The individual who wishes to have an answer to the problem of evil, as it is posed to-day, has need, first and foremost, of self-knowledge, that is, the utmost possible knowledge of his own wholeness. He must know relentlessly how much good he can do, and what crimes he is capable of, and must beware of regarding the one as real and the other as illusion. Both are elements within his nature, and both are bound to come to light in him, should he wish - as he ought - to live without self-deception or self-illusion. (Jung 1963, p362)

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<sup>210</sup> This is the basis of ‘Integral Health’, as discussed later in this section.

<sup>211</sup> That is, no matter how much we zoom in (for example with ever more powerful microscopes) or zoom out (with ever more powerful telescopes) we will never reach an end. Just as importantly, what we see at one level of magnificence reflects and is reflected in all the others.

<sup>212</sup> The analysis of personal accounts of transcendent experiences in Part 2, particularly with respect to the ‘fruits’ of such experiences, clearly illustrate how we ‘learn through experience’ at all levels of our being.

Another good example of a living ‘beyond a cause’ is taken up by Wilbur’s investigation into how one handles the relationship between ‘rights’ and ‘responsibilities’. Typically, in the modern world-view there is no connection between these two facets of being human, but Wilbur argues, again using the holon to illustrate the point:

As a whole, a holon has rights which express its relative autonomy. ... But further, each holon is also a part of some other whole(s), and as a part, it has responsibilities to the maintenance of that whole. (Wilbur 1996, pp302-303)

This provides the clear moral guideline prevalent in the transcendence movement: that in return for the right to enjoy autonomy as a human individual one must accept one’s responsibility as part of society and the earth’s ecosystem. Each individual is integral to the success of the whole. This point will underpin later issues raised within this thesis.

The principle of holism also suggests that an individual’s relationship with others cannot be separated from how they perceive themselves or their relationships with others throughout life. If, as in modern individualism, one perceives oneself as ontologically separate, mechanistic individuals, then the mind will hold images, models and theories that define and describe this. According to the holistic principle (‘as above so below’, as described in Chapter 1) the way in which a thing functions, in this case the mind, reflects and is reflected in its physical make-up and in its ‘contents’. Thus, the theory goes, a mind will at some level (though not necessarily measurable by even today’s neuro-imaging technology) reflect this separatist model.<sup>213</sup>

Despite the emphasis in conventional society and in academic circles of a rational epistemology there are, even within mainstream scientific organisations, individual researchers and authors who question this paradigm. These people can be considered the modern day equivalents to the early scientists of the Enlightenment who dared to question the religious convention of the time.<sup>214</sup> In the UK such individuals are likely to belong to the Scientific and Medical Network (SMN of ‘The Network’) which actively seeks a scientific methodology and understanding beyond the rational.

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<sup>213</sup> This is a feature of ‘mental transcendence’ as illustrated diagrammatically in Appendix 2.

<sup>214</sup> Our current body of knowledge would not have been possible without the courage, for example, of Italian physicist and astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564–1642).

In ‘The Network’, the spiritual and the scientific are understood as two different facets of one reality. Members include eminent medics and scientists from many fields.<sup>215</sup> As an organisation it is: “Truly trans-disciplinary, truly progressive, [a] place to discuss, dialogue and learn about the universe in which we live and which gives us our being.”<sup>216</sup>

In discussing the relationship between science and the spiritual—i.e. “To integrate intuitive insights with rational analysis in our investigations”<sup>217</sup>—members openly acknowledge the need to develop the relationship between the rational and the spiritual within themselves.

The Network’s commitment to transcending barriers traditionally associated with science is exemplified by its annual *Mystics and Scientists* conference.<sup>218</sup> In 2009 the theme of this weekend event, then in its 32<sup>nd</sup> year, was *The Science of Happiness and Experience of Bliss*. In her report of the conference Marilyn Monk (2009b), reiterates the arguments presented by Dominican priest and author Matthew Fox: “Happiness is not eternal optimism. All beings suffer but the opposite of happiness is not suffering. Happiness must be so real that it can embrace suffering.” (Monk 2009, p28). Here again we find the theme of ‘acceptance of suffering’ highlighted.

One factor that distinguishes the SMN’s *Mystics and Scientists* conference from conventional scientific gatherings is the inclusion of participatory activities within the main programme. Monk writes: “We joined together in singing and circle dancing in the spirit of celebration” and argues of such activity, as Fox does, that it: “Speaks of strengthening the heart against fear, and bringing love and wisdom to everything we do.”

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<sup>215</sup> The current president of the SMN, for example is Dr. Peter Fenwick, MB, BChir, BA, DPM, FRCPsych, neuropsychiatrist and neurophysiologist. Other members include Professor Bernard Carr, PhD., Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Queen Mary, and Marilyn Monk, Professor Emeritus in Molecular Embryology.

<sup>216</sup> See: [www.scimednet.org/history.htm](http://www.scimednet.org/history.htm), accessed 4.8.09.

<sup>217</sup> See: [www.scimednet.org/aims.htm](http://www.scimednet.org/aims.htm), accessed 4.8.09.

<sup>218</sup> This is but one of a wide range of conferences, seminars and local group meetings arranged by the SMN. Subjects covered by such events between August and November 2009, for example, included *Beyond the Brain VIII: Self and Death - What Survives?; Towards an Understanding of the Primacy of Consciousness and Towards a New Renaissance 3: Harmonising Spirituality, Nature and Health*.



(ibid, p29). Within the transcendence movement, such experiences are considered essential in embodying the theory described in the more formal presentations.<sup>219</sup>

In my own *Postscript* to the conference (Beasley 2009) I expand on Fox's argument thus: "Rather it [happiness] is a deeper sense of inner peace and 'rightness' about life, which embraces both the highs of bliss and the lows of pain." (ibid, p31). That is to say, true happiness, as this conference helped attendees to both understand and experience, transcends the conditioned labelling of and reaction to emotional turmoil.

Through such public events and its quarterly publication (the *Network Review*) the SMN enables open discussion of ideas that its members regard as essential for humanity's future wellbeing.<sup>220</sup>

Within the Network, there is open admission of the mental barriers associated with rationalism and materialism. Just as importantly, there is a willingness to explore alternatives both theoretically and experientially. To engage in such discussions requires reflection upon values and ways of thinking, i.e. on an individual's relationship with themselves. It is time, argues another author in the hundredth issue of the SMN's *Network Review*, to change how we perceive ourselves: "Each of us is as complex and beautiful as all the stars in the universe" and "... life is a miracle every moment of your existence" (Hawken 2009, p15). Forerunners in the transcendence movement are not constrained by mechanistic models of the human mind.

More expansive and integrative models of human are also growing in acceptance within the health and wellbeing sector. The very idea of 'Integrated Health' is, I argue, about breaking down the barriers prevalent in current interpretations of health and illness. It also recognised the dangers of separating bodily aspects from mental and of divorcing minds and bodies from the inner self or soul.

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<sup>219</sup> Further examples of experiential conferences are described in Appendix 4.

<sup>220</sup> SMN Member and biologist Dr. Rupert Sheldrake emphasises, for example, the crucial factor of the global recession on materialism and on science, and its impacts:

Materialism's credit crunch changes everything. As science is liberated from this nineteenth-century ideology, new perspectives and possibilities will open up, not just for science, but for other areas of our culture that are dominated by materialism. (Sheldrake, R. (2009) 'The Credit Crunch for Materialism', *Network Review* No 99 Spring 2009, pp20-21).

Since the 1970s in particular, alternatives to the reductionist view of health have become widespread. Even the Select Committee on Science and Technology of the House Lords in their report (2000) concluded that the integration of conventional medicine with complementary and alternative<sup>221</sup> medicine (CAM) was desirable.<sup>222</sup> This clearly illustrates a growing acceptance of the need to transcend the mechanistic approach to health. One of the more visible organisations active in this area in the UK is *The Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health*.<sup>223</sup>

This organisation recognised that one's health, like one's spiritual life, is something each individual needs to actively engage, rather than leave to a third party (such as a doctor or a priest) to instigate on one's behalf. It is for each person to have an improved and personal relationship with their body. For example, when patients accept responsibility for their condition and treatment, the benefits can be significant:

Empowerment is good for patients. Research is starting to reveal that when patients are equal partners (with the health professionals they see) in the management of their own health, it can actually have an affect on their 'clinical outcomes'.<sup>224</sup>

The PFIH achieves its aims of raising awareness of these issues through regulation,<sup>225</sup> networks of health professionals and Integrated Health Awards. Such networking

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<sup>221</sup> Although the term 'alternative medicine' is often used in these contexts, and there may be an increasing emphasis on non-drug treatments, 'integral health' means conventional medicine is used alongside holistic approaches and complementary methods. It is not a matter of 'either-or' or of turning our backs on effective medical practices. I argue that this is an evolutionary phase of embracing previous modalities and an excellent example of mental transcendence.

<sup>222</sup> Since this report, CAM is being increasingly integrated into NHS approaches and systems. See for example web site [cnhc.org.uk/pages/index.cfm](http://cnhc.org.uk/pages/index.cfm), accessed 13.8.09.

<sup>223</sup> HRH The Prince of Wales has long been known for his interest in and support for complementary and alternative health. Founded in 1993, the Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health (PFIH) aimed to promote integrated healthcare for all. In 2010 it closed, considered unnecessary given the shift towards integrated health within the NHS.

<sup>224</sup> Originally taken from the PFIH web site ([www.fih.org.uk](http://www.fih.org.uk)) on 3.8.09. The web site is no longer available – see note above.

<sup>225</sup> The foundation has actively supported the establishment of the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council, which is now in the process of formally registering complementary health practitioners in the following disciplines: Massage Therapy, Nutritional Therapy, Aromatherapy, Alexander technique, Bowen technique, Cranial therapy, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, Reflexology, Reiki, Shiatsu and Yoga therapy.

exemplifies a commitment to improving one's relationships with other humans, both generally and specifically.<sup>226</sup>

### **Relationships with the other human beings**

The Parliament of the World's Religions, first held in Chicago in 1893, provides a fitting example of how the emphasis regarding relationships between humans is changing. The Parliament:

Brings together the world's religious and spiritual communities, their leaders and their followers to a gathering where peace, diversity and sustainability are discussed and explored in the context of interreligious understanding and cooperation.<sup>227</sup>

A primary aim, from its foundation, was to transcend previous religious boundaries and to seek human-wide consensus and action where suffering was seen to be prevalent in the world.

Such an aim was perhaps too ambitious for its day and it was another hundred years before the Parliament met again: 1993, in Chicago. The Parliament of the World's Religions now meets every five years (1999 in Cape Town, 2004 in Barcelona). This delay implies that both the needs of humanity and the willingness of participants had evolved sufficiently in the intervening century to make the original aims now both urgent and viable.

In December 2009 over 6,000 participants converged on Melbourne, Australia<sup>228</sup> where "Parliament participants will work with others and within their own traditions to craft faithful responses to ..." (ibid) many key areas of human relationships where action is needed. In each case there is a clear acknowledgement that, in human history to date,

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<sup>226</sup> The growing presence of an integrated and holistic approach to health in the mainstream is illustrated by *Empirical Science, Vitalism or What?*, a CPD Conference for this professional, held at the *Holistic Health Show* at the NEC, Birmingham on 19th–20th May 2013. Organised by the insurance company Balens, it features keynote speaker Professor Paul Dieppe, Professor of Health and Wellbeing at the University of Exeter and chaired by Professor David Peters, Head of Integrative Medicine at the University of Westminster. See: [www.balens.co.uk/media/54012/balens\\_2013\\_cpd\\_program-\\_web\\_version.pdf](http://www.balens.co.uk/media/54012/balens_2013_cpd_program-_web_version.pdf), accessed 24.3.13

<sup>227</sup> See: [www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=8&sn=12](http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm?n=8&sn=12), accessed 28.7.09.

<sup>228</sup> The Parliament ran for seven days and hosted around 450 events. These included not only keynote addresses, conferences and debates but performances, concerts and exhibitions, emphasising the importance of artistic and experiential activities. For a report see, for example: <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2009/12/08/guestview-faiths-meet-at-parliament-of-world-religions/>, accessed 14.11.11.

relationships across human society have broken down<sup>229</sup> and a new commitment is required to heal them. Much of this breakdown can be attributed to materialism and the current global economy. In *A Heart for the World* Braybrooke (2005) devotes a whole chapter to *Globalisation: Curse or Cure* (pp56-82) within which he declares his own incentives:

My own hope is that as people of the world are brought together technologically and economically, so they will come together spiritually and this has been one of my motivations for interfaith work. (ibid, p63)

After reviewing the various religious views on economic development and globalisation he concludes:

I do not wish to hide the real differences of emphasis between and within some religions, but there is, I believe, enough common ground for faith communities to unite in questioning the ideology of greed that so often fuels economic globalization as we know it. Religions emphasise co-operation rather than competition. (ibid, p82)

In interfaith work, as throughout the transcendence movement, the underlying objective is explicitly stated: the need for humans, individually and collectively, to rise above greed and ego.<sup>230</sup> This is a key issue which I will return to in Parts Three and Four of this thesis: *in transcendence individuals are willing to dissolve their separatist (rational and post-rational) ego and are prepared to suffer in the process.*

It is perhaps this direct attack on the foundation of much of modern convention that has restricted the growth of the movement: few are ready to commit to such a personal challenge. To do so requires huge faith and courage, particularly to question one's own beliefs.

In *Pilgrims on the Seashore of Endless Worlds*, Father Albert Nambiaparambil (2002) discusses the way an individual often clings to the 'truths' that they were taught about religion. He calls it a "self-sufficiency complex" and a definite "ailment". He argues that

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<sup>229</sup> One example of such breakdowns, among many possible examples, would be the breakdown of the family structure in many societies.

<sup>230</sup> The willingness of religious groups to work together for 'the greater good' is also demonstrated by the work of the Inter Faith Network in the UK. This network provides an invaluable link not just between a wide range of faiths, but also to the UK government and other official bodies. See, for example, Pearce, B. (2012) 'The Inter Faith Network and the development of inter faith relations in Britain' in Woodhead, L. & Catto, R. (eds 2012) *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2012, pp150-155.

one often needs to step back from such perceived truths to see a higher truth. Interfaith dialogue provides ideal opportunities to do this:

Is not the entry into the path of interfaith dialogue in itself a deliverance or exodus from this “self-sufficiency complex”, from which many believers suffer and name it “faithfulness” to a tradition! (ibid, pp11-12)

It is this courage to enter willingly into such self-questioning that characterises the interfaith founders such as Nambiaramparambil, Teasdale and Braybrooke and which continue to inspire countless others to the movement. Likewise their commitment to periods of silence and contemplation as part of their personal processes of transcendence. Ultimately, all relationships with others (whether human, animal or ‘other-worldly’) are about an individual’s relationship with themselves and how they understand these notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Similarly the forerunners within the transcendence movement, perhaps like the saints in previous times, are those individuals who possess the courage to be different. As Philip P. Bliss (1838–1876) wrote in his lyrics for the now popular hymn:

*Dare to be a Daniel,  
Dare to stand alone!  
Dare to have a purpose firm!  
Dare to make it known.*

To stand alone can be painful, and it is a typical paradox of transcendence that rising above barriers often requires one to set him or herself apart from colleagues or loved ones. But what is it that drives the Daniels of the transcendence movement to risk alienation for the sake of ‘becoming One’? In many cases it is a fervent desire for peace.

Mother Teresa is noted as stating that she would never attend an anti-war rally; but would welcome an invitation to a peace rally. Likewise Mahatma Gandhi knew the benefit of a positive focus:

Gandhi’s chosen term was Sa.tya.graha — the force of truth — because it had a positive meaning, whereas to him, pacifism was a negative term describing a negative response to oppression. Pacifism was also an English word! “Truth (*satya*)” he said, “implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement ‘Satyagraha’, that is to say, Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase ‘passive resistance’”. (Braybrooke 2005, p29)<sup>231</sup>

Braybrooke continues to note:

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<sup>231</sup> Quoting *The Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol III, Ahmedabad, 1968, p157.

*Satyagraha* involves the acceptance of suffering for oneself and the desire to do good to one's adversary. "*Satyagraha* postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person". Gandhi's aim was not to defeat the opponent but to appeal to his or her higher nature. (ibid)

In other words, whilst violent protest triggers a violent reaction, a willingness to feel (rather than to deal out) pain is more likely to bring the cycle of violence to an end. This requires the transcendence of the self-other boundary; as one become aware of the pain that others are experiencing, that pain becomes a shared, unifying experience. This is in stark contrast to the current, prevalent, individualistic view where it is 'every man for himself', where each self is separate from every other self and any pain is borne alone; and seeks merely to emphasise one's separateness.

The understanding of many in the transcendence movement is that the suffering of every other being on the planet is also one's personal suffering.<sup>232</sup> For most, this would be too great a burden to take on board, but compassion and unconditional love for those one meets within our day-to-day life is at least the intent. To achieve this goal requires that one questions and rises above many conditioned, usually subconscious, beliefs.

Braybrooke refers to the Dalai Lama's emphasis of, "the need for everyone to create the external conditions for disarmament by inner purification and by countering their negative thoughts and emotions." (Braybrooke 2005, p30)<sup>233</sup>

A brief look at the activities of one of the many local interfaith groups around the UK provides evidence of this approach of personal engagement and illustrates its practical implementation. In Leeds, for example:

We moved forward by building a representative group from each of the Abrahamic faiths. We met in one of our members' home in the spring of 2006 to discuss together the Israel-Palestine issue. It was here that we discovered the importance of the tea break: it was the time when members of the three faiths really got to know one another. Over refreshments we jokingly referred to a well-known store's vegetarian biscuits as multi-faith biscuits - acceptable as halal and kosher. But more than that, our breaks became the times when we really started to get to know one another. (Kibble 2009, p33)

The importance of informally 'getting to know' members of other faiths is a constant theme in descriptions of interfaith work: only by meeting as fellow human beings first is it possible to rise above conditioned judgements. Informal settings help particularly by

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<sup>232</sup> This can be explained from the holism principle. See Chapter 1.

<sup>233</sup> Quoting HH The Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium*, Riverhead Books, New York, 1999, p207 and p212.

allowing those present to relax, with egos less on guard. Thus, by focusing on similarities rather than prejudices boundaries can be more readily negotiated.

Similarities of morals across faiths is another area of action of the Parliament in its *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*.<sup>234</sup> This ground-breaking document includes the following statement which, I would argue, is indicative of mental transcendence:

Our world is experiencing a fundamental crisis: A crisis in global economy, global ecology, and global politics. The lack of a grand vision, the tangle of unresolved problems, political paralysis, mediocre political leadership with little insight or foresight, and in general too little sense for the commonwealth are seen everywhere: Too many old answers to new challenges. (ibid, p4)

There is no attempt to understate or deny the unpleasant realities which faced by humanity in the world at this time. Rather, the declaration encourages an open admission of our individual and collectives faults. It also emphasises a shared responsibility to face and correct these faults. It goes on to say:

Earth cannot be changed for the better unless we achieve a transformation in the consciousness of individuals and in public life. (ibid, p13).

Therefore, the first step towards solving the many serious world issues is for humankind, again at individual (ego) level and collectively, to become aware of its limitations. For egos to make such an admission is, inevitably it seems, a painful process. Any help on this journey of self-unfolding is to be appreciated and is precisely this which organisations within the transcendence movement provides.

The ‘Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University’(BKWSU)<sup>235</sup>, for example, primarily teaches a practical method of meditation to help and enable individuals to understand their inner selves. BKWSU is perhaps the largest single organisation, outside of formal religions, which offers support and guidance to individuals seeking spiritual succour. Their success, and my reason for including them as a primary example of organisations within the transcendence movement, is in no small part due to their policy of offering all courses to the public free of charge. Financial barriers to education into higher levels of

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<sup>234</sup> That is, a set of ethical guidelines agreed by all faiths.

<sup>235</sup> Originally founded under the name “Om Mandali” in Hyderabad, Sindh (now part of Pakistan), this small group included the respected and wealthy member, Dada Lekhraj. It was a series of visions that Dada experienced in 1936 that were to form the basis for the work of the BKWSU. Since 1950 (when the Brahma Kumaris comprised a community of about 400) they have been based on Mount Abu, often regarded as a sacred location, high in the Aravali Mountains of Rajasthan.

consciousness have been removed. Now attracting deserved academic study<sup>236</sup> the influence of the BKWSU has been, and continues to be, significant.

Also particularly relevant to their success in this field is the fact that the BKWSU is primarily administered by women, with associated emphasis on ‘softer’ human traits:

[BKWSU founder] Brahma Baba also correctly foresaw that core values based on traditionally feminine qualities – patience, tolerance, sacrifice, kindness and love – would increasingly become the foundation of progress in personal growth, human relations, and the development of caring communities.<sup>237</sup>

Such comments endorse a strong argument in the transcendence movement that one of the significant barriers that needs to be overcome is the patriarchy endemic in modern culture and its associated materialistic emphasis.<sup>238</sup>

By contrast, the current Administrative Head of the BKWSU Dadi Janki, in promoting a transcendent approach, says in *Inside Out* (Janki 2003):

Live in such a way that love informs every action! I have learned to live this way, and as a result, nothing disturbs me. ... I have become free. (Janki 2003, p1)

That this organisation’s current leader is not just teaching such lessons but has learnt them herself and is a living example of (transcendent) spiritual principles may also explain the huge number of individuals who feel drawn to partake of their educational resources. She goes on to say:

Everyone can live this way. It is a natural way to be. However, it requires letting go of certain beliefs and habits that drain us of this strength, and interfere with our ability to love. (ibid)

As I have argued, it is not just that a genuinely loving way of life is possible for all, but that to do so requires changing one’s way of thinking. These are recurring themes throughout the literature, first-hand accounts and organisations that form the transcendence movement.

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<sup>236</sup> For example Hodgkinson, L (2002) *Peace & purity: the story of the Brahma Kumaris: a spiritual revolution* Deerfield Beach, FL:HCI, 2002 and Walliss, J (1999) ‘From world rejection to ambivalence: The development of millenarianism in the Brahma Kumaris’ *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 14:3, pp375-385.

<sup>237</sup> See: [www.bkwsu.org/whoweare/spiritualleaders](http://www.bkwsu.org/whoweare/spiritualleaders), accessed 30.7.09.

<sup>238</sup> This is a significant issue and one that deserves more attention than is available in this study. See, for example, King, U. (1993) *Women and Spirituality: Voices of Protest and Promise* (2nd edition), Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.



This need and willingness to change can be seen in all the organisations studied in this chapter, many of whom were set up specifically to assist in the process. The ‘Nonviolent Communications’ or NVC movement, for example, has developed from the work of Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg.<sup>239</sup> In *Nonviolent Communications: A Language of Life* (Rosenberg 2003) he explains how much human communication is blocked, for example, by the use of judgemental language. “Certain ways of communicating alienate us from our natural state of compassion” (ibid, p15) he says, reminding us of the human habits of blaming, insulting and criticising others. Again the separatist ego can be seen at work.

To counter these conditioned ways of talking, Rosenberg helps his clients to become aware of and rise above these reactionary modes of communication. Instead he enables and encourages the attendees at his training sessions and readers of his books to express their own feelings honestly and receive empathically the feelings of others. It is only, he argues, by acknowledging feelings as equally important to objective thoughts, that individuals can truly relate to others; and for that matter, understand themselves. He asks: “Conditioned to view ourselves as objects – objects full of shortcomings – is it any wonder that many of us end up relating violently to ourselves?” (ibid, p130)

Whilst it could be argued, perhaps correctly, that Rosenberg’s ideas are nothing new and are similar to those of thinkers many decades earlier,<sup>240</sup> his approach has, without doubt, captured the imagination of many in the peace movement and beyond. The primary reason for this is his style of delivery and deliberate attempt to make his work accessible to all. His books are very much practical in their approach and his workshops interactive and engaging: his hands-on, down-to-earth method of teaching has inspired and helped countless individuals to face and transcend many of the barriers that I have discussed in this thesis.

Just as NVC can be applied to more intimate one-to-one relationships, so too can the trends of the transcendence movement be seen in organisations concerned with dating. 1

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<sup>239</sup> Recipient of the 2006 Global Village Foundation’s Bridge of Peace Award.

<sup>240</sup> Rosenberg includes a useful bibliography of such earlier researchers in this field (ibid pp197-199). References include Maslow’s *Towards a Psychology of Being* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1962) and *Carl Rogers on Personal Power* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977).

to 3 per cent<sup>241</sup> of web sites related to ‘dating’ and ‘friendship’ also mentioned ‘spiritual’. Whilst this may seem a small proportion, this simple statistic indicates that of all the billions of internet users worldwide, over one per cent of them are interested, not in just any special relationships; but in one with some spiritual element. Mind and body are no longer enough.

The following is typical of the services on offer from these spiritual dating sites:

Spiritual Singles UK is the largest, exclusively online spiritual dating service in the UK with multi-thousands of spiritual singles looking for and finding love, dating, spiritual connections and life partnerships. If you are single and on a conscious path.<sup>242</sup>

*Natural-Friends*, founded in 1985, is one of the earliest of such providers, originally operating as a postal based service within the UK.<sup>243</sup>

Twenty-three years later, its ethical approach has helped over 40 thousand like-minded people ... meet their perfect partner.<sup>244</sup>

A quest for romantic life and an inherent need for a spiritual depth to life are closely linked. That ‘spiritual’ and other words with a transcendent context, are entering the world of personal relationships is another clear indicator that human needs are becoming more discerning. This effect is to be also found in popular culture, with spiritual and self-development themes and titles very much in evidence within music and films over the last twenty years.<sup>245</sup> Whilst a comprehensive review is outside the scope of this project, the following examples illustrate the trends. Love, for example, now has an extra depth to it:

*I can't help falling in love*  
*I fall deeper and deeper the further I go*  
*Deeper and Deeper*  
from Madonna's *Erotica* album

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<sup>241</sup> Google search, 5.8.09. 184,000 web sites out of 12.2 million (i.e. 1.5%) web site hits worldwide. For UK sites only, the comparable figures were 15,800 sites out of 595,000 featuring ‘dating’ and ‘friendship’ that also mention ‘spiritual’; i.e. 2.6%.

<sup>242</sup> See [www.spiritualsingles.co.uk](http://www.spiritualsingles.co.uk), accessed 5.8.09.

<sup>243</sup> See [www.naturalfriends.org.uk](http://www.naturalfriends.org.uk), accessed 5.8.09.

<sup>244</sup> See web page: [secure.natural-friends.com/content.aspx?page=30](http://secure.natural-friends.com/content.aspx?page=30), accessed 5.8.09.

<sup>245</sup> The importance of emotion and its genuine expression in music, as elsewhere, is illustrated for example, by Nehring, in *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism* (London & New Delhi: Sage, 1997): “emotion supplies a missing link, suppressed by postmodern theory, between tactile vocality and meaning, the body and language, biology and society” (p133).

In the same song, Madonna also provides some good advice associated with a path of transcendence:

*You got to just let your body move to the music.  
You got to just let your body go with the flow*  
(ibid).

“Just got to let” can be considered a modern pop song’s equivalent advice to the idea of non-attachment inherent to most, if not all forms of Buddhism and to the whole notion of the Tao. This is the surrender that is required to allow oneself to feel a depth of love that is whole-body / non-local in its transcendence.

Transcendence within popular music takes many forms:

The Icelandic post-rock group Sigur Ros has struck an interesting and exciting chord, with musical implications that transcend their band, their genre, and perhaps even Western culture.<sup>246</sup>

As my later examination and analysis of first-hand accounts<sup>247</sup> confirm, the ideas beneath popular song lyrics (such as Madonna’s) are essential ingredients in the transcendent epistemology. Nowhere can transcendent ideas be seen more vividly than in the subject and content of modern fiction. Whilst one might explain the phenomenal success of *Harry Potter* as due to the quality of the writing, it is just as likely due to a huge thirst for the mystical and magical—that is to say a desire to escape the rational norms that condition our everyday lives—that has led so many avid readers to subscribe to both book, film and the underlying notions of a magical (i.e. transcendent) aspect to life. Whether this is seen as pure fiction or explained as an alternative reality, another dimension or by wizards being able to change ‘phase’, (between their reality and that of the muggles)<sup>248</sup> is not important. To fans of Harry Potter, his world is not only real within the stories but gives a hint of what might just be possible, or is already around us, depending on what level of transcendent experiences has been had.

The very notion of Kings Cross station having a platform 9<sup>3/4</sup>, for example, sets J.K.Rowling’s books apart. In J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55) for example, wizards belong to a different world. Not so in the Potter

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<sup>246</sup> See: [www.scribd.com/doc/15978437/On-by-Sigur-Ros-Meaning-and-Globalization-in-PostRock](http://www.scribd.com/doc/15978437/On-by-Sigur-Ros-Meaning-and-Globalization-in-PostRock), accessed 14.10.09.

<sup>247</sup> See Part 2 of my thesis.

<sup>248</sup> ‘Muggle’ is Rowling’s word for a ‘non-wizard’.

series. Whilst the worlds of wizard and muggle are still very different, they co-exist. They are, to Potter and his fellow Hogwarts students, both part of the one reality in which they have to try to live. Such is the challenge of anyone committed to the path of transcendence: to embrace the truth of the Hogwarts Express and Virgin Pendolino service to Glasgow on adjacent platforms. Transcendence is becoming mainstream.

This research has been about what ordinary people are thinking and experiencing in the period 2009-2013. Whilst accepted and established academic texts provide some explanation for what is happening and may have influenced some of the contributors, for many, their journey into the unfolding of their own consciousness has been a path of self-discovery and self-learning. Whilst books can suggest another mental transcendence one might make and offer the possibility of whole-body transcendence, without the willingness on the part of an individual to personally explore these possibilities they mean very little. Whilst much current culture reflects modern attitudes, my investigations into the transcendence movement confirms a trend towards depth and awareness in culture that reflects a corresponding transcendence in all human relationships.

Furthermore, the need to take a transcendent approach to our relationships is emphasised, I contend, by the significant focus on education, guidance and support offered by the organisations that I have been discussing.<sup>249</sup>

The educational service provided by organisations within the transcendence movement differs in one significant way from most conventional providers of education: whilst having clear learning objectives for any given course, the primary objective is not to impart a particular set of facts or theories. Rather, the educational aim of organisations within this movement is to assist each individual on his or her personal, spiritual journey. Education is not seen as an imparting of facts and concepts, but the enabling of each student to find their own unique path and sense of self. This is achieved in a range of ways depending on the focus of the organisation and, just as importantly, by recognising that each individual learns in different ways. Compared to conventional

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<sup>249</sup> Many, such as the SMN and SDI, are formally constituted educational charities and most, specifically the Brahma Kumaris and Theosophical Society, exists primarily for educational purposes.

educational activities however, there is far more emphasis on personal engagement and on the enabling of personal experience.<sup>250</sup>

Also underlying the teachings of these organisations is the understanding that wisdom is inherent within each individual, that each is on a path of seeking, to know themselves. Furthermore, that every man and woman has a deep, inner longing and need to connect with their spirit. It is in doing this, and experiencing the pain of the process, that barriers between self and the divine are transcended. Such transcendence is seen not as a luxury but as a necessity: at the level of the individual, community and of the human species. Likewise, as the identified educational resources clearly demonstrate, such transcendence is not for a 'chosen few': it is for all. A life beyond purely rational thought is, I contend, available to anybody prepared to open themselves to it.

Such willingness is striking in the whole way of life of individuals active within the transcendence movement. Their commitment to 'practice what they preach' extends into the work environment. Particularly good examples of this came in a number of conferences of organisations within the transcendence movement that I attended during my research period. In most cases I had been accepted to make a presentation on my research and/or to run a workshop, this fact itself indicating that my topic is very much considered timely and relevant to academic debate. Besides endorsing many of the contentions of this thesis, these events providing clear examples of 'transcendence in practice' during events aimed at intellectual deliberation. A detailed report on the conferences attended is given as Appendix 4, which provides extensive examples of the many features of transcendence described in this and previous chapters.

## **Summary**

The objective of this chapter has been to illustrate the extent to which transcendence is no longer a subject constrained to a few esoteric publications or groups. I have thus provided a broad review of a range of organisations and movements which clearly demonstrates an underlying commitment by a growing number of humans to a transcendent way of 'thinking'. Investigations into human relationships with the divine, with ourselves, with the natural world or with each other, has identified a significant

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<sup>250</sup> That is, on experiential learning: a recurring theme within this thesis.

number and spread of individuals and groups can who have clearly moved beyond a rational or post-rational epistemological viewpoint.

The organisations considered in this chapter, together with their related networks, members, students and visitors represent a significant number of individuals. Through this review I have established that such activities are not only widespread in the public domain, they are also now considered worthy of serious academic study. Just as importantly, they represent, in their own minds at least, the forerunners of an emerging transcendent epistemology. Although still not large in terms of percentage of the population, I argue that the transcendence movement, as reflected in my chosen examples and summarised in Appendix 5, demonstrates that, globally within humanity, there exists those committed to enabling nothing less than an evolution of consciousness.<sup>251</sup>

As my research has developed, so signs of transcendence have become visible in an increasingly broad spectrum of human endeavours. Partly this will be because of my own enhanced sensitivity to and awareness of it, but that does not negate the evidence. As a further indicator of the prevalence of the shifts being described, I will end this chapter with examples of transcendence that have come to me during one day, Tuesday, 19th October 2010:

My e-mail in-box this morning contained two examples. Firstly, the latest e-zine from The Theosophical Society in England<sup>252</sup> which begins:

All yogis and saints must have gone through incredible trials when subordinating their lower nature to the higher. A man is not aware of how much his life is ruled by whims of the lower three bodies until he tries to raise the consciousness and live as a soul infused personality.

Two of the themes of this research are immediately noticeable: the raising of consciousness and the suffering that accompanies the process. The article goes on to talk about purity suggesting that, although not often discussed, it is the vital element to human evolution: i.e. the need (as described in my models of Chapter 7) to clear mental channels.

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<sup>251</sup> And, as has already been highlighted, such individuals are prepared to suffer as they facilitate their own and society's transformation. This is further discussed in Chapter 12.

<sup>252</sup> Theosophy E-zine - October 2010, enews@theosoc.org.uk, sent 14.10.10.

In the same inbox, was a spam message, promoting training for managers in South Africa. It says

In our society today, and more particularly in business, there is conflict. Is this necessarily bad. Conflict left unmanaged, or conflict badly managed, can lead to major problems. Conflict well handled, can lead to growth and development. This programme shows how to manage the monster.<sup>253</sup>

As I have discussed above, in the context of non-violent communications, conflict resolution, whether as part of a peace initiatives in the troubled areas of the globe, in personal relationships or, as here, in business, is an excellent example of mental transcendence. Rather than conflicts leading to dualistic winners and losers, they are taken as an opportunity to face the real issues of a situation and to seek a win-win outcome. That even the spam in an e-mail in-box features such an ethos must surely be a sign that the underlying shifts in consciousness are already deep within our society and collective thoughts.

The features and processes associated with transcendence have been demonstrated to be self-consistent and widely distributed in their occurrence. Having presented evidence from a range of national and international organisations, I will now (in Part Two) illustrate how the transcendence described correlates with my own experiences (described in Chapter 4), with the range of biographies reviewed in Chapter 5 and with accounts of transcendent experiences presented and analysed in Chapter 6.

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<sup>253</sup> From Conflict Management, admin@morningcourses.co.za, sent 18.10. 10.

# **Part Two:**

## **The practice of transcendence**

### **Chapter 4**

#### **Analysis of personal accounts and the values and limitations of the engaged researcher**

Having, in Part One, set my overall intent and described who and what I mean by the transcendence movement, in this Part I focus my attention on the practices, experiences and ‘philosophy of life’ adopted by individuals within the transcendence movement. My objective is to examine in practical, daily-life terms, what life is like for those committed to engaging with the transcendence process. To reflect the reality of such life experiences, my research has sought ways of collecting the ideas, feelings and underlying ethos of transcendence for those most involved with it. Underpinning this approach are participate research and action research methodologies. In this chapter I review these methodologies and assess the strengths and weaknesses of research as an ‘insider’ within the transcendence movement.

The inclusion of personal experiences within doctoral research is by no means unusual. Joan Walton, in a parallel example to my own work makes extensive use of accounts of her own life’s journey in her doctoral thesis *Ways of Knowing*.<sup>254</sup> Exploring the

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<sup>254</sup> Alison Yeung in her PhD thesis also makes significant use of her own experiences: see Yeung, A. (2004) *Microcosm, Tillich & Tao: a Critique of Tillich's Ontology*, Leeds: University of Leeds PhD Thesis, 2004.



management of young people in care, she asks “Can I find a way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning?”<sup>255</sup> Her concern is prompted by her own experience of the suffering of children in care homes: something, at the age of eighteen, that she felt ill equipped to handle. Finding that conventional ‘ways of knowing’ (i.e. “Christian theistic religion and classical Newtonian science” Walton 2008, p5) offer no explanation for the suffering and how to reduce it, Walton’s research considers alternatives approaches. By:

Engaging with an ‘experiment in depth’, I develop a meditative and journaling practice which connects me to a sense of a loving dynamic energy with limitless creative potential. (Walton 2008, p5)<sup>256</sup>

Walton claims that vital to her practice (which I would consider a process of transcendence) is personal reflection. Only through reflection do our minds have the freedom to seek the ‘inner’ connection of mental transcendence and the ‘outer’ connection of whole-body / non-local transcendence. Such ‘ways of knowing’ are precisely those which Walton set out to identify. Her whole motivation for this doctorate thesis was to:

Reflect on and record my search for a ‘way of knowing’ that can be intellectually justified, and feels experientially meaningful. In other words, I seek a way of knowing that has coherence: where there is a resonance between theory and all aspects of my experience. (Walton 2008, p8)

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<sup>255</sup> School of Management, University of Bath, 2008. This quote is the sub-title of her thesis.

<sup>256</sup> Like me, Walton thus emphasises that engagement with depth is an essential element in apprehending the truth of situations, particularly where these involve personal and emotional content. Furthermore, she identifies the transcendent quality of such an engagement by stating that it has “limitless creative potential”: i.e. it is beyond normal bounds.

In her summing up, Walton includes the following statement which echoes many of my contributors:

I am involved in an evolution of consciousness, where the story of humanity is the story of ‘self-disclosure of spirit’ (Ferrer 2001). My experience of synchronicity provides evidence of a principle of interconnection and integration between psyche and matter, inner and outer, theory and action, science and spirituality. (Walton 2008, p5, referring to Ferrer, J.N. (2001) *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*, Albany: State University of New York)

Not only is she agreeing that consciousness is evolving, but Walton is freely admitting that she is “involved” in it: not wilfully creating it nor affected by it, but involved in it, as a co-creator. Also in this quote we see many other facets of transcendence as highlighted in my discourse; in particular an “interconnection and integration” between many of the dualities that have predominated modernism: inner and outer, theory and action, science and spirituality. That such words should come in an accepted PhD thesis from a School of Management gives further credence to my claim that all of these ideas are inherent to humankind’s growing consciousness and are likely to appear in any walk of life.

Her search for an epistemology and ontology that embraced both the religious and scientific approaches mirrors my own and that of many of those who contributed to my fieldwork. Each individual seeks a methodology for acquiring their personal truth that brings together what the rational mind can accept and what they feel to be true.<sup>257</sup>

Likewise, my approach throughout this discourse is to relate transcendence and its practice to life in general, rather than to a narrow or specifically religious or spiritual set of practices or individuals. My career in microelectronics research<sup>258</sup> has, for example, provided me with an engineer's perspective on what constitutes transcendence, as the following examples illustrate.

In the call for papers for its 2010 conference, RAMS (The Annual Reliability and Maintainability Symposium), now in its 56<sup>th</sup> years says:

Tell us how you are transcending mission demands and product requirements by applying reliability (and safety) as a competitive advantage. RAMS is the premier forum for sharing your experience, knowledge, and roadmaps to success.<sup>259</sup>

These conferences, which influence the safety and reliability of the aeroplanes and trains in which we travel, not to mention the dependability of the phone and internet infrastructure that are taken so much for granted, seek not just well written, well-argued theses but require its participants to be “sharing your experience” and to transcend boundaries between science and commercial interests. Far from the transcendence of Otto and James this may be, but, I contend, it is just as valid and important a use of the term as theirs. Transcendence is already seen, in the harsh reality of equipment survival or failure, an experiential matter. As an engineer, ‘being objective’ meant being focussed on the practical reality for the product I was responsible for: would it do the job it was intended to? How would this affect the lives of those who used it?

Likewise, in my work as a life guide, my objectives were directly concerned with the health and wellbeing of by clients. In both situations working objectively required a direct focus on the specific engineering application or human life situation. To be

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<sup>257</sup> My own ‘two facets’ model of transcendence allow for two comparable ‘dimensions’ of reality and integrates them in a unified learning and growth process. See Chapter 7.

<sup>258</sup> I worked in the research and development of microelectronic components from 1979 to 1996 at Plessey Research (Caswell) Ltd, later GEC-Marconi Materials Technology.

<sup>259</sup> See: <http://rams.org/>, accessed 12.3.09. I gave a paper at this major international conference in 1984 Entitled "Semi-custom ICs - Reliable and productive".

effective I could not allow my moods, preferences or personal theories to distance me from the needs and perspective of the client/customer. This, I would argue, is precisely the objectivity required from current academic research funding bodies when requiring their funded work to ‘have impact’.

On reflecting on my level of objectivity during these studies, it has become clear that my prior research and work experience has indeed influenced my approach. Thus, my objectivity, rather than opposing subjectivity or being in stark contrast to it is one that is directed by the specific needs of the moment. This approach is then enabled and supported by the systematic application of principles of ‘Quality Assurance’ and the application of theoretical understandings of the underlying physical mechanisms involved. When faced with situations that have life or death implications, ‘critical thinking’ takes on a very immediate focus: it is no longer about purely rational deduction based on extensive references. Sue Cowley (2004) in describing how to engender ‘critical thinking’ in students thereby comments:

Logic is what appears to make sense, but if this is in the absence of certain information, then the logic falls apart. Consequently, when helping our children to learn how to take a logical approach, we must ensure that they consider all the different factors that could apply to the situation. Although logic is very much a left-brain activity, our children actually need to use the right sides of their brains and to be creative in their responses to what appears to be logical on the surface. (Cowley 2004, p116)

This approach is one I had already learned and adopted in engineering: to think critically and stay objective one needs to look at the whole picture.<sup>260</sup>

Exploring the technical issue of reliability provide valuable insights on the issues of research methodology and data gathering: In order to know how to prevent a piece of electronics from failing in the field, it is essential to know what makes it fail. Real-life (and death) evidence from actual working systems needs to be gathered.<sup>261</sup> Whether human beings are considered as ‘working systems’ or something even more complex, it would seem reasonable to apply these advanced approaches from engineering to the

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<sup>260</sup> As, for example, illustrated by the parable of the blind men and the elephant cited in Chapter 2.

<sup>261</sup> Such was the objective of a programme I worked on during my time at GMMT. In collaboration with Loughborough University of Technology & the Danish Engineering Academy and funded by the UK MOD Procurement Executive, the *Field Failure of Components* project explored and validated the use of field data for improving the reliability of electronic equipment.

question of human health and wellbeing. Philosophical arguments, whether written a thousand or ten years ago may give us clues, but for any given individual, it is personal experiences of what works, or does not work that is of most immediate value. Generalised theory needs to be complemented by specific and relevant ‘field’ or ‘life’ data.

My past experience in the electronics industry demonstrated to me that research success in engineering sectors depends as much upon feedback from ‘real-life’ operation, as blue skies research and abstract theory. The equivalent when studying human wellbeing is, I contend, first-hand accounts of moments of personal significance, when things are perceived as going particularly well or not for the person concerned. For results that are of practical help, it is the gathering of ‘real life’, experiential evidence that is necessary; rather than relying totally on conclusions arrived at through logical reasoning and theoretical studies.

The following chapters are thus concerned with first-hand accounts from those who experience transcendent states. In Chapter 5 I review a sample of published, biographical accounts which illustrate the place of transcendent experience within a lifetime of personal growth experiences. Then, in Chapter 6, I describe the collection and analysis of accounts from individuals as part of this research. I include biographical material in the context of Jung’s autobiographical accounts in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963).<sup>262</sup> Whilst wishing to be remembered as an empirical ‘scientist’, Jung considered this ‘autobiography’ to be “the dot on the i” (Jung, 1963, p14) of his writings. Likewise, it is by making sense of the narratives of Jung’s dreams and visions that we arrive at the most valuable insights that can be gleaned from his influential work, more so than any scientific explanation or abstract theorising could. The use of such subjective accounts is increasingly being employed to hypothesise about human nature and to make strong claims about it. Subjective accounts are readily accepted as an invaluable methodology in a number of academic disciplines. Thus, Carolyn Ellis, Professor of Communication has, for example, established a robust and important methodology for making use of invaluable first-hand accounts of life experiences.<sup>263</sup> These she has applied, under the heading ‘Autoethnography’ (Ellis, 1997), to

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<sup>262</sup> As indicated in Chapter 1 and reviewed in Chapter 5.

<sup>263</sup> At the University of South Florida.

Anthropological studies and also to Sociological studies involving ‘Emotional Sociology’ and ‘Sociological Introspection’ (Ellis, 1991).<sup>264</sup>

A good example of this latter use comes from *Investigating Subjectivity* (Ellis ed, 1992) in a piece entitled *The Reflective Self Through Narrative*. It is a piece, not to be analysed, but to be felt:<sup>265</sup>

If I am quiet and do not distract myself with inane details of living life; if I just listen, but not for words; if I just let go and feel for a second, then there is a tightly wound, compressed emotion that wants to leap out of my chest – bypassing my mouth and my brain - and scream. (Ronai 1992, p106).

In analytical psychology (that is to say, Jungian psychology) there is a growing acceptance that in matters related to personal identity and experience, rational theories alone are insufficient—a position summed up in his now famous dictum that echoes traditions in philosophical discourse made popular by Nietzsche, that ‘to understand an idea one must turn to the author’ (Jung 1963) To find any sort of completeness or self-containment in such discourse the metaphysical view also needs to be considered. In *The Self as violent Other: the problem of defining the self* (2002), for example, Huskinson argues from a Jungian position that,

As an entity to be *experienced* the Self is very much alive; the Self cannot be reduced to intellectual terms, as it will always evade the ego’s grasp but it does relate to the ego in a ‘relation of non-relation’ and is therefore experienced as a numinous quality. (Huskinson 2002, p453)<sup>266</sup>

It is clear that sense of self and experiences of the transcendent are closely linked; and are as much metaphysical as physical. As such, to fully grasp their nature, there is a need for research methods, descriptions and theories to embrace both rational and non-rational modes of consciousness; physical senses and inner knowing; objective and subjective perspectives. That is, to practise transcendence.

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<sup>264</sup> In a later work, Ellis identifies the danger of romantacisation in autobiographical work (Ellis, C. & Bchner, A.P. , 2000, p733). Whilst due attention needs to be taken to guard against such effects, this does not invalidate the approach as appropriate in certain circumstances.

<sup>265</sup> That is, to fully understand the subjective element of this piece the reader needs to identify as the ‘I’ having the experience described.

<sup>266</sup> In Jungian terms, ego equates to the conscious, rational mind and Self to the ‘higher-self’ or soul.

The research of religious and psychological topics by active, personal, participation in the subject itself is an increasingly accepted methodology.<sup>267</sup> York (1995) for example, argues that a researcher can best understand and thus effectively study a given experiential topic only by engaging in the experience itself. Furthermore, by so doing the researcher is far more able to relate to their research subjects and subsequently ask relevant and searching questions as to the true nature of the experience and of its effects on the subject. He says, for example:

‘Any accounts of new religious movements that does [sic] not take note of [mystical experiences or altered states of consciousness provided by the group] misses what is perhaps the essential feature that they all share in common. The provision of intense religious experience is what characterizes the new religious consciousness.’ By suggesting entry into the state being studied, Stone notes the value of "state-specific research." (York 1995, p27, quoting Stone 1978<sup>268</sup>)

Thus, to understand and effectively study transcendent experiences, it is necessary to ‘know them from the inside’ as it were.<sup>269</sup>

In my own case, I had experiences of a transcendent nature many years before I engaged in formal research into such phenomena. I had, with the help of a broad and eclectic reading list, built up my own understanding of what they were, their relevance and effect on my life and sense of self. Whilst inappropriate to include details in this thesis, I have had a number of what I regard as ‘key experiences’. These have inevitably influenced this work, in having enabled me to identify what (to me then) were key features and underlying trends of those transcendent experiences. Considerable reflection had established what seemed most significant about my own transcendent experiences, at least in respect of the impact they had on my life and wellbeing. Thus, whilst a bias has been introduced, it is a bias towards features relating to a personal sense of value and wellbeing, which is a key research question.

Like William James I aim to highlight the great ‘variety’ of transcendent (or religious) experiences. Despite the huge spectrum of experiences, all justify the transcendent label through their impact on an individual’s life. Given this fact, and from their common

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<sup>267</sup> For example as ‘Participative Enquiry’, as discussed in Chapter 9.

<sup>268</sup> Stone, D. (1978) ‘On knowing how we know about the new religions’ in *Understanding the New Religions*, (Needleman & Baker, eds). New York: Seabury, p147.

<sup>269</sup> It is necessary but not sufficient to provide a complete or objective picture. As York also says (York 1995, p27) “multiple research methods” are needed. Hence, in this study, the combination of literature review, collected accounts and personal accounts.

features, I have been able to develop the models that form the gist of this thesis, which are presented in Chapter 7. In proposing such theories, I have attempted to embrace the broad spectrum of examples of transcendence provided by my analysis of the transcendence movement, the first-hand accounts gathered for this project and my own transcendent experiences over approximately twenty years. Whilst the latter undoubtedly influenced my initial hypotheses for this work, the resonance between my own experiences (both short term during transcendent experiences and long-term during the broader transcendence process) and those of my contributors are striking. Despite participants and contributing authors using their own words, describing their own lives and often coming from very different cultural backgrounds to my own, the features highlighting in this study emerged time and time again.

Having been actively involved for over twenty years in many of the groups and activities that I am highlighting as typical of the transcendence movement, I had built up a good understanding of their practices, attitudes and behaviours. Like many seekers,<sup>270</sup> I took every opportunity to explore techniques aimed at improved mental, physical or spiritual wellbeing. This was both a conscious commitment to expand my awareness of such things and an eagerness to find out more about this other level of human existence beyond rational thought. It was all driven by an inner urge, a deeper need that had previously been unsated but which had been fuelled by the transcendent experiences so far obtained.

This urge to know drew me, over a period of nearly two decades, to experience many techniques and approaches to wellbeing which, on reflection now, also opened me to new ways of knowing. One striking example is my experience with the Alexander Technique which I would now classify as ‘transcendent’.<sup>271</sup> Further reflection on whether my adoption of the technique can be regarded as objective, causes me to ask: is there anything in the acknowledged understanding of this method that would explain why it had that effect on me? Does this approach—taken here simply as one example of

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<sup>270</sup> As I shall illustrate from the first-hand accounts of Chapter 6.

<sup>271</sup> The particular exercise involved lying on the floor with one’s hands on ones ribs in order to feel one’s breathing. Whilst so doing, participants were instructed to keep their eyes open. Attention was thus focussed both within (on the breathing) and without (into the room) at the same time. A similar objective is achieved by *The Mindful Heart* exercise in Arati Suryawanshi’s (2013) *The Mindful Heart*, San Francisco: Six Seconds, 2013, p54.

a respected technique for improving one's health—help in our understanding of the nature of the transcendence process?

To best capture the essence of the Alexander Technique, it is valuable to examine the words of F. Matthias Alexander (1869-1955) himself. In his writings on what he called “the work” (Alexander & Maisel 1989, pviii) can be found, not just in the literal words, but in the unique way in which Alexander spoke and wrote, an underling essence that is hard to qualify let alone quantify. Take, for example, the following quote taken from his “Notes of Introduction” which were “addressed to a variety of students during actual teaching” (Alexander & Maisel 1989, p3): “The experience you want is in the process of getting it. If you have something, give it up. Getting it, not having it, is what you want”. (Alexander & Maisel 1989, p5) To ‘get’ something, as in the popular usage of the phrase, means for the ‘light to dawn’, for the truth to have sunk in. What is striking about its usage here, is the context: of talking about “the experience” and “the process”. From this it can be seen that The Alexander Technique, whilst it involves practices that can be learnt, is primarily a method of self-exploration. Alexander says: “My experience may one day be recognized as a signpost directing the explorer to a country hitherto ‘undiscovered,’” (Alexander & Maisel 1989, pvii). Not only does he encourage those who take up his technique to explore what Drake (1991) calls their *Body Know-How*, but he emphasises that what he teaches is based not on theory but on “my experience”. A parallel with accounts of those engaged in the transcendence process can immediately be seen: neither the Alexander Technique nor transcendence can be learnt by rote. They have to be entered into.

A similar and related facet of the practical truth associated with transcendence and illustrated by Alexander concerns the notion of ‘not trying’, i.e. of allowing things to flow, rather than trying to force them through willpower. Alexander, in discussing how to change a poor posture for example, says: “Paradoxical as it may seem, the pupil’s only chance of success lies, not in ‘trying to be right,’ but, on the contrary, in ‘wanting to be wrong’” (Alexander & Maisel 1989, p125). It helps to be willing to make mistakes, which in turn requires being aware of the many inner judgments we are apt to make due to conditioning.

Other Alexander quotes are more poetic, yet equally persuasive: “Take hold of the floor with your feet” (Alexander & Maisel 1989, p3), for example, somehow conveys one of



the underlying concepts to both the Alexander Technique and transcendence: we (our feet) are not separate from the world around (the floor). Our walking on the earth, both literally and metaphorically, is an intimate engagement with the world around us. To feel such whole-body transcendence requires mental transcendence that removes this self-imposed barrier between ‘me’ and ‘it’.

The above experience post-dates the first experiences described earlier in the chapter by over twenty years. The gradual progression from fleeting experiences that I was not even aware of at the time (as in the mind-numb drive from my first teaching session) through ever more aware experiences through to long periods within a transcendent state is notable. I thus conclude that each experiences, once assimilated, enables further experiences, each (if gradually) expanding the degree of transcendence available in subsequent experiences. This is an important factor in personal, self and spiritual development and is explored further, in the context of models to describe the underlying process (in Chapter 7). Engagement with the mystical is, from my personal experience at least, wholly consistent with pursuing the enhanced understanding needed of academic research. Studying the transcendent, as my next accounts illustrate, provides not just supporting evidence of but opportunities for transcendent experiences.

Throughout my three years of research for this thesis, I was continuing to have regular transcendent experiences. Whilst I would not suggest that these could replace conventional research methods of reading and analysing what has gone before within my subject area, it is my contention that, such periods of enhanced mental consciousness have contributed significantly to this project. In such an affirmation I echo the words of Jung, describing the ‘fruits’<sup>272</sup> of his near death experience:

After the illness a fruitful period of work began for me. A good many of my principal works were written only then. The insight I had had, or the vision of the end of all things, gave me the courage to undertake new formulations. (Jung 1963, p328)

Times when one cease rational thought and allows transcendent states to emerge are, as I shall illustrate through the writings of experts in many disciplines, precisely those times of inspiration which occur when connection into divine wisdom is enabled. It is my personal experience, endorsed by many other accounts reviewed in Chapters 4 and 5, that multiple transcendent experiences over a period of many years, enable our minds to

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<sup>272</sup> That is, positive effects of a transcendent experience or value of a religious experience. The term is used by the RERC at Lampeter on their account submission form.

rise above previous limited and limiting beliefs and to see and accept a broader and deeper sense of reality. The following account, for example, occurred over a twenty-four hour period at the beginning of my second year of study:

I had been feeling ‘heavy’ and rather depressed and put this down to another period of ‘facing the harsh reality of life, i.e. trying to accept facets of the human conditions that seemed to contradict the growth of transcendence. I was reminded of the Serenity Prayer: “help me accept those things I cannot change” and realised how much I still struggled to ‘just accept’ things (such as the beliefs and attitudes of others) over which I had no control. I seemed to be putting myself through unnecessary suffering as I went through a period of if not clinical depression, at least significant periods of feeling depressed. At this time I was reading *The Four Agreements*. Ruiz (1997), in describing our inner Judge and inner Victim, was making a similar point:

How many times do we pay for one mistake? The answer is thousands of times. The human is the only animal on earth that pays a thousand times for the same mistake. The rest of the animals pay once for every mistake they make. But not us. We have a powerful memory. We make a mistake, we judge ourselves, we find ourselves guilty, and we punish ourselves. If justice exists, then that was enough; we don't need to do it again. But every time we remember, we judge ourselves again, we are guilty again, and we punish ourselves again, and again, and again. (Ruiz 1997, p12)

Ruiz, from his understanding of ancient Toltec wisdom, argues that to live in joy and harmony requires one to break this cycle: what he called the old ‘Agreement’. To do this, and to create a new agreement requires one to put one’s true self, one’s soul, first. This is what I call the process of transcendence.<sup>273</sup>

The process is very much on-going though, and my next examples provides a very ‘real life’ example of what psychotherapists call ‘critical acceptance’.<sup>274</sup> As the prayer of acceptance suggests, divine help is often needed to accept certain facets of reality that influence our lives. Such acceptance however can be painful and difficult, illustrating

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<sup>273</sup> An example of the process in action, is provided by a continuation of my personal experience on this occasion: I did not sleep particularly well that night, laying half-awake as all the deep processing took its course. As I awoke however, that song’s words were clear and sharp amidst a noticeably lighter feeling. *My soul’s desire*. Overnight reflection had brought all these experiences and ideas together. It came to me that my soul’s desire was to be at peace with my mind. That was it. That was my insight. My soul’s desire was not, as I had previously ‘agreed’ (to use the Ruiz terminology) to see ‘everyone happy’, but for my mind and higher self to be at peace with each other. This realization marked a turning point in my ability to “accept those things I cannot change”.

<sup>274</sup> See Chapter 2.

how suffering and transcendent experience can be two sides of the same coin of acceptance. As Kabat-Zinn says:

“Acceptance doesn't, by any stretch of the imagination, mean passive resignation. Quite the opposite. It takes a huge amount of fortitude and motivation to accept what is”  
(Kabat-Zinn 2005, p407)

Acceptance, I have found, even if enabled or assisted with transcendence-triggering activities, is hard work. As I worked through the above acceptance process, a time came when I could no longer deny the truths beyond my own, previous, viewpoints. But parts of me still did not want to accept. As the inner processing took its course, I felt heavy, lethargic, that nothing was of any value, that ‘nothing mattered’. My feet went icy cold and my stomach felt bloated, queasy.

If numinous experience is as Otto claims, ineffable, so too are periods of pain and suffering difficult to describe—if not ineffable—when one is in the midst of them. I might have said at this point that I felt ‘empty’, as if there was a void in me. To some extent this was true; where there had been a belief or perspective on truth (in this case on the nature of inner desire), now there was nothing. I had succeeded in letting go of some limiting mental constructs; surely a useful way of reaching into the ‘Nothingness’ considered by Heidegger as essential to Being (see Chapters 8).

Such purification of pre-conditioned views, be it of ‘wishful thinking’ or judgments about others (for example), is closely aligned to issues of emptiness as I shall discuss further in Chapter 10. Other experiences may be considered as ‘reconnecting to reality’, of deflating expectations such that my mental view of a situation more closely resembles the view accepted by other.<sup>275</sup> These I consider to be ‘grounding’ experiences, an idea I shall also discuss further in Chapter 8. These experiences of grounding oneself within the reality of the world around one, of deep acceptance, including periods of ‘emptiness’ can, as my contributors agree, be disheartening, disorienting and often uncomfortable.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> An example of such a series of experiences related to difficulties I was having at the time with my teeth and very expensive dentists. Accepting the dentist’s perspective (through visualisations) was as painful as the actual work on my teeth.

<sup>276</sup> It could well be that emptiness represents some of the features of numinous experiences that lead some who feel them to consider the experience itself to be ‘negative’. My experience leads me to hypothesize that it is not the experience itself that is negative but that our reaction to it and/or assimilation of it leads us to have negative feelings. This is further discussed in Chapter 7 – Models.

Not untypically these emotional feelings are accompanied by physical feelings of ill-health. Within the discipline of holistic health, such cold-like symptoms are often considered symptomatic of a 'healing crisis'.<sup>277</sup> It is argued that flu-like effects reflect acute bouts of 'inner work'. These psychosomatic symptoms correlate, I have found, to periods during the deep acceptance process that I would consider integral to the transcendence process: that is, when one is forced to admit one's human limitations.

Although transcendence can help in accepting that 'anything is possible', it also requires an admission and acceptance of the contrary position: that even though there is a potential to achieve absolutely anything, often one cannot. Such a paradox is typical of the transcendence process and way of thinking. The trouble with connecting with the divine and seeing all potential is that one can think that one can achieve everything. This carries with it the danger of ego expansion or grandiose inflations, of believing one is invincible, no matter what. Transcendent experiences can help in accepting that although anything is possible, amazing things are not ready-to-hand and are not subject to the will of the ego's desires and wants. As Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) reminds us: "Man can never reach the blazing centre of the universe simply by living more and more for himself nor even by spending his life in the service of some earthly cause." (Teilhard de Chardin 1923, p30). Rather, we need to become the "living crucible in which everything melts away in order to be born anew" (Teilhard de Chardin 1923, p35). This is an acceptance process that requires significant surrender of the ego and does not come easily, as my next example illustrates.

During September 2010 I had a 'frozen shoulder': I reflected on the trigger for the condition: given the timing it was almost certainly to do with my new position as administrator. Louise L. Hay (1984) suggests that healing shoulder problems requires joyous acceptance: "Life is joyous and free; all that I accept is good." (p211). This certainly seemed relevant and I had been working hard to accept the time and effort

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<sup>277</sup> See for example Paul A. Mackereth's 'An introduction to catharsis and the healing crisis in reflexology' *Complementary Therapies in Nursing and Midwifery* Vol 5, Iss 3, June 1999, pp67-74. Mackereth emphasizes that such 'healing crises' occur at the emotional as well as the physical level.

required of the work and its challenges. But what was the real cause? ‘Shouldering responsibilities’ perhaps, or a sense of being given ‘the cold shoulder’?<sup>278</sup>

Shifting into a healing/meditation mode I found myself feeling more peaceful than I had for some weeks. Something had changed within me. I found myself reflecting that it was my right shoulder, which corresponds to the left side of the brain and thus to logical, rational, thought. Suddenly my mind lit up: over recent months I had found that the only way I could cope with my job was to stay ‘connected’, to allow higher guidance to solve my problems and to stay detached from emotional or mental involvement. I had, in short, been giving my rational side ‘the cold shoulder’. An excellent example, I would suggest, of whole-body consciousness.

Hay argues convincingly that the human body has the answers to many of its physical and situational problems. She says:

The body, like everything else in life, is a mirror of our inner thoughts and beliefs. The body is always talking to us, if we will only take the time to listen. Every cell within your body responds to every single thought you think and every word you speak. (Hay 1984, p123)

Thus, by ‘listening’ to one’s body one can tap into body consciousness. This might be interpreted as making use of the imagination but, either way, it represents a powerful research methodology as, for example, discussed in *Ways Of Knowing* (Mark Harris ed, 2007). As its subtitle suggests, *New Approaches in the Anthropology of Experience and Learning* represents the cutting edge of thinking in anthropology. The concluding chapter in particular includes many ideas resonant with those covered by this thesis. It takes the form of a dialogue between the editor and Nigel Rapport (Rapport & Harris 2007).

As an insight into the many possible meanings of transcendence, their chapter offers another, important perspective: reciprocity. In it Rapport and Harris highlight an emerging methodology within anthropology, of a researcher’s *Ways of Knowing* generally and, I would suggest, an excellent example of moving beyond the single-focus epistemologies that have characterised modern research methods and views. The chapter is introduced thus: “Its form, a dialogue, is a recognition of the reciprocal contexts in which we come to know others as anthropologists.” (Rapport & Harris 2007, p306)

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<sup>278</sup> From the psychosomatic perspective these are considered classic causes of shoulder problems, as Hay and others explain. See for example Hay 1984, p127 and p198.

In five sections, the two writers take it in turn to describe their personal experiences in trying to understand the subjects of their respective research: hospital porters (Rapport) and Amazonians (Harris). This format mirrors a research method of which Rapport says:

And then it is the case that a presentist knowing demands a multiple and eclectic engagement. The anthropologist zigzags, as you put it, between 'the bodily and the linguistic, the tangible and the imaginary', in the attempted authentic apprehension of otherness. (Rapport & Harris 2007, p323)

Just as my contributors and I 'zigzag' between profound and real-life experiences, so too do anthropologists use both present-day fieldwork experience and thoughts enabled by imaginative experiences triggered by immersion in, for example, historical accounts.

During the longer term mental processing of transcendence, I suggest and have experienced, individuals oscillate between two states, between two worlds in order to ascertain and accept the broadest and deepest truth about their own lives. Eventually, in being approached from two directions at once, a deeper, more authentic truth is attained for both my contributors and for Rapport.<sup>279</sup> He goes on to say: "Ultimately it is a work of the imagination: of an embrace by the mind, in the here and now, of the possible past and future, the tacit and the voiced." (Rapport & Harris 2007, p323). Such words, in the terms of this thesis at least, could be considered no less than a definition of transcendence: 'an embrace by the mind' and 'work of the imagination' immediately positions it beyond the purely rational way of thinking. Likewise, to bridge 'past and future', 'tacit and voiced' illustrates mental transcendence par excellence. Rather than rational analysis, this is a task for the imagination:

I found myself training my imagination to carry out a lot of the research. ...The words on the page were a kind of trigger to change perception, a vehicle to another reality. (Rapport & Harris 2007, p323)

Imagination, whilst not conventionally considered a part of the average academic researcher's 'toolkit', is here being acknowledged as a powerful ally in enabling the researcher to connect to other people, times, and places which are not otherwise accessible through conventional analysis.<sup>280</sup> Harris is willing and able to explore

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<sup>279</sup> Such experiences and related theory could be readily equated to Hegelian synthesis and to Jung's two personalities (ego/self; conscious/unconscious) and the constructive development that can occur when these are in dialogue. Rather than debate theoretical interpretations however, the emphasis in this work is the practical value to such a process of transcendence.

<sup>280</sup> In *Imaginative Horizons*, Vincent Crapanzano (2004) also encourages the use of this potent human instrument. In doing so, he quotes classical Arab philosopher al-'Arabi:

alternative (or as I would say ‘transcendent’) modes of consciousness in order to better understand his subject. Imaginative reflection on historical texts in the context of his fieldwork with present-day descendants brings insights into the ancient texts and, allowing free association of these, triggers questions to ask his current research subjects. Their history is continuous and immersion in it allows a transcendence of past-present and other dualistic barriers. Just as a well-acted play can transport us to another time and place, so too can an imaginative researcher.<sup>281</sup>

This approach is, I would now argue, similar to that used by those committed to the transcendence process: they will immerse themselves in a transcendent experience, bring that experience and a current understanding of it back to the day-to-day world and allow a reflection and assimilation to take effect. Once the two ‘views’ of reality have been brought into harmony, then a new knowing will have been established.

These two ‘views’ might equally be one’s own ‘mind’ and ‘body’, so that by becoming aware of their combined whole-body / non-local consciousness, important information, not otherwise available to rational thoughts alone, can be gleaned. This is something of which I had prior experience, in the form of ‘dialogues’ with particular parts of myself. My frozen shoulder was to illicit another such ‘dialogue’, not with the shoulder, but (as best I could perceive and can describe it) between my rational mind and my ‘higher

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The imagination (al-khayal) is an intermediate term that resists definition. At times it appears to be between the spiritual and material - the sensuous - world; at others between being and nothingness, as somehow equivalent to existence. The important point is that the imagination is an intermediate ‘reality’, inherently ambiguous, and best described as “it is neither this nor that or both this and that”. It is *barzakh* (Crapanzano 2004, p57)

*Barzakh* is the Arabic word for bridge or interface, that which separates. This I would suggest is wholly consistent with the imagination being something which helps us transcend, or which is part of the transcendent process.

<sup>281</sup> Of course, one could question the validity of such an approach: how do we know the imagination will take us to an accurate feeling for the past? This is, if I understand Harris correctly, why his zigzagging method is so powerful: by continuing to check his imagined view of historical detail and progression with first-hand and current world he has an in-built reality check:

As I delved into these imagined worlds I would come back to the text and check my wonderings against the traces on the paper. In other words, I cannot separate the language from the embodied understanding of the history I was creating. Fused were the bodily and the linguistic, the tangible paper and imaginary traces, the street and the archive, in my way of knowing this history. (Rapport & Harris 2007, p317)

self". During the 'dialogue' my 'higher self' helped my rational mind to feel useful as I accessed and integrated the 'higher-reality' of whole-body / non-local consciousness: "You can help us with that. Because you know about logic and reason, so you'll be perfect at channelling the highest truth and purer reason."<sup>282</sup>

In the same way that a pure mathematician might wax lyrical about the inherent perfection that he can see in and through his subject, so my rational mind, now freed of the constraints of following conventional human prescriptions of possible truths, of 'shoulds' and 'oughts', was at peace. The feeling was profound, a deeper peace than that found, rationally, in a conventional 'logic' of the situation; rather it was a 'transcendent logic' that comes from being, consciously, part of life itself. From my reading of metaphysical and philosophical treatises,<sup>283</sup> this *felt* right. Typically from my experiences, this sense of euphoria only lasted a few minutes and I woke up the following morning with the 'old' rational mind still questioning and resisting. The process of acceptance had however taken a significant, if small, step forward.

The hypothesis that physical bodies often have the key to one's state of health is supported by John Eaton in *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia: The Reverse Therapy Approach* (2006) with his theory of 'Bodymind'.<sup>284,285</sup> It is a form of knowing that resides not in the brain-mind, but deep within our whole physical self. One satisfied client amongst many of his *Reverse Therapy* had written:

Incredibly, I'm now back at work, enjoying a social life and making positive plans for the future. I consider myself to be fully recovered. My symptoms started to lift at my very first appointment, immediately upon reading my first message. The therapy was sometimes hard work and emotionally draining, but I was always rewarded with a lifting of symptoms. Thanks to the commitment and understanding of my therapist, Reverse Therapy has been an unforgettable and life changing experience, and one that I recommend to all ME sufferers. (Testimonial by SH 2004 quoted in Eaton 2006, p126)

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<sup>282</sup> From a transcript of the dialogue taken at the time (Feb, 2011).

<sup>283</sup> As referenced at appropriate junctures throughout this thesis.

<sup>284</sup> Other authors, in a very similar fashion, talk about what in this work I am calling 'whole-body consciousness': For example, focusing on the inner wisdom associated with sight, Roberto Kaplan's *Conscious Seeing – Transforming your life through your eyes*, Hillsboro, Oregon: Beyond World Publishing, 2002.

<sup>285</sup> That the previously prevalent view, of body and mind being separate entities, is being transcended, even in mainstream psychology, is indicated by the following, week-long Summer School: *Keeping the body in mind: The mind-body relationship in mental health*, 2-6<sup>th</sup> Sept 2013, Tavistock Centre, London, organised by The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.



Another had been drawn to Eaton's approach because it was not, nor did not claim to be a miracle cure. As SH (above) notes: *The therapy was sometimes hard work and emotionally draining*. She is probably referring to the suffering of the healing process that so often accompanies such life-changing processes and which I describe throughout this discourse.<sup>286</sup> Such are the effects, I would argue, of 'Brain-mind', its fears and difficulty changing. This is in stark contrast to Bodymind, as another of Eaton's testimonial explains:

Bodymind, though feelings and intuition, guided me through your book, gently guiding and correcting, and I found the way that helped me most was talking to Bodymind. When I did this I found answers revealed in a unique way, accompanied by great joy, energy, peace and serenity. (Testimonial by SJ 2005 quoted in Eaton 2006, p118)

Eaton is not interested in Bodymind as a theory, of consciousness or otherwise.<sup>287</sup>

Rather, like myself, he sees his description of whole-body consciousness as a vital means by which we can take control of and improve our health. Even within his Reverse Therapy technique, the emphasis is on feeling rather than analysing what the Bodymind might be telling us, since:

Any attempt to work out the meaning of the symptoms using 'Head' intelligence is counterproductive. In fact it can lead to frustration as the Mind tries to work out 'rationally' what is in fact an intuitive, deeply emotional communication from the Body. (Eaton 2006, p15)

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<sup>286</sup> I was able to relate to and thus appreciate such effects when I had a 'frozen shoulder' which I worked on using Eaton's methods. During the period I felt decidedly unsettled; suffering not just from the painful shoulder and aching arm but from an on-going churning stomach and a general feeling of insecurity and uncertainty. One could debate cause and effect, but the two sets of symptoms were definitely synchronous.

<sup>287</sup> In describing the ideas behind Bodymind, Eaton does acknowledge the pioneering work of Milton H. Erickson (1901–1980) and Dr Ernest Rossi:

In his ground-breaking work *'The Psychobiology of Mind-Body Healing'* (1986) Dr Rossi has shown that symptoms arise when Bodymind remembers difficult experiences and stores the information away in the Emotional brain, and elsewhere in the body, as a cellular memory. Whenever similar experiences come up the cellular memory is activated and chemical messengers are used to tell the rest of the organism how to respond. Thus different parts of Bodymind are in communication with each other - the Emotional Brain, the glands, the skin, muscles, gut and Immune system and so on. And Bodymind is also in communication with *us* - using the symptoms as 'codes' to flag up that a difficulty has returned and we need to learn new ways of handling the experience. (Eaton 2006, p11)

See, for example, *The Collected Papers of Milton Erickson*, New York: Irvington, 1980 and [www.erickson-foundation.org](http://www.erickson-foundation.org), accessed 23.12.10.

The communication, between Bodymind and the rest of one's being, has to be felt. Such is the nature of whole-body consciousness. Transcendent techniques such as Reverse Therapy require that such deeper communications are welcomed, that answers to health issues are consciously sought beyond conventional intelligence.

Both Eaton's *Reverse Therapy* and my reading of, for example, Hay (and related experiences trying their methods) were encouraging a transcendent way of thinking that put far more emphasis on the wisdom of the body than on conventional, acquired knowledge. Perhaps not surprisingly other bits of me (i.e. ego) were not at all happy about this change and a lack of confidence resulted at this time.

And yet underlying that feeling was a sense that Bodymind was very much real and important to my emerging ways of knowing. Also assisting the assimilation of this alternative view has been Rapport and Harris (see above).<sup>288</sup> Whilst transcendent 'ways of knowing' are increasingly described in contemporary literature, the accompanying feeling of vulnerability is discussed less so.<sup>289</sup> Such situations (of vulnerability during transitions) could be compared to that of a hermit crab which has abandoned an outgrown shell and not yet moved into a new one or, more dramatically, like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. The metaphor of metamorphosis is a common one within the transcendence movement and, I claim, a realistic one. Associated with such acceptance of a new world view there is often a feeling of disorientation.<sup>290</sup>

There is often a realisation that 'I' am rather different from what it had been just a few weeks previously. But although different it is somehow more whole, more complete, since it now embraces (to at least some extent compared to previously) Bodymind and rather more non-local consciousness. When logic is able to conclude: "if 'I' am now more whole, more complete, there is thereby more of 'me' to provide greater

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<sup>288</sup> The idea of connecting into a greater wisdom through one's body is to be found not only in psychotherapy and anthropology. McMahon & Campbell, for example, provide a workbook based on the Christian theology and practices. See McMahon, E.M. & Campbell, P.A. (2010) *Rediscovering the Lost Body-Connection Within Christian Spirituality*, Minneapolis: Tasora, 2010.

<sup>289</sup> Although it relates closely to the fear often associated with the suffering aspect of the process of transcendence. This is discussed in Chapter 12.

<sup>290</sup> To the extent (as I have heard others report and have experiences myself) of bumping into things. This could be interpreted as one's sense of personal space having been significantly altered.

confidence”. The thought brought me out in a hot sweat and healing fever that lasted the rest of the day.

Seen as a whole, over many weeks, months and years, short-term and long-term experiences taken together can be seen to embrace both facets of transcendence. They are examples of mental transcendence in that rational knowing of the theory of critical acceptance can be applied to personal emotional issues. It is also whole-body / non-local transcendence in that one can, for example, take oneself back in time to feel the pain from the past. Doing so enables the relinquishment of old mental habits and for old patterns (for example of blinkered vision) to be transcended. As I shall demonstrate in subsequent chapter, such experiences constitute the day-to-day reality of the transcendence process.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, by examining alternative ways of knowing related to transcendent experiences, I have begun to analyse a number of its key features. Notably, the experience of transcendence pertains not simply to the experience itself per se, but to the period of time afterwards—during a time in which the effects of the experience are being mentally assimilated. In analysing accounts of experiences in Parts 2 and 3, we shall see how these two facets of transcendence often correlate to whole-body / non-local transcendence at the time of the experience and mental transcendence during the assimilation process. It is this two-stage and on-going interaction between facets of transcendence that, I argue, enables long-term and permanent changes in our level of consciousness.

A review of autobiographical literature in the following chapter lends strong support to my hypothesis. There I also explore further a number of other notable features highlighted in this chapter; in particular the sense in which transcendent experiences can be regarded as ‘evolutionary’; the important role played by the sense of ‘emptiness’ within the experience; that such experiences can occur anytime and at anyplace, and can be triggered by all manner of situations. Transcendent experiences may manifest themselves through mundane activities, they may be striking and enable a major life change, and often come when least expected. Yet, as discussed in Part One, one of the few things that unite all transcendent experiences is their power to open the mind to new possibilities, to establish new attitudes, and generate new comprehensions and

understandings of ourselves and the world in which we find ourselves; that is to say, they establish a depth to life, to being that had not previously been realised. In the following chapters, I expound the veracity of my hypotheses by illustrating my claims through the experiences and thoughts of others who have recorded their experiences and thereby lend themselves to our analysis. We shall see that my description of transcendent experience can be traced in their reports.

# Chapter 5

## Accounts from biographies

This thesis is, first and foremost, about the personal journey of transcendence. In the previous chapter I focused on my own experiences, and now I shall compare and contrast these with experiences of others who have felt inspired and motivated to write about their personal, spiritual, journeys. Why would anyone feel compelled to write about them if they were not meaningful to them? Jung in his explanation for writing one of his most challenging of scientific works, *Synchronicity: An acausal connecting principle*(1955), writes for example,:<sup>291</sup>

It is chiefly because my experiences or the phenomenon of synchronicity have multiplied themselves over the decades ... [that it has] ... brought the problem ever closer to me. (Jung 1955, p5)

And it is not just his own experiences that compelled him to confront the scientific problem before him; Jung had clearly been impressed by his patients' reported experiences of the theory he would come to delineate as synchronicity:

I was amazed to see how many people have had experiences of this kind and how carefully the secret was guarded. So my interest in this problem has a human as well as a scientific foundation. (Jung 1955, p6)

That Jung writes as from the perspective of his everyday self, as well as from the perspective of a scientist is also important. The works quoted in this chapter have been chosen, not simply for their relevance to my theoretical subject matter, but because they are accessible from the standpoint of the ordinary, everyday, human perspective; that is to say, they speak to the reader without jargon, enabling him or her to empathise and 'feel' the wonder and frustration as the authors themselves did. Life stories, presented

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<sup>291</sup> Also entitled *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*,(Jung 1955), first published in German as *Naturerklärung und Psyche*, 1952.

with honesty of emotions succeed in conveying something of the essence of transcendence in a way that abstract academic texts rarely do.<sup>292</sup>

Given that synchronistic events are often reported by those on a path of transcendence and the features of synchronicity map readily onto the presented models of transcendence (see Chapter 7), it is highly pertinent to begin with the quote of Jung. That this quote comes not from his biographic work per se (which we shall consider later in this chapter) but from one of his most obscure of scientific essays emphasises the point I wish to make: that the development of one's 'theories of life', whether for personal or professional purposes, is integral to the development of one's personal development in life. The lifetime and work of an individual—their life's stories—are on-going cycles of experience that help them to transcend their previous, limited, understanding of the world in which they live. Biographic works thus provide a rich source of information on the nature and dynamics of transcendence.<sup>293</sup>

In this chapter I seek to extol that those personal anecdotes of my own experiences and insights of transcendent modes of thought are neither new nor unusual. On the contrary; I shall illustrate how many of the themes that I have described and conclusions that I have personally gleaned have been similarly embraced by the lives of many others.<sup>294</sup>

Moreover, my analysis of biographical material, and that of autobiography in particular, demonstrates that the transcendence process is often perceived to underpin the lives of many who choose to write their life stories, and who thereby reflect upon the changes

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<sup>292</sup> Jung's middle sentence here is also important: "and how carefully the secret was guarded". Jung's patients, like some of my contributors, were often reluctant to talk about synchronicity or other features of transcendence because such subjects are frowned upon by those still entrenched in the 'modern' mind-set. The implication is that many more people have such experiences far more regularly than the prevailing 'wisdom' would have us believe.

<sup>293</sup> That is not to suggest that everybody would be convinced by the 'evidence' of biographic materials: claims of 'selective memory', for example may indeed be valid. When considering transcendence as a topic however, it is the human quality, the depth of personal perspective that is present in the better examples, that is valued by readers within the transcendence movement. As Frank Cottrell Boyce says: "The more personally you speak, the more universally you speak". See Boyce (2012) 'The book that inspired Danny Boyle', *The Daily Telegraph Review*, Oct 13th 2012, pp20-21.

<sup>294</sup> I present these examples as a necessarily limited cross-section of biographies, making no claims as to its statistical validity. For, as Jung expounds in his theories on acausality, the modern scientific method perhaps places far too high a value on 'statistical significance': occurrences at the extremes of a statistical distribution are still valid occurrences. Likewise my focus on transcendent experience as being better represented as a spectrum of experiences.

and experiences imparted to them. Indeed, the act of reflecting on one's life, and integrating one's experiences through that reflection is what makes autobiographies so intriguing and powerful reads. The very process of reflecting upon one's experiences facilitates an awareness and evocation of transcendent experience. If transcendence, as I have defined it, is about rising above divisions, about building bridges in one's comprehension and relationship to the world, then my analysis of biographical material presents many such bridges. Firstly, by comparing autobiographies of 'iconic' philosophers with those of individuals less academically qualified or known, I am able to identify common features between their personal journeys of transcendence. That is, when it comes to autobiographies about transcendence, it seems not to matter whether the author has written volumes of academically favoured texts or is a supposed amateur; it does not matter if the journey described relates to an international speaker or someone previously known only in their own neighbourhoods. As they describe their feelings of elation and frustration, as they describe how they learn and grow through experiences of all varieties, so they show that they are in touch with their humanity and evoke the Being to which we are all connected.

In the autobiographies reviewed runs a deep and powerful theme: the common vein of transcendent experience that unites all on a journey towards depth of Being. By selecting a spread of texts that include a range of authors' backgrounds and abilities, I shall show that what they each describe in their lives has reflections in the lives of many others. In short, the process of transcendence is one that anyone at any time might engage in. Furthermore, as more such books and works are written and more readers resonate with the unfolding personal developments described, so they too are enabled and encouraged to embrace the transcendence process in their own lives.

Autobiographies provide an important bridge between theory and practice. As first-hand accounts they include the emotional aspects, the deeper feelings felt, that are rarely part of theoretical texts. This, in turn, makes it far easier for a reader to engage with the subject. Resonance aids understanding.<sup>295</sup> I found this very much to be the case during my research. Like many others who attempt to understand the works of Heidegger, Nietzsche and Tillich I initially found their work complicated to the point of being indecipherable (indeed, as is the very intention and 'correct' response that Nietzsche

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<sup>295</sup> The need for empathy between author or teacher and learner is widely accepted in teaching theory. See, for example, in the context of religious education, Watson 1993, p4.

himself sought in his published works). In each case, it was not until I read their biographical work that suddenly what they were saying made sense to me.<sup>296</sup> Whilst their theories merely confused and frustrated, these same theories came alive as I read the authors' backgrounds and struggles. To read not what they thought but how they, personally, related to the world in which they lived, provides an invaluable link between the concept and the daily reality of transcendence.

I begin my analysis with a review of a book that opened my mind to the possibilities of transcendence when I first read it at the age of forty: *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) by Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952). This book gives contemporary accounts of a number of remarkable individuals and their experiences. Here, for example, Yogananda explains to his friend Upendra how Bhaduri Mahasay levitates:

A yogi's body loses its grossness after use of certain pranayamas. ... Even saints who do not practice a formal yoga have been known to levitate during a state of intense devotion to God. (Yogananda 1946, p68)

To read about a person who can transcend gravity is indeed to challenge one's concepts of reality and what is possible for us individually and collectively. But whilst such stories may be treated as miraculous by many today (or ridiculed and disbelieved as nonsensical), to Yogananda they are an almost everyday occurrence: Bhaduri Mahasay, the Levitating Saint, lived not far from Yogananda, who would often visit him.

Not only does Yogananda illustrate through such accounts in his autobiography that miracles of biblical proportion are happening regularly (at least in the circles in which he moved in India), but he goes to considerable lengths to emphasise that feats such as levitation are not restricted to Yogis. In a footnote on page 73, for example, he says:

Among "levitating saints" of the Christian world was the 17th century St. Joseph of Cupertino. ... The saint, indeed, was uniquely disqualified for earthly duties by his inability to remain, for any long period, on the earth! Often the sight of a holy statue was enough to exalt St. Joseph in vertical flight; the two saints, one of stone and the other of flesh, would be seen circling together in the upper air. (Yogananda 1946, p73)

It is clear from this work that Yogananda was particularly inspired and influenced by meeting such remarkable yogis and gurus as Bhaduri Mahasay. There is little doubt that he was not simply willing to embrace possibilities such as levitation (through mental transcendence) but was possessed with an inner desire to become a guru himself, for the

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<sup>296</sup> And, of course, Nietzsche's 'autobiography', *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One is* (1888) is written in order to convey the absurdity of Nietzsche as a rational philosopher!



benefit of others. It was always the wish of Yogananda to enable others to attain self-realisation as he calls it. Through the founding of the Self-Realization Fellowship he undoubtedly achieved this aim. The “Spiritual seekers are welcome to visit Self-Realization Fellowship’s more than 500 temples, retreats, ashrams, and meditation centres around the world”.<sup>297</sup>

These centres teach the Yoga practices and teachings of Yogananda. However, whilst including a chapter on Kriya Yoga (pp263-273), within his own ‘training’ as a yogi, Yogananda makes little reference to his formal practice of it. He placed far more emphasis on his experiences in meeting other miracle working gurus and on his own ‘learning experiences’. Whilst the practice of Kriya Yoga is undoubtedly important to Yogananda and his followers, it is clear that a sheer ‘presence’ is as, if not more, important:

Paramahansa Yogananda explained that all true gurus are living, whether or not they are in a physical body. He said, “Their consciousness is attuned to their disciples, whether or not all are living on the same plane. One of the essential qualities and manifestations of a true guru is omnipresence.” Paramahansa Yogananda himself continues to help and bless all who turn to him for spiritual guidance.<sup>298</sup>

Presence of someone well advanced on the transcendent path (or their materialised spirit) is indeed seen as enabling for others on a path. Such presence can take many forms. Lorna Byrne, for example, describes the uplifting effect of walking in a monastic garden:

It definitely was a holy place, a place where lots of prayers had been said. All of the monks shone so brightly - they were so clean, and not just in their bodies, but in their souls, too. They prayed as they worked and I noticed the angels were praying with them. I felt very much at peace there. (Byrne 2008, p59)

Byrne’s autobiography is full of accounts of angelic presences that guide and support her through her life. Sometimes this is through a deep sense of peace (as in the above example), at other times, angelic or other non-physical presences, can provide ourselves or others with vital and specific information and encouragement. Byrne describes a prayer meeting where she shared the vision of another attendee and was ‘told’ by the ‘angels’ to speak about her vision and insight:

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<sup>297</sup> See [www.yogananda-srf.org/tmp/locationsListintl.aspx](http://www.yogananda-srf.org/tmp/locationsListintl.aspx), accessed 09.05.11.

<sup>298</sup> In response to the question “Does one need to have a living guru in order to progress spiritually?”. See [www.yogananda-srf.org/faqs/Frequently\\_Asked\\_Questions.aspx](http://www.yogananda-srf.org/faqs/Frequently_Asked_Questions.aspx), accessed 09.05.11.

I turned to the first young man and explained to him that the vision related to his fear of becoming a priest. I told him that there would be a lot of obstacles on the path that God had laid out for him, but he would overcome them. He would make a big difference. ... I explained this was the message that the angels had given me for him. (Byrne 2008, p204)

This is a not untypical example of non-local consciousness, a transcendence of the mental space between one individual and another. To speak out in this way, Byrne had to transcend her own fear; she remarks, “I was nervous; I was terrified! ‘I can’t do this,’ I said to the angels, ‘They Won’t believe me - I’m just an ordinary person’”. (Byrne 2008, p203)

Like others who are aware of a transcendent reality, Byrne feared being different and ridiculed. It is still the case that her vision-sharing abilities, which I describe as transcendent, are very much contrary to the conventional view of life. If anything, however, knowing they are different spurs the ‘seeker’ ever onwards, for they know that their emerging truth has a depth and meaning not found in the prevailing ‘wisdom’ of the modern age, nor within the contexts typical of the present-day alternatives.

Faced with a gulf between one’s own emergent perspectives of reality and the prevailing view, those on a journey of transcendence accept the challenge of transcending that gulf. Somehow they have to find or create an inner model of reality that reflects the spread of awareness and degree of engagement in this transcendent view at one extreme and the conventional modern view at the other. Irrespective of the number and extent of whole-body / non-local experiences those within the transcendence movement may have, they still need a mental understanding that will enable a peace between inner and outer worlds. Richard Leach (2010) describes just such a shift in way of thinking which I would call mental transcendence:

For many years I used to play a sort of wishing game in my head. I would give myself a certain number of wishes and indulge myself mentally. For example, if I had five wishes it may be: 1. a million pounds ... What a waste of time and mental effort! I stopped doing this exercise when I stopped looking for more and learnt to live in the here and now. (Leach 2010, p59)

To develop the necessary expanded and integrated model of the world and of one’s personal place within it requires much reflection. Writing about one’s thought processes, and in so doing exploring new ways of describing the world and sharing our own personal models, is one way in which individuals on a transcendent path find they are

able to develop their models.<sup>299</sup> A number of works reviewed in this section focus not on transcendent experiences themselves, but on the refining of this inner model. In describing something to others our own process of understanding and acceptance is enabled; as if it were enacting a self-release.

Nicki Jackowska in *Write for Life* (1997), makes a strong case for writing as a path for finding oneself. In her preface she writes:

Primarily we may write for ourselves, to create an external space on which to project and invent ourselves. And at the same time we may be writing for a nameless sea of human beings, without particular identity. ...  
It doesn't matter. What matters is that to write is to create a place external to ourselves that is separate and distinct and in which we may know ourselves and each other better. We are, necessarily, engaging in public activity, and here lies the foundation for that creation, now separate, to go further. (Jackowska 1997, p5)

With writing, whether for others or not, comes an enabling of the healing that is associated with, if not is, an essential ingredient of transcendence: "The symbols and images that emerge through writing are particularly

good at healing this sense of the divided self." (Manjusvara, 2005, p14)

Others, like myself, find that the answers to their deep questions about life are not to be found in existing books:

When I was twenty-one years old I searched for a book that would explain to me what the spiritual path was about, and where it would eventually lead me. Finding no such book I started a path anyway, joining a Sufi Order and remaining there for fourteen years. I realised through these years that the true path of my spirit was not one I could find described in any book. The most important part of my spiritual development came from learning to be honest, patient and brave. My growth in honesty eventually meant that I had to leave the order in which I had grown up. Becoming honest meant seeing through much that I had believed in, and leaving it behind. This was six years ago. I hope that this book encourages you to find your own way, and to see spiritual growth as a process that affects your everyday life in a meaningful way. (McCutcheon 1999, p3)

There are many evocative and useful works on transcendence readily available, and yet theories and accounts written about experiences and or lives of others is insufficient for the deeper realities of a personal existence to become apparent. It would thus seem that, for many, the very writing and explication of their personal experiences facilitates the re-alignment of their general thoughts and thought processes; and this self-disclosure is an essential part of the transcendence process.

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<sup>299</sup> These models are described in Chapter 7.

Revising one's mental view of the world to better reflect one's physical reality is key to transcendence. Transcendent modes of thought often present new insights that help acceptance of practical reality. These can appear in many forms, such as, for instance, synchronicities, premonitions and Extra Sensory Perception (ESP or telepathy), all of which are common within the biographies I have surveyed and, as we shall see in the next chapter, also within the reports of my contributors. Jung, having described one such foreboding, explains:<sup>300</sup>

When one has such experiences - and I will tell of others like them - one acquires a certain respect for the potentialities and arts of the unconscious. .... I have, however, learned that the views I have been able to form on the basis of such hints from the unconscious have been most rewarding. Naturally, I am not going to write a book of revelations about them, but I will acknowledge that I have a "myth" which encourages me to look deeper into this whole realm. Myths are the earliest form of science. (Jung 1963, p335)

That Jung should write "Myths are the earliest form of science" endears him—irrespective of his leanings towards scientific empirical research—to the mystic in search of a transcendence of understanding between the scientific and the mystical. The question poses itself however as to why, when Jung expresses acceptance of ESP and such phenomenon, that such ideas are not as generally widely accepted as Jung's other therapeutic models and ideas? Jung suggests an reason in his foreword to *Synchronicity: An acausal connecting principle* when he notes, "In writing this paper I have, so to speak, made good a promise which for many years I lacked the courage to fulfil." (Jung 1955, p5). Indeed, this work was written *after* Jung had his near death experience, and after he witnessed countless other examples of 'acausal' phenomena. By this time his confidence both in a reality beyond the conventional logical model of a 'cause and effect' linearity to experience, and in a mode of thought that embraced the non-rational unconscious was sufficiently strong to give him the courage to write about it. And what he writes, if music to the ears of mystics, is perhaps inevitably incomprehensible to those enmeshed in the conventional scientific epistemology:

In man's original view of the world, as we find it among primitives, space and time have a very precarious existence. They became "fixed" concepts only in the course of his mental development, thanks largely to the introduction of measurement. In themselves, space and time consist of nothing. They are hypostatized concepts born of the discriminating activity of the conscious mind. (Jung 1955, p28)

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<sup>300</sup> The particular incident concerns a unshakeable memory from his war service of someone drowning. He arrived home to find that his grandson Adrian had almost drowned at precisely the time he had had the vision. (See Jung 1963, pp334-335).

Jung freely admits that writing “space and time consist of nothing” has only become possible for him, after decades of experiences and reflection on matters transcendent.<sup>301</sup>

The conclusion is clear: to be understood to any significant degree, transcendent phenomena must be experienced first-hand.<sup>302</sup> After all, for even something as normal as driving a car, no-one would think of learning totally from a book or relying on a teacher who themselves had never driven a vehicle. Just as driving a car is an ‘of the moment’ issue, so too is transcendence. Words cannot describe the whole-body experience and the ‘learning’ occurs often over a prolonged period of time.

I refer in this chapter to a number of texts recognised as ‘classic’ within their spiritual or discipline traditions. In three significant cases, the life-stories concern those who died in the mid-20th century.<sup>303</sup> Their accounts, from towards the end of the modern era, are particularly relevant to the transcendence movement. One might reasonably suggest that these books pre-empted or started the movement. In discussions with fellow seekers over the years, Yogananda and Dass are often mentioned as sources of inspiration. Teilhard de Chardin predicts his own role in enabling a ‘new soul’ for humanity, “Or perhaps what I am called on to do is simply to help in the birth of a new soul in that which already is”. (Teilhard de Chardin quoted in King 1996, p173)<sup>304</sup>

Having set the biographical scene with the books authored by Teilhard de Chardin and other individuals recognised as major contributors to human development (at least within their own spheres of influence) I now consider current-day biographical accounts

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<sup>301</sup> This certainly endorses my own experiences. Having felt ‘beyond time and space’ in a particular transcendent experience (enabled by music inspired by dolphins), then I can relate to Jung’s words having ‘been there’ myself. Without such an experience, the words “space and time consist of nothing” would have been incomprehensible to me, as perhaps they still are to many others who read this particular Jung work.

<sup>302</sup> As Rudolf Otto himself notes at the start of his discussion of numinous experience, if one hasn’t already experienced the numinous, one will not understand what he has to say about it and ought not bother to read any further: “The reader is invited to direct his mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, as little as possible qualified by other forms of consciousness. Whoever cannot do this, whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no farther; for it is not easy to discuss questions of religious psychology with one who can recollect the emotions of his adolescence, the discomforts of indigestion, or, say, social feelings, but cannot recall any intrinsically religious feelings” (Otto 1917, p8)

<sup>303</sup> Jung died in 1961, Teilhard de Chardin in 1955 and Paramahansa Yogananda in 1952.

<sup>304</sup> In Claude Cuénot’s *Teilhard de Chardin: A Biographical Study*, London: Burns & Oates, 1965.

of transcendence from ‘ordinary people’; by which I mean those that one would not particularly expect to talk to about transcendence or who have not previously featured in academic research. Many such authors emphasise that they are, for example, “just a regular guy” (Leach 2010, p2).

Other than an interest in and an inner drive to make sense of the world, these authors have little else in common. Brown, for example, is a journalist, Finn the executive director of a communications technology company and Leach “a professor of physics” (Leach 2010, p2). Their books have been written with: “An almost unstoppable urge to help other people find happiness and peace.” (Leach 2010, p2). Such a quote being a typical example of the philanthropic spirit that pervades these biographies.

In this chapter I use the descriptions ‘publish’ and ‘book’ in a broad and inclusive manner: whilst some books quoted are published with long established publishers, others have been self-published through one of the many on-line publishing companies now available. Other texts quoted have been downloaded from the author’s own or supporting organisation’s web site. All are however widely available and very much in the public domain. It is this that distinguishes the accounts of transcendence reviewed in this chapter from the accounts of Chapter 6: the latter, at the time of writing at least, were prepared specifically for this thesis, in response to my invitation to contribute.

That some of these books have been self-published does not diminish their importance. These individuals felt sufficiently strongly about their personal journeys to put themselves through the not inconsiderable stress of the self-publishing process. It must also be emphasised that these books are not published through ‘vanity publishers’: they are not the result of an ego wanting to see its name in print. As I have already quoted with Leach, the motivation of all these authors is, in my judgement, the desire to help others: a recognised trait throughout the transcendence movement. The key question I seek to answer here is, what are the common characteristics of the experiences reported by these biographic authors?

Teilhard de Chardin epitomises those within the transcendence movement with his courageous determination to identify and write about a divine presence. As one of the forebears, I would argue, of the transcendence movement, his story provides many clues to the essence of transcendence. What I hope to achieve, in my brief extracts from his life story, is to identify features of his upbringing, approach and attitudes that, I contend,

helped distinguish him as the forerunner of the transcendence movement. Such characteristics are, we shall see, common among those who live the practice of transcendence. Ursula King, in *Spirit of Fire* (1996) provides a highly informative and moving picture of his life and work, which form the backbone of this analysis.

Those who feature in this thesis are those who have found themselves with enquiring and open minds; courage and a need to act on that courage; and an awareness that their role in life is to, somehow, give these traits full attention. One could ask “where do these inner drives come from?” but, in doing so, run the risk of falling into the ‘nature versus nurture’ argument. Teilhard de Chardin was in no doubt that his drive came from deep within, from a “phenomenon of the spirit” that “reveals a gradual and systematic passage from the unconscious to the conscious”.<sup>305</sup> His quest, like that of others in the transcendence movement, is not so much to understand such phenomenon in an abstract, intellectual, sense but to embrace and embody the deepest possible understanding of them. This is clearly illustrated in his writing of the “philosophical synthesis” about the “creative union” between the mystical One and the in-numerous manifestations of God in the world. As King writes:

For Teilhard, union always implies a simultaneous process of unification as well as differentiation. Coming together in closer union always means that differences are enhanced and heightened through being combined in new synthesis. This is where the creative moment lies, a moment he perceived in all realities, in personal relationships, in everything that is in process, everything that is truly alive. (King 1996, p64)

That focussing on the differences between apparent opposites could bring about their unification might seem paradoxical, but it is just such contradictions that characterise the transcendence process. Typical of this paradox might be the way in which the worst times often brings out the best in people; as for example in courageous acts during times of war.

Courage is possessed to a far greater extent in some individuals compared to others, not least in Teilhard de Chardin who experienced both world wars. In the second, he was separated from a loved one and:

Was at times prostrated by fits of weeping, and he appeared to be on the verge of despair, But, calling on all the resources of his will, he abandoned himself to the supremely Great, to his Christ. (Leroy 1957, p36)

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<sup>305</sup> From *The Phenomenon of Spirituality*, quoted by King 1996, p165.

In the Great War, as a stretcher-bearer:

Living on the battlefield under extreme conditions, on the boundary between life and death, compelled him to articulate his thought and communicate what he had experienced. (King 1996, p54)

It is courage that characterises leaders; those who are willing and able to be the first in previously uncharted territory. At the start of the 21st century, this vanguard (transcendence) movement applies not to some new physical frontier on the surface of the globe, but to the depth of human consciousness and how it is utilised. It is perhaps fitting that Teilhard de Chardin demonstrated his courage not only in his way of thinking but also, very much, on the conventional battle-field of humanity. That so much courage is required empathises the degree of suffering involved in the transcendent process.<sup>306</sup>

The courage to face death, our own or that of someone close to us, provides another not untypical enabler of a transcendent process. In *Cleo*, Helen Brown (2010) shares her remarkable story of *How a small black cat helped heal a family* (the book's sub-title). Deeply moving in its raw description of the death (through a car accident) of their nine-year-old son Sam and the years that followed, the Brown family endured a great deal of suffering. And yet, in many ways (with the help, particularly, of their cat Cleo), Brown worked through the trauma.

The extent to which reflection over time is a healer is beautifully illustrated by Brown. In hearing of her grandson's death Brown's mother says: "I saw the beautiful sunset just now. Glorious streaks of reds and golds. I thought Sam must be part of it". (Brown 2010, p26). To Brown, at this point, such an idea is an insult: "My ravaged mind interpreted her words as callous. How could she surrender her grandchild to a sunset?" (ibid). Yet less than two years later she writes that, whilst looking at the stars:

The night sky that had once seemed so icy and indifferent would draw me into its magnificence ... Light that had left those stars years ago travelled across time to enter

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<sup>306</sup> The need for courage, as I argue in Chapter 7, follows naturally from a tripartite transitional model. Whilst undoubtedly required by the foremost thinkers and activists within the transcendence movement, by the time the movement becomes established, when its ideas and ways are no longer strikingly different but accepted as valid options in society, such courage is no longer required. To live according to transcendent ways is, at this later stage of the transition, about Being part of mainstream thinking. Already, as Harvey & Vincett say: "Alternative spiritualities are ... now a significant element of the popular and mainstream culture of post-war Britain, and beyond.", illustrating how some elements of transcendence are already 'mainstream'. See Harvey, G. & Vincett, G. 'Alternative Spiritualities' in Woodhead, L. & Catto, R. (eds .2012) *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2012, p169.



the retinas of my eyes and become part of my experience. They were as close to me now as darling Sam, distant as the stars and yet as integral part of every breath. (Brown 2010, p115)

Through both the immediacy of that star-gazing experience and the intervening months of life's experiences, insights and reflections, Brown had transcended not only some of her pain of loss, but many notions of duality normally applied to space and time.

Acceptance of her son's death, perhaps the ultimate in difficult topics to embrace, was coming for her through acceptance of a world beyond life and death, beyond near and far.

Brown refers to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, acknowledging the value of her model for grief, by saying:<sup>307</sup> "The word depression isn't big enough to describe the ocean of melancholy I'd slipped into". (Brown 2010, p83). But eventually, 24 years later, she had sufficiently transcended the grief of her son's death to have forgiven the driver of the "Blue Ford" that had knocked him down. She realised that life had moved on. Such is the reality of the transcendence process.

But why wait for a death before experiencing such an intense, transcendent, experience of life? The answer, of course, is that one does not have to, but often we require an event to rupture the strong sense of self-containment that long-lived traditions and old habits have instilled in us. Fear of death, however, often prevents such experiences. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992/2002) encourages its readers to understand this and so not to waste their lives waiting and worrying. Rinpoche says:

NO ONE CAN die fearlessly and in complete security until they have truly realized the nature of mind. For only this realization, deepened over years of sustained practice, can keep the mind stable during the molten chaos of the process of death. ... Hundreds of thousands of individuals in India, the Himalayas, and Tibet have attained realization and enlightenment through its [Dzogchen] practice. There is a wonderful prophecy that "in this dark age, the heart essence of Samantabhadra will blaze like fire." My life, my teachings, and this book are dedicated to lighting this fire in the hearts and minds of the world. (Rinpoche 2002, p154, author's capitalisation)

This image of the human essence being a flame of fire is common to Rinpoche and Teilhard de Chardin and, indeed, within the transcendence movement generally.<sup>308</sup> Those on an active path of transcendence are those who are far more aware of higher

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<sup>307</sup> The Kübler-Ross model is discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>308</sup> Hence the title of King's biography of Chardon: *Spirit of Fire*.

levels of consciousness, often from an early age. Describing memories as a baby and toddler, for example, Yogananda says:

I still remember the helpless humiliations of infancy. I was resentfully conscious of being unable to walk and to express myself freely. (Yogananda 1946, p3)

To be aware that he could not walk requires a degree of self-consciousness far and above anything modern-day child development psychologist would associate with pre-school humans. Yogananda is clearly talking about a transcendent consciousness. He goes on: “My far reaching memories are not unique. Many yogis are known to have retained their self-consciousness”. (Yogananda 1946, p4)

That the mind does not have to redevelop from birth, whilst perhaps inconceivable to conventional science, is an accepted idea within eastern esoteric traditions.

Consciousness, they argue, transcends death and birth. Mental abilities are not restricted to those acquired through growing up in this life. Even to modern neuroscience, this is a staggering statement but, from this autobiography and other accounts, it is clear that such beliefs are increasingly widespread. The higher levels of consciousness that Yogananda refers to, and that I concede as apparent within the more advanced levels of transcendence, do not seem to be developed by us, as such, rather, we are born with them; they are innate tendencies. Our lives can therefore be construed as opportunities to enhance them, to remember even that they are available for us to harness and use. This ‘remembering’ is a theme that I shall return to when reviewing contemporary accounts and in subsequent discussions.<sup>309</sup>

Within a few pages of the above revelation by Yogananda one reads of a guru who appeared in two places at once. Yogananda is relating an account of how his father became a follower of Lahiri Mahasaya.<sup>310</sup>

There in the field, only a yards from us, the form of my great guru suddenly appeared. (Yogananda 1946, p9)

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<sup>309</sup> It will also feature in the models described in Chapter 7: that such consciousness is present from birth might be explained by the ‘mind as a channel’ model in which we are connected with ‘all time and all space’. In teaching Reiki healing I will usually explain that my task is to ‘remind’ my students what Reiki is, and not to ‘teach’ them something new; at which students often nod and smile knowingly.

<sup>310</sup> Lahiri Mahasaya (1828-1895), a Yogavatar, ‘Incarnation of Yoga’. Disciple of Babaji; Guru of Sri Yukteswar. Reviver in modern India of the ancient *Kriya Yoga* science.“ (Yogananda 1946, p360).

For gurus to appear from nowhere and vanish instantly were common in Yogananda's upbringing. Thus, by 1915 when Yogananda "witnessed a strange vision", he was sufficiently mentally transcended to embrace it. During this experience he effectively became a battleship captain during the First World War. He felt precisely what that captain felt as his ship was bombarded and he was hit in the chest by a stray bullet: "My whole body was paralysed, yet I was aware of possessing it as one is conscious of a leg that has gone to sleep" (Yogananda 1946, p305). For a period he was not sure if he was himself or the dead captain, until "A dazzling play of light filled the whole horizon" (ibid).

Yogananda was not concerned as to who the naval captain had been, but was more than ready for insights into the higher levels of transcendence. He says: "I came to understand the relativity of human consciousness, and clearly perceived the unity of the Eternal Light behind the painful dualities of *maya*". (Yogananda 1946, p305). Furthermore he was able to conclude: "*The law of miracles is operable by any man who has realised that the essence of creation is light*". (Yogananda 1946, p306, emphasis in the original)

Whether called 'light', 'God' or 'Reiki' the most powerful of transcendent experiences can and do open minds to a reality beyond the material and rational. Yogananda's experience provided significant and powerful insights into the nature of human consciousness, proving in a way that which no words or theories ever could: that we are far more than the sum of our memories and personal experience of this life. Such visions exemplify both mental and whole-body / non-local transcendence. They may be at the 'rare' end of the spectrum of experience but they happen often enough to be considered part of an emerging transcendent reality.

If war, or memories of war enable significant transcendent experiences, so too can major illnesses. We have already noted as much with allusion to Jung's account of his near-death experience, but here I want to consider other examples to highlight this important point. Thus, in the DVD issued a few years after his book *Still Here*, (2000) Dass shares a number of personal stories which focus on his struggle to continue his quest for truth following a major stroke. He described the event and its resulting phase as 'fierce grace', the title of the DVD.<sup>311</sup> Dass does not expect or encourage his numerous followers to take his word, of that of any guru, saint or Ascended Master, as the truth. He argues, as

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<sup>311</sup> *Fierce Grace*, Zeitgeist Films, 2003.

he has learnt from his own experience, that each individual has to find their own truth through their own experiences. Biographical accounts provide contemporary personal experiences with which others can empathise and associate.

Comparing early recordings of sessions run by Dass<sup>312</sup> to his more recent public talks,<sup>313</sup> is illuminating. Dass's early recordings contain the theory, but little of a personal journey. In the more recent recordings, not only does Dass share his suffering, but his words have a very different feel to them: no longer are they repeated words from those who have gone before. Now they are embedded in his own personal and painful experiences. They appear to have far more depth and a sense of authenticity of being. As he says of his new found connection and inner truth "the trauma [of the stroke] pushed me up into [it]".<sup>314</sup>

A stroke can happen to anybody at any time and, in this sense, is both every-day and profound. Somehow, however, the profound can be found within everyday occurrences as illustrated by my next section, taken from autobiographies of well-known and respected celebrities.<sup>315</sup>

### **Autobiographies of the rich and famous**

Although lacking in spiritual language and extent of numinous quality within their experiences, these extracts serve to illustrate a few additional key points. Most notably, how personal happiness (and success) depend not so much on material gain as the acts of overcoming and transcending one's fears. Actress Sheila Hancock, for example, writes in *Just Me* (2008):

I have had periods in my life when the fear that lurks beneath the surface breaks out and immobilises me ... The dark side of life absorbs and sometimes overwhelms me. All these traits, which I trace back to my wartime childhood, were assuaged by my relationship with John.<sup>316</sup> Despite its ups and downs, he was my rock-like Mr Giles.

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<sup>312</sup> For example *The Core Book Lecture* recorded 31/3/69, Vol 1 of *Evolving Wisdom*, Ram Dass Tape Library. See <http://ramdasstapes.org/cd%20evolving%20wisdom.htm>, accessed 27.6.10.

<sup>313</sup> For example *Dancing with Shiva* recorded 29/9.01, Vol 3 of *Evolving Wisdom*, Ram Dass Tape Library, details as above.

<sup>314</sup> From recordings identified above.

<sup>315</sup> One benefit of using research material such as autobiographies of the famous or ordinary, is that they use ordinary, accessible, language, which itself helps to transcend the language barriers often introduced by disciplinary specialisation.

<sup>316</sup> Her husband, actor John Thaw. This book is about her coming to terms with his death through cancer.

Now, without him, there has been danger of those demons returning. It is my current battle to see that they don't. I must remember that there were also cowslips, watercress and Dancing Ledge. (Hancock 2008, p151)

Whilst acknowledging how much the love between herself and John helped her through fears whilst he was alive, she hints at a love of life as an alternative. Her 'cowslips, watercress and Dancing Ledge' are clearly her 'Favourite Things'.<sup>317</sup>

Rising above fears through focussing on things that engender calm and happiness exemplify every-day, transcendent experiences, and help us to begin to make sense of the transcendent state of mind, and how one can facilitate it and bring it about.

Lynda Bellingham, a popular actress in the UK, concludes her recent autobiography with the following words:

Looking back, perhaps the single biggest problem was fear. Fear of failure, fear of other people - but mostly fear of myself. It has taken sixty years to discover who I really am. It's never too late to find yourself, however lost you may be. (Bellingham 2009, p356)

Just as Hancock describes how many of her fears stemmed from being brought up in wartime years, Bellingham openly shares her adopted childhood and resulting insecurities. As I shall describe in Chapter 7, models used by psychotherapists strongly support the conclusion that if one is to find happiness one must transcend past attachments and otherwise one is prevented from engaging effectively with one's relationship in the world, and prevented from experiencing consequential depth of being in the world. Such commitment is, I argue, the harsh, 'facing reality' process that underpins the suffering and joys of the transcendence journey. These autobiographical stories are a reminder for us that a fulfilling life requires immersion within it, of an acceptance that we cannot control it but must attempt to except—embrace even—whatever happens as best one can. As Hancock says, one usually comes out the other side, 'older and wiser'. This respected actress also describes how life entails the need to transcend youthful innocence and the inevitable fears of adulthood if one is eventually to regain the *childlike*, fearless, ability to engage with life and to enjoy it. In other words, she upholds, as we did before, the child as the very personification of the transcendence process. It is the child-like attitude that is deemed to relish life and live it free from

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<sup>317</sup> To quote the famous song, "When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I'm feeling sad I simply remember my favourite things and then I don't feel so bad" *Sound of Music*, Rogers and Hammerstein.

fearful attachments. In the words of Hancock, "Some people dread old age but I'm having a ball. At my age, I can get away with anything". (Hancock 2008, p267). And she can precisely because she has, in her words, found a way to embody the child within her.

This actress, like the guru we described before, Dass, has reached a level of maturity and transcendence where growing old is seen as another lesson, another opportunity to face death, face fears and encourage a state of faith and grace—and all from this childlike attitude.<sup>318</sup>

Transcendence, bringing heaven to earth, as some might describe it, is considered to be about feeling and knowing at a deep level without complicating it with words. In *My Life, My Way* for example, Sir Cliff Richard (2008) describes an experience during a gospel tour:

I remember talking about love. Love is such a strange word. You know in the Bible they have different words for love. If you loved your mother it was one word; if you loved your wife it was another word; if you loved your friend it was another word. We are stuck with one word. For instance, I love God and I love the skin of custard – same word yet God and custard are miles apart (Richard 2008, p144)

After recording an interview with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, Sir Cliff found that nothing had come out on the tape. They did the interview again, with no problems the second time. Mother Teresa explained: "OK, something you said or I said must have displeased Jesus." (Richard 2008, p227) It got Cliff thinking: "Why do we complicate our faith? Why do we have to intellectualise everything? Sometimes the intellect clouds the issue" (ibid).

As I outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, language can itself be the barrier that needs to be transcended: so many words, phrases and ideas are misunderstood. Another example of such misunderstanding is expressed by such notions as meekness and humility. Talking about how the press often tried to put him down, Richard admits that they:

Portray me as some sort of wishy-washy weakling. They seem to confuse meekness with weakness, and the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. The truth is quite the

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<sup>318</sup> 'Grace' is a word frequently used by those describing their journey of transcendence. See, for example, Teilhard de Chardin quoted by King 1998, p197 or the whole of McCutcheon 1999. Like many of the words and concepts allied to transcendence however, its meaning is nebulous, hard to describe in words. It can however be felt: as for example when listening to the blind tenor Andrea Bocelli singing "Was blind, but now I see" (*Amazing Grace*, performed on *Songs of Praise*, BBC1 2nd October 2011).

opposite. Nobody could survive for as long as I have in this business if they were weak. (Richard 2008, pp153-154)

One only has to think of the understated, divine authority of Gandhi and Mandela to agree with him. Here is another key facet of transcendence: the courage to face one's detractors, to be humble in dealings with others, yet having resolve.

Richard also includes a particular transcendent experience that 'changed his life': He describes his first hearing of Elvis Presley, from the radio in a nearby parked car: "We heard no more than the opening two lines of it before the guy had jumped into the car and driven away, but it was enough. We stood there dumbfounded." (Richard 2008, pp17-18). Since then he insists that had there been no Elvis then there would have been no Cliff Richard. The question of destiny and synchronicity, as discussed at the start of this chapter, are again brought into the spotlight. Transcendence is not so much about personal characteristics or actions, but about embracing life with depth and openness. If the above extracts and examples of transcendence are less extreme than those from Dass or Teilhard de Chardin, they do demonstrate that transcendent experiences are available to us, irrespective of upbringing or walk of life.

### **Autobiographies of ordinary people**

If my hypothesis is correct—that an increasing number of individuals are experiencing transcendence in the way I am describing—then one would expect to find evidence of this amongst the breadth of biographies readily available, not just from the 'rich and famous' as illustrated above, but from the otherwise ordinary individuals who have been so moved by their experiences and/or encouraged and supported into writing their accounts. This is indeed the case, and I now turn to these. In this section I review and quote examples from a selection of autobiographies of those who often describe themselves as 'being on a journey'. Such men and women have been drawn to share their stories, specifically (and in the true spirit of transcendence) to help others. Finn (*Divine Realisation*, 2009), for example, says, "Knowledge is light and with that light comes peace of mind, the greatest gift one can receive and this is what I wish, in whatever small way, to pass on." (Finn 2009, p1)

Finn's modest contribution is typical of this genre of 'journeys of spiritual growth' in many respects. Firstly it is a slim volume (103 pages): the gist of what these books has to say is simple, and such authors know how important it is to keep this simplicity in

their message. Secondly, these authors have often never written before, let alone been published. Their experiences have been so profound that they have been willing to enter the literary world because they know (in the deep, intuitive, sense of the word) that they can and need to inspire others. Thirdly, many of the features of the transcendence movement already mentioned or indicated at (and discussed in later chapters) appear time and time again. Just one sentence from Finn's autobiography, for example, includes numerous key features of transcendence. On page 16, for example:

God was/is one of perfect love, no threats, just gentle guidance sent through many messengers to help us to find our way back to our real home, which is where we all belong, but it is a long arduous journey through many 'dangers, toils and snares'. (Finn 2009, p16)

"We" are travelling "home", to "where we all belong" and whilst that place is one of "perfect love" and "gentle guidance", "it is a long arduous journey". Although Finn focuses on the 'lighter' subjects that her journey has opened to her, she is clear that our journey is painful and that we suffer as we journey home.

In the books that I accepted<sup>319</sup> I experienced 'light bulb' moments where my heart recognised the words and smiled, it was not a case of my mind wanting to believe something, it was as if I already knew what I was reading. (Finn 2009, p15)

This sense of reading to be reminded of a truth, rather than to learn something, is a common theme. Higher truth is not as these writers attest, something that can be taught; it is as we continue to note, a matter to be experienced first-hand to be 'known' and remembered at the deeper level of awareness and consciousness that it itself evokes.

If transcendence is seen as a journey, then the real life experiences as a nomad, or finding one's home within another country, is another recurring theme in these biographies. Partly, as I discuss in Chapter 11, this is about being open to alternative ways of living, to other cultural values and behaviours. Living for a significant period amongst those of a different culture, enables a greater depth of experience of cultural difference and assists in the acceptance that no one form of society or cultural norm is 'right': merely different. Dass, Yogananda and Teilhard de Chardin all spent significant portions of their lives immersed in cultures different from those in which they were

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<sup>319</sup> She explains that discernment is vital in choosing our reading material during periods of questioning.



brought up.<sup>320</sup> Transcending the cultural divides and seeing the value in each was important to them all. Teilhard de Chardin foresaw:

“a confluence of East and West,” a necessary coming together or convergence of the active currents of faith in the world around a powerful new mysticism that he, somewhat misleadingly, always called “the road of the West.” What he really meant was a new and future synthesis of Eastern and Western spiritualities. (King 1998, p189)<sup>321</sup>

Yogananda was in total agreement:

The great masters of India who have shown keen interest in the West have well understood modern conditions. They know that, until there is better assimilation in all nations of the distinctive Eastern and Western virtues, world affairs cannot improve. Each hemisphere needs the best offerings of the other. (Yogananda 1946, p533)

Both Yogananda and Chardon, whilst true to their own faiths, were committed to greater understanding and acceptance between faiths, with the former speaking in such cities as London, at the invitations of the British National Council of the World Fellowship of Faiths,<sup>322</sup> and Teilhard de Chardin speaking in support of the Union des Croyants.<sup>323</sup> This same spirit of multi-faith religious commitment for humanity as a whole underlies the Interspiritual movement as described in Chapter 3.

In Teilhard de Chardin’s case, to propose a ‘super-humanization’ and emergent transcendent humanity brought him into constant and painful conflict with his Jesuit superiors. They continually denied him permission to publish any but his strictly scientific works, despite his undying faith that they needed to be published. Such on-going constraints from ‘the establishment’ are typical of the suffering often endured by those leading in any era, the post-rational being no exception, and expressive of the resistance to change, to the seduction of attachments and self-containment, and the fear of having this ruptured in the name of transcendence.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> The American Dass, previously known as Dr. Richard Alpert, travelled extensively to India from 1967 onwards. The Indian Yogananda did the reverse, first travelling to the USA in 1920. The Frenchman Teilhard de Chardin lived for many years in both China and the USA.

<sup>321</sup> Quoting Teilhard de Chardin’s *The spiritual contribution of the far east* (from *Toward the Future*, London: Collins, 1975).

<sup>322</sup> In September 1936. See Yogananda 1946, p518.

<sup>323</sup> The French branch of the World Congress of Faiths. See King 1998, p189.

<sup>324</sup> Hardy was similarly constrained. See Hay 2011 (throughout).

Whilst such suffering may come from outside ourselves, the suffering of transcendence can, just as frequently, come from within us. The courage to suffer as fears are faced is a recurring theme, illustrated here by the recovering addict David Agnew in his *Walking into Eternity* (2006):

Yet the answers I need if I am to grow,  
They will only be found in the dark.  
I must conquer my fears, and say to myself,  
I'm no longer afraid of the dark.  
(Agnew 2006, p46)

Facing and working through fear is but one way amongst numerous others that the practical reality of transcendence is described within the autobiographies reviewed. Finn, for example, on her first page, says:

After my 'transition', I studied many subjects that slowly but surely led me to a profound realisation that there was more to life than I could ever imagined possible. I had 'climbed out of the box' (Finn 2009, p1)

To climb, or think out(side) of the box, is an apposite metaphor for transcendence, both mental and whole-body / non-local. Benner, in describing the first of what was to be a sequence of transcendent experiences over many decades, writes: "Now it was a different universe, not the one in which I had lived before" (Benner 2002, p3). "A different universe" is another appropriate description for transcendence. Fischer, in a very different output format, includes the following in the first paragraph of his dissertation towards his Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical Psychology: "Here comes the turning of the world, opening to reveal that which it holds apart, yet suffused with the mystery of presence". (Fischer 2009, p1)

He expands on his meaning in his second chapter:

This topic is fugitive, hermetic, changing hues like a chameleon, patterns like a kaleidoscope. It concerns a nebulous, synaesthetic event that seems to dwell just outside or below the language of the known. It grows out of oblivion, both calling for and resisting intelligibility. (Fischer 2009, p14)

Fischer is describing *The Evocative Moment: A Study in Depth Psychological Poetics* (the title of his thesis):. 'Evocative Moment' is another expressive way of attempting to put the notion of a transcendent transition into words. Whereas Fischer is attempting an interdisciplinary discussion of the phenomenon, Finn is discussing the 'transition' by which she means her shift in consciousness that her experiences and reflections enabled. Describing this transition she says:

Keeping an open mind and an open heart is an essential ingredient to life. Had I not kept my mind open, I would not have gained the knowledge that I have to date, such knowledge going beyond the boundaries of religion. Had I not kept my heart open I would not have found my own truth, nor would I have touched and aligned with the deep knowing within me, a deep knowing that exists within everyone. (Finn 2009, p18)

<sup>325</sup>

This need to keep an open heart and an open mind is another key factor that is repeatedly stated as enabling transitions and transcendence, as is the need to find one's own truth: to take on board, or be taught, somebody else's is not transcendence. Such a truth, that those on a transcendent journey seek, is not about a set of words or beliefs but, as Finn says above, a "deep knowing within me". If others' truths are not taken for one's own, they are, however, accepted as valid for others.

### **Inclusiveness and openness**

Thus, one of the factors that sets participants in the transcendence movement apart is their openness to any and all paths and faiths. Like the interspiritual movement discussed in Chapter 3, a number of individuals have, in their biographies, emphasised how openness and inclusiveness is essential. In accepting the experience of others, and learning from their different perspectives, we read how significant shifts in thinking can be enabled. The Dalai Lama, for example, writes:

Looking back to this trip in 1956, I realize that my visit to the Theosophical Society in Chennai (then Madras) left a powerful impression. There I was first directly exposed to people, and to a movement, that attempted to bring together the wisdom of the world's spiritual traditions as well as science. I felt among the members a sense of tremendous openness to the world's great religions and a genuine embracing of pluralism.<sup>326</sup>

A primary objective in using biographies as a feature of my literature search is to illustrate how foremost thinkers within the transcendence movement did not simply talk and write about the principles of evolved consciousness, but also lived these principles. His Holiness is much respected for 'practicing what he preaches', not least in his on-

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<sup>325</sup> Finn's transition was in fact a conversion (back) to Christianity: she had been brought up a Christian but rejected the religion for many years, before her realisation encouraged her to re-join the church; on her terms. She is however, at pains to point out, like interspiritual commentators as discussed in Chapter 6, that "such [transcendent] knowledge going beyond the boundaries of religion" (ibid).

<sup>326</sup> From *Toward A True Kinship of Faiths* written by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and included on web page [www.theosophical.org/events/news/DalaiLama.html](http://www.theosophical.org/events/news/DalaiLama.html), accessed 8.6.10. This page describes a meeting between the Dalai Lama and senior members of the Theosophical Society in June 2010, illustrating how he much his Holiness values such dialogue.

going series of dialogues between himself (and representatives of other Buddhist traditions) and scientists (See, for example, Goleman 2003).

Another shining example of this feature is Sir George Trevelyan: his biography includes these glowing words:

David Lorimer says, “light and love emanated from him in the last few years of his life. You could feel he’d experienced a bliss, and a light. Something was coming from him that was beyond charisma.” Many people have made similar comments, to the effect that it seemed that George was surrounded by an aura of pure, non-egotistical simplicity. (Farrer 2002, p167)

Individuals on the path are typically those who treat others with a genuine respect and openness. Philip, Brown’s new partner was such a man:

He was the first man I’d ever met who seemed genuinely interested in my weird dreams and occasional off the planet psychic experiences. He had a strong spiritual curiosity. (Brown 2010, p203)

The subjects of this thesis may well have ‘spiritual curiosity’ but they are also, often acutely, aware of practical needs and real-life realities. Many are definitely not saints:

Life isn’t written by Rogers and Hammerstein. Real people have histories, hang-ups, phobias, anxieties, egos, ambitions not to mention opinionated friends and family waiting to pass judgement. (Brown 2010, p204)

Such is Brown’s reflection as she and Philip come to accept the reality of each other’s presence. Above all, Brown’s book provides a not un-typical example of how life provides the experiences through which many people transcend previously limiting and limited way of thinking, to become a “philosopher in a dressing gown” (Brown 2010, p253). This epithet was applied by Brown to her second son Rob, after he had survived a colostomy. Shortly after the operation Rob notes, “I never realised the sky was such an intense blue”. (Brown 2010, p239). After the supposed miracle of surviving his onslaught, he claimed to be able to see the miracle of life in all things. He writes, “Here on earth we think our little lives are so important. Even though we’re an integral part of everything, we’re just tiny specks in the universe”. (Brown 2010, p256). When things got too much Rob just looked at stars and saw things from their perspective.

My chosen autobiographies clearly illustrate the impact of transcendence on the lives of ordinary people. They include examples grounded in house and home. Brown’s stories of the lessons learn from her cat Cleo are as striking as they are accessible. As she

herself intimates, animals, such as cats, for example, may know only too well how to transcend!:

Free from the slavery of measuring every moment ... they never worry about endings or beginnings. ... The joy of basking on a window ledge can seem eternal. (Brown 2010, p232)<sup>327</sup>

‘Eternal’ in their manner, yet seeming like only “eighteen minutes” to those of us (like Brown) who insist on measuring time. Likewise animals such as cats seem to know or at least sense when a family (such as Brown’s) *need* their comfort not when they simply want it. (Brown 2010, p285), Indeed, Brown suggests that humankind has much to learn about transcendence from other creatures.

## Summary

The literature that has been consulted in this research emphasises that the transcendence process, with its associated transcendent experiences and periods of suffering, is not so much a rare event or sequence of events that occur in the life of an exceptional mystic or devout religious person—as is often considered to be the case with *religious* experiences per se—but is a manifestation of the natural unfolding of the life of any human being; it is the natural—or as Heidegger connotes, the *authentic*—expression of our Being; our humanity when in touch with itself. It underpins the otherwise mundane event of a cat being sold in an airport bookstore (Brown) as much as it does in erudite scholarship or interdisciplinary doctoral research (such as that of Fischer). Transcendence manifests itself as a spectrum of experiences, through which an individual learns how to grow into him or herself, and to adopt a more accepting attitude that is more at one with the events of the world that we find ourselves facing. Inter-twining with such experiences is the continually evolving ‘life-map’ in the mind that develops as that person struggles to make sense of their world. In the previous two chapters I have demonstrated that the experiences of transcendence, personal growth and suffering span the continents and published literary genres. In the following chapter I further demonstrate that it is ordinary people who are increasingly making an active commitment to the process.

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<sup>327</sup> Indeed, the theologian Martin Buber would concede as much, with his famous allusion to the cat as expressing *the Thou* of being through its gaze and by being at the threshold of speech. See, Buber 1937

# Chapter 6

## Collected first-hand accounts

In the ten to fifteen years preceding the start of this formal research I had the pleasure of meeting many men and women from a plethora of backgrounds, who seemed to be living what I now understand as a life of ‘transcendence’. I here now present evidence that I have analysed and collated from first-hand accounts of some such people, whom responded to my advertised call to be interviewed for my research into the nature and dynamics of transcendent experiences.

Certainly since the formation of the RERC by Hardy in 1969, if not before, there has been a steady influx of accounts of so called ‘religious’, ‘mystical’, and ‘spiritual’ experiences. The RERC archive now contains around six thousand personal accounts. From these reports there can be no doubt that ‘religious’ or transcendent experiences are by no means rare or unusual. The emphasis in their review and analysis to date however has been with regards to their very occurrence, as separate and individual experiences. My doctoral research and my empirical findings has attracted interest by the RERC because I decided to take a different approach in my analysis of the accounts I collated. My focus is on *multiple* transcendent experiences, over a period of time, that have been reported by the same individual, and in so doing, I have sought to show how these personal experiences reflect a possible evolutionary trend in our general disposition towards transcendence.

It has been my observation in my meetings and discussions with fellow seekers that many individuals are having not just one but a succession of transcendent experiences, and that over time these experiences can be seen as part of a bigger picture of personal self and spiritual development. I found, on first making contact with the RERC at the commencement of this research, that such positive ‘fruits’ of religious/transcendent experiences have always been central to the archived data held by the RERC, where ‘fruits’ is actually a designated key field to complete by respondents for their database.

I begin an overview of my empirical evidence by describing my methods of collection and analysis of accounts of these ‘multiple’ transcendent experiences.

The accounts collected were all first-hand reports of transcendent experienced as written in response to an ‘invitation to contribute to research’ (reproduced in Appendix 6). The invitation specifically requested accounts of ‘multiple’ experiences; i.e. a number of separate transcendent experiences over a period of years.

The overall aim of the data collection exercise was to indicate how transcendent experiences contribute to the enrichment of the lives of many individuals. Accounts of experiences considered ‘negative’, ‘scary’, or in some way disturbing, were received, were also studied, thus providing a more comprehensive examination of the contributed experiences. By embracing both the ‘highs’ and ‘lows’, a more realistic dynamic for the transcendence process could be determined. This was found particularly helpful in the development of the models discussed in Chapter 7.

Whilst initial experiences were found to be important, often more significant was the mental processing after the experience; of periods during which experiences were assimilated. That is, consideration was given to both short and long-term effects of the experience, including the manner of cumulative effects of many experiences.

The primary objective of the analysis was to identify common factors that contributed to an enrichment effect: i.e. to discover which features of an experience (and its triggers/enabling circumstances) most frequently bring about beneficial transcendent experiences.

Besides qualitative and (limited) quantitative analysis of the data gathered, this chapter includes actual quotes from my contributors. Not only do these serve to demonstrate the spread of individuals but, but using the contributor’s own words, so a better ‘feel’ for their perception of their experiences is portrayed. Whilst all quotes are taken from responses to my ‘invitation to contribute’, these take a number of forms, which I will now describe.

Having posted my ‘invitation to contribute’ on many notice-boards both physical and virtual in a wide range of situations, respondents were thanked for their interest and sent a questionnaire to complete.<sup>328</sup> This questionnaire was developed from that used by the

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<sup>328</sup> My ‘Multiple Transcendent Experiences’ questionnaire is reproduced as Appendix 7.

RERC, with the addition of questions aimed at exploring multiple experiences and enabling factors. During the course of the investigation, twenty-two questionnaires were returned. Appendix 8 lists these contributors by age, gender, location, religion and occupation (not by name so as to comply with ethical requirements of data protection). The location includes country and postcode (for UK) or state (for US) to provide a more useful analysis of results.

It was the original intent to compare submissions according to age, gender and religion, but the limited quantity of data and large range of inputs do not provide statistically significant results in this respect. A few observations and conclusions can however be drawn from quantitative analysis. Of the 22 questionnaires returned, eight were from males and 14 from females. This ratio is roughly consistent with my observations over the preceding decade: women, generally, are more likely to be aware of and committed to a transcendent path, and also to open to the communication of such experiences to others, but there are also a significant number of men on such a journey too.<sup>329</sup>

No particular attempt had been made to gather accounts from any particular age group. The distribution of ages of contributors (at the time of completing the questionnaire) is fairly flat, with four respondents aged 29 or younger, six aged between 30 and 44, five aged between 45 and 59 and seven aged 60 or over. This would suggest that age, per se, is not a critical factor in whether or not an individual has multiples transcendent experiences.<sup>330</sup>

One could (as I have done in Appendix 9c) categorise the respondents into their religious affiliations. To do so in a conventional breakdown between, say, Catholics, Anglicans, Buddhists and so on, would however present a misleading picture. Whilst the spread of religions represented is noticeable and important, perhaps more striking is the way in which respondents often chose to describe their “Religious background”. C17, for example, writes “everything except Islam”. No less than three others (C4, C8 and C22) make a point of saying “raised” or “brought up” (Christian) whilst clarifying in

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<sup>329</sup> A study into the reason for this is outside the scope of this research, but one could hypothesise that the conventional societal pressure on men to be less emotional and not to show their sensitive nature is likely to be an important factor. Considerable academic debate exist on gender differences related to religion and spirituality; for example Loewenthal, K. M., MacLeod, A. K., & Cinnirella, M. (2002), King, U. (1993) and Gelfer, J. (2009).

<sup>330</sup> Whilst the models presented in Chapter 7 suggest a relative ‘maturity’ or ‘degree’ of transcendence, there is no suggestion or logical reason why this should be age dependent.



subsequent questions that they are now closer to what I might call multi-faith or interfaith in their beliefs and practice. I would argue that such basic data already points to a good degree of transcendence within the attitudes of these individuals: they have, it seems, ‘grown out of’ their conditioned religious associations.

Some respondents, rather than (or in addition to) completing a questionnaire chose to send me separate pieces of texts, either already written for their own prior benefit, or in direct response to my invitation. Such contributions, whilst not amenable to scrutiny within quantitative data analysis, but nevertheless being written freely and without the constraints of the questions of the questionnaire, often raised enlightening features that did not, and perhaps could not be expected from questionnaire responses.<sup>331</sup>

In order to pursue features emerging from the questionnaires a small number of contributors were chosen for face to face interview, which were then transcribed for further analysis. The choice of interviewees was largely practical: i.e. those who were local and available enough for a meeting to be viable.<sup>332, 333</sup> Appendix 10 identifies which contributors provided information instead of or in addition to the questionnaire.

Contributions ranged from a complete e-book (Lockett 2009, C27) to just a few lines in an e-mail:

I begin to doubt if I could be helpful since I have had a lifetime of many small experiences – mostly of being surrounded by warmth and protected and I have never logged dates and times etc. (C30).

This modest input reflect numerous e-mails and face-to-face discussions that I have had over the past fifteen years: to have felt “surrounded by warmth and protected” has become ordinary to the point that the lady concerned thought it not worthy of mention. Yet to feel “surrounded by warmth and protected” is precisely the example of whole-body / non-local consciousness that demonstrates the daily reality of transcendence.

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<sup>331</sup> One contributor, for example, besides offering her own accounts in the questionnaire, took the opportunity to share a “Spiritual Diary” of a deceased aunt of hers, here included as C29 and also donated to the RERC archive.

<sup>332</sup> Interviews via Skype were considered, but ruled out on this occasion for a range of technical and time constraints.

<sup>333</sup> Both the ‘Invitation to Contribute’ and Interview plans were approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Arts and Humanities.

The questionnaire was also structured so as to allow numerical assessment of the number of transcendent experiences over time. Respondents were asked “How frequently have you had and do you have transcendent experiences?” for each of the time periods: “During the last 12 months”, “In period 12-24 months ago” and “In 12 months following your first experience”, thus assessing both number of experiences and progression over time. Of the sixteen respondents who completed this question, only two reported a decreasing number of experiences in the years following their first transcendent experience, with eight reporting similar numbers per year and six an increasing number of experiences over time. The numbers of experiences themselves is also worthy of note: in the first 12-month period, respondents had, on average 4.2 experiences, in the intervening years they had 4.8 and in the most recent 12 months, 5.4 experiences considered transcendent.<sup>334</sup> Two facts are thus immediately evident: transcendent experiences, as categorised by my contributors, are far from being a ‘once in a lifetime’ occurrence: they are regular and on-going. Secondly, there is a noticeable trend for the number and thus frequency of such experiences to increase over a number of years. Both conclusions support my contention that transcendence can best be seen as a process of personal development, each successive experience enabling mental transcendence which in turn enables further experiences of a transcendent nature.

C21’s answer to Question 4.10, for example, supports this contention:

I suppose it just stopped me in my tracks a bit. ... It made me reminisce about the other experiences. They’re always so minimal and seem so negligible, but when added together and occurring continually, I have the feeling of trying to grasp for something more profound and to stop negating any significance to them.

To reach such a conclusion requires an openness and awareness that is itself indicative of someone on a journey of transcendence. The sample accounts have been obtained from individuals sufficiently interested in the topic of transcendence that they wished to participate. This corresponds to the focus of the thesis which is that a proportion of the general population who have not only had such experiences, but who are sufficiently aware and interested in such matters to be willing to commit the time to completing the questionnaire. This sample may thus represent the ‘leading edge’ of public opinion and

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<sup>334</sup> Note that these numbers are conservative estimates, since the questionnaire groups responses, with the many respondents indicating they had “7 or more” experiences. Further comments from these often indicated ‘numerous’ such experiences per year.

experience and, as such, give a clearer picture as to the trends under discussion within this dissertation.

It is not the intent of this work to perform extensive quantitative analysis nor to attempt to compare this self-selecting group with the general population. The aim is to examine the accounts received qualitatively and to identify some of the common facets related to the process and experiences of transcendence reported therein.

Given this aim, invitations to participate were distributed in such a way as to obtain a broad cross-section of accounts. The 'invitations to participate' were posted in particular to groups and organisations within the transcendence movement (as discussed in Chapter 3), that is, to groups with a particular interest in transcendence related topics such as the SMN and SDI.<sup>335</sup> It was also posted in 'ordinary' places, such as University notice boards in order to illicit a response from those who did not consciously identify as members of organisations within the transcendence movement.

Appendix 11 lists the locations at which the 'invitation to contribute' were posted, either physically or electronically, during October, November and early January 2009. To ensure a practical and manageable data gathering exercise the invitations were circulated (physically) within the geographic area in and around Bangor, Gwynedd, on-line via international web communities and direct to known contacts in specific, target, groups.<sup>336</sup>

During this main collection period and throughout 2010, the invitation was still available on my research web pages<sup>337</sup> and would have been mentioned during numerous other personal conversations. Not surprisingly, other than a cluster of respondents from North Wales, there is little other correlation between the initial invitation locations and the location of respondees. This is explained by the virtual nature of many of the circulations and the wide spread of recipients on the various lists circulated. Likewise, the precise mode of receipt of requests and widely varying manner in which individuals respond to direct e-mailings and internet group postings can explain the apparent lack of response from some postings but proportionately high responses via another posting. In

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<sup>335</sup> Scientific and Medical Network and Spiritual Directors International, as discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>336</sup> For example to those who have taken Reiki training with me over the years.

<sup>337</sup> [www.algarveowl.org/research](http://www.algarveowl.org/research)

some cases, one recipient circulated personally to individuals known to be interested in this topic. Such personal requests were generally far more effective in eliciting responses.

It is acknowledged that the North Wales area is often considered to be of ‘non-conformist’ religious background. Whilst this might create a bias in aiming for a ‘representative’ sample, in the context of this investigation it is considered a positive trait. As already stated, this project, in studying evolutionary trends, was focused on identifying the leading edge of views and experiences.<sup>338</sup>

With the exception of clusters around the invite locations (as discussed above), in practice it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify any particular category or group of individuals who provided significant collected data. This is partly due to the contributors being self-selecting, but also because of how the invitations were disseminated. As discussed above, what happened after my posting was totally outside of my control. Rather than see this as a methodological weakness, this factor can be seen as broadening the population base of responses, thus highlighting that those who have multiple transcendent experiences come from a wide range of backgrounds.

Typical of how contributors volunteered, beyond responding to posted invitations, is C16. I was attending a local Theosophical meeting and talking to a couple who were new to the meetings. I gave them my card and a few days later received a letter from them asking if we might meet to further the discussions. During this subsequent meeting, which covered a wide range of topics related to Theosophy and transcendence, they asked if they might help me somehow. Since this project had, quite naturally, cropped up in the conversation, I invited them to contribute.

Likewise, when attending conferences, delegates would express an interest in my work. I might then mention my invitation to them: a few would then return a completed questionnaire. The enthusiasm to be part of my research was often significant, with contributors typically keen to enable and support it.

The proportion of those offering to send a contribution but not actually doing so, whilst hard to quantify, was comparatively high. This can probably be explained by the sheer

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<sup>338</sup> Further studies could be undertaken in other geographic areas to assess any variation in factors around the UK (or world). Such a comparison was outside the scope of this study.

pressures of life on these individuals and perhaps that, whilst willing to share their experiences verbally, were not quite ready to commit them to print. This factor does not however disguise the large number of individuals who, during this research, have been keen to share their accounts, if not formally, at least informally. Add this number to those I have met since my own first interest in the subject (in around 1987) and who demonstrate many of the traits and beliefs outlined in the discourse, then I have perhaps 'met' (on line, if not in person) approaching a thousand individuals who are indicative of the transcendence movement. This number would include most of the four hundred or so who have studied Reiki Healing with me and other attendees at healing meeting, spiritual gatherings and conferences over the intervening years.

In all there were thirty-four individuals who contributed in one way or another to this chapter. The means by which their accounts were received is summarised in Appendix 10. Contributors and any quotes from their accounts are identified by a reference number and an indicator of age and gender. Thus C16 (F63) refers to Contributor 16 who is a 63 year old female. Quotes are only included in this thesis where permission has been given for such extracts to be used. Where quotes are taken from a completed questionnaire, the reference also includes the question number.

The Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) program NVivo8 was used to assist in the analysis of accounts received. However, even the ability to code and sort information in such a way was found to be no substitute for working with the accounts to obtain a 'feel' for the contributors and their reports. Identifying commonly occurring words, for example, does not readily allow for the multiplicity of use of some words by different people. Summary and comparative analysis of and between responses in the questionnaire thus proved difficult for many of the factors under consideration. Despite the care taken in the phrasing of questions it became clear that different respondents had interpreted various terms in a range of ways. Perhaps the most striking example was in response to Questions 3.6 & 4.6:

Were you engaged in any of these sorts of activities immediately prior to the Experience?

C18 (M 43), for example, was meditating at the time of his quoted recent experience, which he categorised as 'Mundane/Ordinary'. Against 'Religious' and against 'Spiritual/Therapeutic' he had written "No : not in my book!" Such a response illustrates two points already emphasised:

Firstly, what respondents class as ‘normal’ (or ‘Mundane/Ordinary’) varies considerably and often includes the very transcendent experience this study is examining. When asked (Q 4.6) whether she was engaged in a spiritual activity prior to her experience C22 says: “Yes I’m a child of GOD life is always spiritual.” In other words, ‘normal’ and ‘spiritual’ are synonymous to her and indeed it would appear so to most others in this study. To their minds there is no separation between the ordinary three-dimensional reality and other dimensions (that I embrace within the phrase whole-body / non-local, consciousness) that those individuals featured here are becoming increasingly aware of. To such people, as discussed in Part One, there is only *one* reality.

Secondly, this response highlights how certain individuals who do not consider themselves religious choose not to label their experiences as ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’, even if others might. Participant 18 (above), for example, declared that he had no religious affiliation and made it clear that, as a physicist, he did not believe in God.<sup>339</sup>

To investigate ‘negative’ experiences, the text inputs received were examined for the following terms: fear, dread, frightened or afraid, terrified, worried or scared. Only six cases fell into these categories. On further investigation, three of these were actually found to be examples of ‘positive fruits’:

I believe my connection to spirit helps me all the time. I don’t live in fear of death. (C13, Q5.1)

I am never afraid, I have Divine protection (C22, Q4.5)

Not to worry about the fleeting trivia that tends to cause much anxiety much of the time. It was reassuring and calming. (C5, Q4.10)

Even the other three accounts confirm, rather than provide evidence against, my hypotheses. One involved learning to control frightening dreams:

I’d be scared of (I remember one involving a lion age 4!) a lion and kind of split away from that mode of consciousness and be able to see/commentate/observe from several independent modalities/view myself objectively, then realise I was dreaming, and thus that I could control it. (C21, Q3.5)

Such awareness and ability to transcend fear is undoubtedly a prime example of transcendence. The second example, C16, is considered below as an example of

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<sup>339</sup> It is partly for this reason that I use the term ‘transcendent’ rather than ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ to describe the experiences under discussion, although even this term has restrictive connotations to some individuals.

childhood memories of transcendent consciousness, again illustrating a higher level of awareness consistent with my contention of an evolution of mode of thought. My final sample of a 'negative' experience is C18 (M43) who had a "bad trip" on LSD. So much so, that the experience "Made me stop taking LSD!" (C18, Q3.10).<sup>340</sup>

Such honesty and openness is a feature of all of my contributors. In a similar vein, a significant number of my contributors were not only keen to participate but were willing to be identified. Leanne Halyburton, a life coach working on Anglesey, writes:

I have never desired to be anonymous in my entire life ... the ego is alive and kicking! Feel free to quote me; if I don't want it to be heard, I shouldn't be saying it!<sup>341</sup>

Halyburton, like a number of other participants in this project, has transcended the fear of what others might think or say. Individuals within the transcendence movement are not afraid to speak their mind. The inner work of facing ourselves enables a transcendence of the barrier that often exists between our inner world (what one might say to oneself) and the persona displayed to the rest of the world. Such dual identity is both an example of the dualistic nature of modernism and a not un-typical cause of personality disorders.<sup>342</sup> There is no place for such split personalities in a healthy individual or society. As Halyburton says, if she is not willing to openly share her views, of what value are they?

And yet this is far from (modern) egotism. Transcendence is about becoming individuals without becoming individualistic; it is about being able to celebrate and live as unique human beings without feeling separate from the rest of humanity or life in its fullness. Halyburton, like other contributors, no longer feels anonymous. By accepting

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<sup>340</sup> My 'Invitation to Contribute' actually requested no 'drug induced' transcendent experiences, but this contributor submitted this case anyway and it is considered here as it illustrates the overcoming of what the contributor then considered a harmful habit. That is not to deny that some groups and individuals consider drug taking a key enabler of transcendent experience. Its use is excluded from this study on the grounds of restricting factors to a more manageable number.

<sup>341</sup> Personal e-mail 18.6.10.

<sup>342</sup> Damasio, for example, talks about the "anonymous autobiographical self" of some schizophrenics. (See Damasio 2000, pp215-216)

responsibility for their own self and lives they no longer feel guilty about being different.<sup>343</sup>

Similar views are also found amongst humanistic psychologists. Heron, for example, describes what he calls a ‘transpersonal’ state as:

A state in which personhood is transformed from being identified with egoic separateness to a state which integrates the individuating modes with the participative modes, and is fully creative and expressive in the world; is transparent for psychic and spiritual energies; celebrates distinctness of being within unitive awareness. (Heron 1992, p63)

The phrase “fully creative and expressive in the world” is particularly pertinent here, with a number of those who contributed personal accounts also having written a book which I reviewed amongst the biographies in Chapter 5. Both C19 and C34 illustrate this blurred distinction between account contributors and authors of biographies, which came about as follows:

Impressed by *Divine Realisation*, I approached author Patricia Mary Finn (C19, F62), who was happy to complete a questionnaire and to answer questions about it, as herself. Similarly with Alexandra Martin (C34): as a member of *Spiritual Directors International*, I receive their quarterly resource *Listen*. Reading in it a poem by Martin, my face became hot and I felt an immediate resonance. She had written:

*Like the body, Belief  
Starts at the head,  
A processing of nerves  
Ganglion, tangled  
Logical and semi-logical connections.  
Eventually you swallow— Gulp of faith— Having tasted, To see how it settles.  
Next to the belly, Deep seat of Satisfaction Or indigestion.  
(Martin 2010, p4)*

This very visceral description resonated so strongly with my own: frequent stomach upsets, to Martin as well as myself, being indicators of some deep acceptance (‘stomaching’) of unpalatable realities.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> This is not to dismiss the significant, legitimate reasons why many who have transcendent experiences prefer not to share their experiences or prefer to do so anonymously. Such reasons include a modesty borne of humility or position in society, for example. These views would always be respected.

<sup>344</sup> In a subsequent e-mail, Martin expressed “honour” that I wanted to quote her poem. (Personal e-mail dated 15.10.10.)



For each account, respondents were asked (Q3.6 and Q4.6) what sorts of activities they were engaged in immediately prior to the experience. They had the options of answering ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to “Mundane/Ordinary”, “Religious”, “Spiritual/ Therapeutic”, “Creative/Artistic/Musical” or “In nature”. The responses clearly indicate that engagement in a religious or spiritual activity is by no means a prerequisite for transcendent experiences. C13, for example, provided such answers as, “Evening Meal, getting ready for evening”, and 21, “Merely reading an article”. The factor with the most ‘yes’ responses, by a significant margin, was ‘Mundane/ Ordinary’ again confirming my own experiences: that transcendent experiences can happen anywhere and at any time.<sup>345</sup>

Of course, some situations are generally considered more conducive to transcendent experience than others. In this respect, my results are largely in agreement with Michael Argyle (1999). His investigation into what triggered or enabled (religious) experience identified the top three triggers as “Listening to music” (49% of respondents), Prayer (48%) and “Beauties of nature such as sunset” (45%) (Argyle 1999, p61). Both ‘nature’ and ‘creative’ activities (including music) scored highly amongst my participants with a score of 7 experiences each. The score for ‘Mundane/ Ordinary’ however was more than double this (at 16).

It seems surprising that mundane or normal ‘day-to-day’ activities, whilst so prevalent as triggers in my sample should receive little if any recognition in much previous investigation, such as that by Argyle. However this information would not have come to light for the simple reason that the question was not asked. Most research into ‘religious experience’ started from the premise that such experiences require a specific trigger. Also, by definition if for no other reason, they were associated with religious (or at least spiritual) activities as opposed to secular or ordinary ones. However, as soon as the research perspective is shifted, and respondents asked about experiences considered religious, spiritual or transcendent yet obtained in a day-to-day context, equally powerful experiences are found to occur. The detailed descriptions of experiences show no lesser degree of transcendence or resulting ‘fruits’. C16’s answer to Question 4.10, for example, is typical of the accounts of experiences obtained under ‘ordinary’ circumstances:

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<sup>345</sup> The full breakdown of responses to this question is given in Appendix 9d.

Sitting on the beach and soaking up the beauty in front of me I just saw this very light curtain. Although the panorama was there it was something like watching a film. I knew that if I could have got up & moved the curtain there would be nothing there. Weird but enthralling. (C16, Q4.10)

She goes on to describe the fruits of the above experience: “I wanted to know more about life & how my ‘mechanism’ works.”<sup>346</sup> Clearly this respondent had been affected by her ‘ordinary’ visit to the beach and, as am hypothesising, sees the effect of such experiences to be part of an on-going personal journey.

The above example, like many others, illustrates another important facet of transcendent experiences: they can happen whether one is alone or in a group.<sup>347</sup> This question was examined in my questionnaire by asking whether the enabling situation was some sort of formal group or facilitated event. Of the accounts that included an answer to this question (Q3.7 and 4.7), there were 11 ‘yes’ responses compared to 23 ‘no’ responses. That is, the reported experiences were twice as likely to be a ‘solo’ as opposed to a group situation. From the now seminal work of James on such matters, this should come as no surprise, since even in an overtly religious group situation, the experience is often very personal:

And although the favor of the God, as forfeited or gained, is still an essential feature of the story, and theology plays a vital part therein, yet the acts to which this sort of religion prompts are personal not ritual acts, the individual transacts the business by himself alone, and the ecclesiastical organization, with its priests and sacraments and other go-betweens, sinks to an altogether secondary place. The relation goes direct from heart to heart, from soul to soul, between man and his maker. (James 1902, p29)

That being said, there are undoubtedly situations where being part of a group, and in particular in the presence of an inspiring leader, can be an enabler to transcendent experiences. Questions 3.7, 3.9, 4.7 and 4.9 address these questions. For those experiences obtained in a group situation, I ask how the respondent perceived the leader of the group. They were ask to rate the teacher, facilitator (or whatever specific role the ‘leader’ had) on the following scales: Charismatic (1) to ‘No personality’ (5); Serene / Peaceful (1) to Stressed / Hassled (5); ‘Inspired Trust’ (1) to “Dodgy” (5);

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<sup>346</sup> In response to Q5.1.

<sup>347</sup> This is perhaps nor surprising when seen in the context of child development and learning theory which offers two, contrasting emphases. Whereas personal exploration is considered key by, for example, Piaget (1937), to Vygotsky (1978), it is the assistance and support of others that is critical. In the context of learning about transcendence, both views would seem to have validity.

Compassionate (1) to Uncaring (5); and Sensitive (1) to Insensitive (5). The results are as one might expect: on each of the scales, those leaders who enabled transcendence in others are far more likely to exhibit the positive traits often associated with having attained a degree of transcendence.<sup>348</sup>

I used the term ‘leader’ in a very broad sense. Just as helpful as a teaching or preaching type leader seems to be the company of others who are present as equals. C13, for example, describing her experience in an “informal circle”, writes:

I was really pleased to realise how well my friends are progressing with their spiritual development. (C13, Q4.10)

Those on a shared journey acknowledge the inclusiveness and ‘sense of belonging’ that is so valued by those engaged with the transcendence process. Just as importantly, there is no competitive aspect: there is a desire for everybody to make progress.

In arguing that transcendent experiences may occur both for individuals on their own and for individuals in a group situation, I may appear to be contradicting myself. On the contrary; or rather, this apparent paradox describes the reality of transcendence. On some occasions being in a group assists the process; on other occasions it does not. Likewise sometimes being on one’s own can help the transcendence process, whilst at others it may inhibit the process. Transcendent experiences do not happen ‘to order’ or in a way that can be described by a simple list of dos and do nots. Whilst there may, as I discuss in Part Four, be some generally enabling factors and situations that make the transcendent, or holy, more likely, the transcendent process is somehow more intrinsic to life itself. Indeed one could conclude, as Otto does: “That not only the rational but also the non-rational elements of the complex category of ‘holiness’ are *a priori* elements and each in the same degree”. (Otto 1923, p136). The evidence from my contributors would seem to support this: through being *a priori*, something that is inherent to humanity’s very Beingness, the process of transcendence may, sometimes, be amenable to logic, but in other respects it seems entirely non-rational.<sup>349</sup> Such is the paradox of

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<sup>348</sup> Statistical data is given in Appendix 9 e).

<sup>349</sup> It may appear contradictory that I refer to the process of transcendence as ‘*a priori*’ in the context of a discussion on the fruits of transcendent experience. How can it be inherent if we require personal experience to acknowledge it? I would argue that the personal experiences do just that: enable a growing awareness of a process that is already present and continuing irrespective of our conscious experiences.

this subject which, whilst it may prevent the defining of hard and fast rules for transcendence, does offer the possibility of identifying some common features as to the nature and dynamic of transcendence.

If factors such as activity and companions are not primary indicators of a likely transcendent experience, then what is? James, Argyle and others have already established that either feeling calm and peaceful or times of extreme stress can be triggers.<sup>350</sup> It thus seems reasonable that how one feels is an important factor. I thus examined the extent to which the responder's state of mind immediately prior to the experience was a contributing factor. Respondents were asked to provide four ratings of 'state of mind' (Q3.4 and Q4.4), as follows: where were they on a scale of being: Depressed / Sad (1) to Happy / joyous (5); on a Confused (1) to Clear minded (5) scale; and on an Angry (1) to Calm/Peaceful (5) scale.

As James identifies, a major crisis can provoke transcendent experiences. C2 (F39) offered such an account, where personal circumstances were such that:

The stress caused me to miscarry and I ended up trying to take my own life. (C2, Q3.5)<sup>351</sup>

The result of the experience was far from negative:

I now know from experience that when we have life crises, they strengthen our inner core, and this enables us to see the light at the end of the tunnel. (ibid)

C2's low rating of 'state of mind' were however the exception. The averages were generally high on all scales.<sup>352</sup> Clearly a crisis is not an essential requirement. Moreover, the spread of scores indicates that transcendent experiences can come not just when things are really good or really bad, but at any time. For example

I was worshipping - not really feeling the atmosphere, feeling cynical and annoyed. (C15, Q3.5)<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Again we see the apparent paradox, with both extremes of the calm to the chaotic state of mind being capable of enabling transcendence.

<sup>351</sup> Her ratings were: -1, -1 and 0, despite being asked to rate them on a scale of 1 to 5.

<sup>352</sup> The mean ratings were: Happiness scale: 3.6; Clear-headedness: 3.9; Calmness: 4.0. Respondents were also asked where they placed themselves on a scale of Unwell (1) to Healthy (5). The average values of those submitted was 4.3.

<sup>353</sup> His rating on the 'state of mind' scales was 2, 2 and 2.

If a transcendent experience can occur whether one is at rock bottom (C2), or on a high (as for example with C4 and C16 who both scored three 5's on Q3.4 ) or “feeling cynical” (C15 above), it must be concluded that they can occur at any time. This deduction is consistent with transcendence being an aspect of inherent Beingness. In that case, one would expect such experiences to be available to all. This may be the case, but it is my contention that transcendent experiences occur more frequently for those who are consciously working with them as part of an on-going journey of self-discovery.

In question 5.2 I thus asked “Would you say that you are on a ‘Spiritual journey’ or a conscious path of personal, self, development?” Of the 18 who answered this question, 17 answered “Yes”. Only C18 answered “No, I am just alive” but then goes on to say (Q5.5):

I think the transcendent experience is actually nothing to do with spiritual awareness (I hate the word enlightenment). It is simply an often-felt stepping-stone towards a dropping away of the self and the realisation that there is just what is, no more no less. Boring really, yet wonderful at the same time.

Thus, although describing his experiences as not part of a spiritual development process he clearly associates them with a process of realisation and change in a perception of self. This is a difference in words, not in gist, and probably explained by him declaring his “Religion as “None”. That is, just as this contributor is uneasy with terms such as ‘spiritual’, so transcendent is also a word he does feel comfortable using. His detailed answers, however, clearly indicate a mental transcendence in keeping with my hypotheses.

How one sees and describes transcendent experiences inevitably depends upon one's upbringing, thus providing more interesting insights into the nature of transcendence. Both C16 (F63) and C13 (F56) talk freely about memories from their very early years, C16 was not able to give her age or location of these experience because she was “too young to remember”. She described her experience thus:

“That this body of mine wasn't me. All I was aware of was as if I was just skin and the body inside was blackness.” (C16, Q3.5)

It is not uncommon (e.g. C21, F22) that such people think that everybody has such memories and experiences. Their view is that as souls being reborn into their current bodies, they were already aware beings: they did not need to wait for their minds to develop ‘this time around’. Each individual brings, they argue, a developed

consciousness within them into this life. In saying this, they are concurring with Yogananda who, as I have illustrated, displayed similar awareness.<sup>354</sup>

Whether there have been childhood memories or not, the transcendence process constitutes, I argue, the assimilation of earthly and divine perspectives. To assess the extent of this, Q5.1 asks:

On reflection, do you consider that your experiences have caused you to change your beliefs, the way you live your life or your ability to cope with life?

Leach, C18, answers:

No, they have made no change to my beliefs, as I have none (apart from all the mundane ones that everyone has). Since I realised that there are no transcendent experiences to try to get or wait for, or more to the point that there is no one to have such experiences, it was all over. I am much more content now, so something's changed.

This apparent contradiction (first saying nothing had changed then admitting that it had) is easily explained by his statement that he has no beliefs now. He has, as he nicely described, risen above (or transcended) them. And this transcendence has left him "much more content".<sup>355</sup> The effort of putting oneself through the transcendence process has its rewards. Leach adds:

I think the transcendent experience is actually nothing to do with spiritual awareness (I hate the word enlightenment). It is simply an often-felt stepping-stone towards a dropping away of the self and the realisation that there is just what is, no more no less. Boring really, yet wonderful at the same time. (C18, Q5.1)

Boring, yet wonderful. Such is the paradox of the transcendent. Boring, in that there are no clever words left to describe it and, at the same time, wonderful in the liberation that acceptance of the 'boring' brings with it.

One could say that transcendence is merely about putting life, with all its traumas and delights into some sort of cosmic perspective. A number of respondents describe how their transcendent experiences, by being so powerful and 'out of this world', helped to put the frustrations of daily life into perspective. C21 (F22), for example, says:

They [her other transcendent experiences] are always so minimal and seem so negligible, but when added together and occurring continually, I have the feeling of

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<sup>354</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>355</sup> His book (Leach 2010, referenced in Chapter 5) is called *Happiness? A simple guide to a contented life*.

trying to grasp for something more profound and to stop negating any significance to them. (C21, Q5.1)

Even if they take some accepting afterwards, transcendent experiences often help problems and preoccupations to seem insignificant. C22 (F52) highlights how amazing some connecting experiences are by saying

It was a huge celebration I must tell you. I often felt like I was experiencing a holographic version of *Fantasia*.<sup>356</sup>

She goes on to explain what, to her, is required in order to enable further transcendent experiences and to get the most from them:

What Spirit or Light requires of you is a “firm” commitment to seeking it and loving it. (ibid)

This would certainly endorse my own conclusions: once I accepted and valued my experiences, the more frequent such experiences would be. C22 goes on to share her valuable lesson in how general attitude and manner affect one’s ability to transcend:

If you become angry or participate in unjoyful activities, then you are not able to contact them [transcendent energies/consciousness]. It has to do with vibration of sound and light. After a while you figure this out and begin to abstain from negative speech, backbiting others, complaining, etc. (C22, Q3.5)

It becomes a positive ‘vicious circle’: the more positive one is in one’s attitude, and the more open, receptive and appreciative, then the more easily one is able to experience the whole-body / non-local transcendence. Likewise, the more experiences one has the more easily it becomes to be open, receptive and to live in an attitude of gratitude.

This question of commitment is an important one. To enter onto a path of spiritual growth is very much a personal choice which those in the transcendence movement make when they are ready to. And yet, at the time, it is quite usual to feel that there is no choice. C22 writes lucidly about the relationship between the seeker and Spirit, as she calls the higher dimensions of consciousness:

Spirit is very gracious and respects your free will. I will say that when you chose to continue to seek, there is a celebration in Heaven and Unconditional Love radiates through and around you. That is about the best description I can give you, you experience unconditional love. LOL there is no going back!<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> In response to Question 2 of the Questionnaire on frequency of experiences.

<sup>357</sup> In response to Question 3.5 of the Questionnaire, describing an initial experience.

“There is no going back”. Once a commitment to this path or process is made there is no going back on it. Although it was a choice to make the commitment, the necessity embraced by this process gives little option but to continue along the path. Such, as I argue in Part Four, is the power of the evolutionary imperative.<sup>358</sup>

To feel aligned to this ‘bigger picture’ could be considered a major outcome to the transcendence process. In common with the RERC, this research is particularly interested in the fruits or benefits accrued as a result of transcendent experiences. Whilst my emphasis is primarily concerned with the benefits enjoyed by the experiencer themselves, it is important to highlight that ‘fruits’ of such experiences may also be enjoyed by other individuals. Indeed, given the move towards a compassionate focus to life that is part of becoming more transcendent, it should come as no surprise that others reap the reward. C22 (F52), for example, says of a recent transcendent experience:

It made me confident enough to head out to see a few people I know who have Cancer and love them up. Also we had a few military pilots killed in Afghanistan from our community. I met one of the wives and many of her peers. I listened patiently to the wife, cried with her and just shot God's love at her. (C22, Q3.6)

The above quotes and analysis of contributed accounts are nothing if not varied. Far from leaving an unsatisfactory vagueness and openness to the nature and dynamic of the transcendence process, I maintain that this “vagueness and openness” is precisely what the evidence demonstrates and thus worthy of academic attention, as I shall now discuss.

## **Discussion**

Whilst a number of common themes and factors have emerged from the review and analysis of the accounts collected (see conclusions below), it is also clear that, from many respects, there is no pattern to the triggers or course of a transcendent experience and its eventual fruits. Sometimes the fruits are immediately obvious and very specific.<sup>359</sup> Often however, the fruits are non-specific and merely another experience to help, I argue, in the overall process of transcendence. Far from a negative result this, I suggest, serves to emphasise that transcendence is an inherent process: transcendent experiences may happen to anyone at any time. Or rather, an individual will have transcendent experiences when the time is right for them: in the context of their own

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<sup>358</sup> In some respects, there is ‘choice’ yet ‘no choice’ paradox about the whole process which typifies its post-dualistic nature, but such a debate is outside the scope of this discourse.

<sup>359</sup> As, for example, in a premonition experienced by C10.



personal journey. It is, I argue, at this level (of an individual's spiritual progression) that conditions for transcendence are primarily determined rather than at the conventional level of there being some physical factor present or not.<sup>360</sup>

Thus, physical, human, factors are rarely, if ever, totally necessary or wholly sufficient conditions for a transcendent experience, or indicative of a transcendent process. However, the above accounts, together with my own experiences of Chapter 4 and biographical accounts of Chapter 5 do, on analysis, yield a number of common conditions and triggers. These are discussed in Chapter 13.

Yoga teacher Rose (real name, used with permission) is typical of those preferring the spontaneity of sharing through discussion and thus more comfortable with a recorded interview. 'Interview' is perhaps an inaccurate word here: I spoke very little during our time together, merely nodding my understanding from time to time. Like many in the transcendence movement, Rose relished the opportunity to talk about her experiences knowing that I was listening with an open mind and awareness as to the matters and ideas she was sharing with me. Often I would find relief from my contributors when they realised that I was not going to ridicule their experiences. Once they could see that I was listening as someone who had 'been there themselves' all my participants relaxed and enjoyed being able to express themselves freely and openly.<sup>361</sup>

Rose is also a good example of the consistency between a recorded account and the hypotheses of this thesis, originally based on my own personal experiences. In the first ten minutes of her interview, whilst describing her first and most profound transcendent experience, Rose touches on many of the issues to which I refer in this thesis. Firstly she describes how her enthusiasm for her practice (in her case Yoga) enabled the "pushing through [of] the second wind" to find an "effortlessness" and unlimited energy to pursue her practice to an ever deeper level.

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<sup>360</sup> For example, whilst many find silence a useful contributing factor, the reports examined here indicate that it is by no means essential. See Chapter 13.

<sup>361</sup> This reaction provides a good justification for participative research: the more I am perceived as being an equal, the more the interviewee is able to relax and co-operate with my role as researcher/interviewer and thus speak without suspicion or concern. Individuals being interviewed on matters of transcendence will be only too aware of any insincerity or scepticism from researchers.

The terminology used in an attempt to describe the more numinous type of transcendence as experienced by Rose is not only fascinating, but transcendent in itself. “No ‘I’” and “the observer is observing” clearly illustrate the post-dualistic notion of being beyond the subjective: objective distinction and debate of the Cartesian mind-set. Metaphors abound in the almost impossible task of describing the indescribable. The “Divine Darkness before the Big Bang” being a good example, but also the sense of being outside of or beyond time.

The feeling of love, not surprisingly, is widely reported. Besides Rose, C15 (M19) is amongst those who reported that he felt “loved” during his experience which in turn enabled him to being more loving to others:

Felt loved and felt happy. I stopped being so angry with the people that had hurt me that day (C15, Q3.10)

Analysing the occurrences of ‘love’ in the received accounts highlights both a challenge in such analysis and the reality of transcendence: that is, whether it (love in this case) is a received sensation or an offered state? The answer, in typical post-dualistic manner, must be both. The more loving one feels towards others, so the more loved one is apt to feel by others. C3 (F34), for example, says “I love my natural surroundings and see magic in nature” (Q5.3). Such is her intent and approach to life which could well explain why during an experience in and with the rain, she writes “I smiled from ear to ear and felt really quite joyous in that moment” (Q4.5).

The love felt during transcendence might be compared, in its unconditional aspect at least, with that between mother and child. C13 (F56), for example, describes a very definite memory of herself as a baby:

I knew I now had a body and felt that I was here to ‘learn again’. I could also feel energy around me, linking to me, giving me support and love. (C13, Q3.5)

This is important again in illustrating how the love facet of transcendence, if not the essence of transcendence, is nothing unusual. Indeed, it is perfectly natural. Far from restricted to the love of a mother or ‘significant other’ however, the love felt during transcendence is often considered ‘the love of God’. One young Christian contributor (C15, M19) describes a particularly moving service thus:

There was a call forward to pray about creativity and I thought "Why not?". Quickly waves of heat moved through me and pins and needles ran sharply up my arms and

pulsed in my hands. I was crying heavily, it was messy! I felt a heaviness in me. I knew it was God and that he knew and loved me. (C15, Q3.6)

The effect of feeling such love can be striking, not just to the person themselves, but to those around, as with C15 as quoted above. The benefits of allowing a higher connection are immediately clear. C22 provides another example of how many can benefit from the divine love that flows through a transcendent individual:

There was an 18 y/o female who has Cancer and was given a pretty grim diagnosis. Her grandma brought her to me and I hugged her and yesterday she got word from her oncologist that there is no cancer in her spine. (C22, Q3.6)

Amazing as such stories may seem, they are by no means unusual within the transcendence movement. Sharing such stories, as one might share the miracles of Jesus, helps with one's mental transcendence and with opening-up to miraculous possibilities. A profound sense not unusual in the more intense transcendent experiences is that one's personal essence, like the essence of all things, is of light. Yogananda, in describing one of his early and powerful experiences says:

Though I have had many visions, none was ever more singular. As the illusion of a solid body was completely dissipated, and as my realization deepened that the essence of all objects is light. (Yogananda 1946, p308)

Such a sense is not restricted to accepted gurus. Rose too uses the notion. Although in her case, it took a visitor at her door (as it happened, the wife of a deacon) as she was coming out of the experience to help her to acknowledge the fact:

But I remember this deacon's wife when I opened the door ... but she said there was all this amazing light all around me. And that mean you don't know it because you are not looking at yourself. (Rose, Interview transcript)

That a 'light-body', beyond the boundaries of a physical body, should be visible to an independent observer (who had been unaware of Rose's experience) adds considerable weight to her account. This was a non-local transcendent experience not only in how she herself perceived it, but it was also sufficiently manifest in the three-dimensional world around her that to the extent that the effect could be witnessed by another person.

Rose provides a striking example of how a whole-body / non-local transcendent experience (albeit a very significant one) can bring about a mental transcendence:

I have gone from being brought up with no religion and suddenly understanding what it was all about. (Rose, Interview transcript)

Rose's is an understanding brought about through depth of experience and 'inner knowing': a transcendent 'knowing' far beyond that transmitted through attending a lecture, and certainly a very positive experience.

In my research I have been concentrating on positive transcendent experiences, ones in which the 'recipient' feels 'safe' with what is happening to them. Rose commented on this feeling of security and explained that she thought this was the case because she had been able to enter into them in a 'childlike' way. That is, I would argue, she was able to flow with the process, to enjoy it without mentally questioning what was happening. The corollary is, I would suggest, that negative experiences are more likely to be felt when the process is resisted, thereby creating an inner conflict. Any further analysis or discussion on this point is outside the scope of this study, but could be a fruitful line for future research.

Rose attributes her ability to enter transcendence states with a child-like approach to her upbringing: she was allowed to be herself, to be natural. Being unconditioned, she feels and I would agree, has provided her with an ability to trust the transcendence process. This childlike openness is, I contend, a key factor in allowing transcendence. I discuss this further in Chapter 13 where I also provide other examples of where parents encouraging natural, open-minded, children has helped those individuals to embrace modes of thought beyond the rational and conditioned.

The personal accounts analysed and described in this chapter, together with the evidence from the autobiographical material of Chapter 5, clearly add considerable weight to the significance of my own experiences and insights presented in Chapter 4. The commitment to transcendent thought as evident within the transcendence movement can be seen to be reflected in the personal experiences and philosophies described in the preceding chapters (of Part Two).

In Part Three I now develop, from the key features identified above, models of the transcendence process.

# **Part Three**

## **Theories of transcendence and evolution of consciousness**

### **Chapter 7**

#### **Models resulting from the experience and practice of transcendence**

In Part One I set out the scope of this research as an investigation into the interplay between transcendent experience, suffering and personal self-development—an interplay that I hypothesised is played out within the context of a possible evolution of human consciousness, wherein human beings generally are increasingly experiencing non-rational means to ascertain essential truths to their lives, truths that go against the grain of conventional logic. In Part Two I analysed descriptions and reports given by individuals and organisations of so-called transcendent experiences to demonstrate there is at least an *inner drive* that enables a growing number of people to embrace and enable the transcendence process. In Part Three I now analyse in detail the following concepts that have been discussed broadly in the previous chapters, ‘transcendence process’, ‘personal self-development’ and ‘evolution of human consciousness’. I do so by proposing theoretical models for these processes that embrace the notions of transcendent experience and suffering as described in the previous chapters. My aim is to present a theoretical framework for such experiences and processes that place the

reported experiences into prescribed patterns of human behaviour. Once we have established these models it is then possible to propose guidance on how one can support and enable the transcendence process, and thereby enhance personal wellbeing. I present and develop the models with reference to relevant and parallel theories in academic discourses. Whilst many established concepts seem comparable, Heidegger's notion of 'Being' bears many striking similarities to my models of transcendence, and is thus subject to detailed scrutiny in Chapter 8.

Before we can discuss further my hypothesis of the evolution of consciousness, it is necessary to have a working model for consciousness. For consistency with my multi-disciplinary approach, I shall present what I refer to as the 'Channel' model of consciousness. Although a simple model that appeals to metaphysical thought, it unifies the experiences described thus far into a coherent representation. As I have emphasised throughout, it is not the aim of this thesis to discuss the physical mechanisms involved. I am primarily interested in the effects and practical implications of transcendence. This model offers an accessible explanation for the experiences described and for the effects of such experiences in the lives of those reporting them.

Following my explanation of this model, I propose my two-facet model of consciousness and transcendence, offering a description for mental transcendence and whole-body / non-local transcendence consistent with both the Channel model of consciousness and those experiences presented and analysed in Part Two.

Next I describe the tripartite model of transitions, indicating how it can be applied to both personal self-development and to phases of human evolution. Keeping with the modelling of change, I then offer a model for the transcendence process which describes the associated emotional stages.<sup>362</sup>

Finally I describe how, by integrating these models into a single framework, it is possible to see how transcendence is a unified process that employs both consciousness and transitional elements.<sup>363</sup> This I illustrate with a conception of the 'transcending self'.

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<sup>362</sup> Throughout this chapter, the emphasis is on what the transcendence process is like as a first-hand experience; thus relating it to a process of personal self-development.

<sup>363</sup> That is, a series of models that acknowledges both different levels and changes in consciousness and the transitional nature of the process involved.

Prior to embarking on the theoretical component of my research, I had already developed a vague personal conceptualisation of the nature and dynamics of transcendence. This conception has not wavered in my subsequent research into other theoretical ideas that find parallel with it, but has to some extent been clarified and fleshed out. It is this original conception that, unless otherwise stated, forms the basis of the models now presented. Where comparable ideas have been identified in the literature, these are cited.<sup>364</sup>

Each person on a path of transcendence will inevitably develop their own understanding, based on their subjective experiences and prior beliefs. These personal models, however, share the many common features that I identify here. This is not surprising given that, as these models propose, the knowledge within them originates from the Oneness of life, the collective wisdom of creation.

Given the limited space available within this thesis, it is not possible to describe each model individually in considerable detail. Rather, and in keeping with the gist of transcendence, the aim throughout has been to present the essence, the key principles of transcendence. Equally, a primary objective of this chapter is to describe how the various principles of transcendence form a consistent picture when considered within working models of the processes that underpin it.<sup>365</sup>

Having trained and worked as an engineer for seventeen years, and finding that visual representation aids learning, my own understanding of each model has been greatly assisted by diagrammatic interpretations. Thus, each model is both described in written narrative below and presented visually as figures in Appendix 12. Words and figures are offered as aids to an understanding of the essence of the processes involved and are not intended as literal or indeed definitive representations. I begin with an overview of the need for such models.

It is a well-known characteristic of the human mind that it likes to understand what is happening to it: humans, generally, seem to have a deep, or at least a perceived need to

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<sup>364</sup> In saying this, I am not claiming that mine is an original idea. On the contrary, my contention is that I, like other contributors, have merely ‘seen’ the possibility through accessing the Oneness.

<sup>365</sup> Detail, from a transcendent perspective, belongs not to discussions of general principles but to practical, here and now, issues. As Heidegger says: “The sail of thinking keeps trimmed hard to the wind of the matter.” (Heidegger 1971, p6)

label, categorise and theorise about anything and everything that happens to them.<sup>366</sup>

Transcendent experiences, precisely because they are out of the ordinary, seem to provide an extra impetus to ‘make sense’ of them in concepts that appeal to our ordinary reasoning.<sup>367</sup> As I shall demonstrate, such a need results precisely as ‘mental transcendence’, which I have outlined and will discuss further in this chapter.

This chapter presents the models of consciousness that have helped me, personally, to make sense of the experiences I have had. I offer them as ‘working hypotheses’ only, accepting that they represent an on-going evolution of the sense of reality within my own mind. In describing these models I do not claim them as metaphysical truths. Rather they form a conceptual framework which provides a helpful explanation for what happens during and after transcendent experiences, and why this may help us to become more accepting of them.<sup>368</sup> Rather than taking these models literally, they should be seen as merely representational of what might well be happening.

I developed early versions of the models presented in this thesis many years before beginning my postgraduate studies.<sup>369</sup> My research and associated experiences and discussions with others who have had comparable experiences, have enabled an evolution of these models into the integrated framework now presented. Inevitably I have, over the years, been inspired by existing models that I would have read or heard about. The models as presented, however, are my own versions. Where published theories and models may have, either consciously or subconsciously, influenced me prior to the writing of this thesis, I have attempted to reference them. Likewise I have included reference to material reviewed during this study which lends support for the models presented.

These models are, in essence, simple. The gist of transcendence is, I would suggest, simple. Complexity comes only when our rational minds seek details and mechanisms

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<sup>366</sup> That is, to philosophise. As Colin Radford says: “Philosophy ... pervades human life“. See Radford, C. (1992) 'The Examined Life Re-examined' in Griffiths, P. (ed) *The Impulse to Philosophise*, Cambridge: Royal Institute of Philosophy, 1992, p1.

<sup>367</sup> Whether we actually need to conceptualise an experience before we can accept it is an important question, but beyond the scope of this work to discuss at length.

<sup>368</sup> In turn, this may enable greater contentment and flow in our lives and thus heightened sense of wellbeing. The importance of acceptance is discussed elsewhere, particularly in Chapter 12

<sup>369</sup> See for example Beasley, K. (2007) *Reiki: Without Rules*, London: Lulu.



that are, I would argue, irrelevant to what transcendence is. The theories and models that I reference, from across disciplines and subject areas exhibit an underlying similarity, which reflects a 'Beingness' with which the process of transcendence connects us to. As many academics are increasingly emphasising, no theory or model can fully or adequately describe this phenomena in words: it has to be felt, lived, experienced.<sup>370</sup> However, awareness of the gist of transcendence, such as I am attempting to summarise in this chapter, can be obtained through direct experience and can provide 'life guidance' to those who have such experiences. My focus is on models that identify commonly referenced ideas in a practical way.

Whilst there is difference in detail between different descriptions (as for example between Heidegger's 'Being' (1949) and Tillich's living 'on the boundary' (1936), these primarily reflect the different terminological and epistemological origins of the philosophy or models, rather than any difference in the underlying transcendent reality they seek to describe. These details have little, if any bearing on the practical implications of the models outlined below to an individual's life and how it is lived. Indeed, it is my observation that transcendence practitioners tend only to engage in discussion of detail, where these relate to a specific situation. Detail, they and I argue, is only relevant to the here and now. The inner workings of the engine of a car are only relevant when discussing the maintenance or performance of a car, and only then if they relate to the specific make and model of vehicle. To most of us, most of the time, we just need to know what type of fuel to put into our car and which controls will perform certain functions. So it is with transcendence.

These models are at one level abstract and conceptual: they are not meant to be taken literally. At another level they are very practical: their purpose is to aid understanding of the day-to-day occurrence and significance of transcendent experiences.

### **The 'channel' model of the human mind**

*Make me a channel of your peace.*

This well-known hymn, based on a prayer of St. Francis, is a particularly powerful and pertinent one to many healers. Such healers recognize that it is not they who are healing; they are merely enablers, conduits or channels for healing in the same way as this hymn

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<sup>370</sup> Indeed, this is a key feature of Heidegger's 'Being' as I discuss in the next chapter.

asks that we be channels for peace.<sup>371</sup> But what is meant by ‘channel’? As a teacher of Reiki Healing I needed to be able to provide a clear and realistic answer to this question for my students. In Reiki, as in other disciplines, there is considerable misunderstanding as to what is meant by ‘channel’. All too often there is an assumption that the channel has or is something physical, that somehow the energy of healing and peace flows from ‘somewhere out there’ through the healer and then to the recipient. Whilst physical channels, for example in the form of meridians, may provide the mechanism for other forms of healing<sup>372</sup> such a description did not, from my experience and perception, make sense when applied to Reiki.<sup>373</sup>

Rather, the channel referred to by healers and presumably by St. Francis is metaphysical in nature. It can be seen as connecting different levels of being; of uniting two facets of consciousness, namely the divine/inner/super-conscious/soul nature with the rational consciousness and physical body. This is illustrated in Figure 1. This model, in effectively the same form, was originally drafted in 2000 and 2001. The words I wrote then stood the evidence and scrutiny of the following six years and were used, without change, in *Reiki – Without Rules* when published in 2007:

The ‘giving’ of a Reiki ‘treatment’ is often described as a ‘channelling’ of the Universal Energy. It is, but not in the sense of a *physical* channel. A Reiki healer does not channel energy from ‘out there’ *into* the person ‘receiving’ the treatment. Reiki, being Universal, is already everywhere. It doesn’t need to ‘come’ and ‘go’. This [Reiki healing] is a channelling of energy. Not from me to you but between our conscious mind-body and our spiritual, energetic self. It is not a physical channel but a channel between levels of being, between the physical world and higher dimensions. A (Reiki) treatment connects us to our higher self. (Beasley 2007, pp44-45)<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> See for example Paula Horan’s *Empowerment through Reiki* (Twin Lakes: Lotus Light, 1990) which I read whilst learning Reiki in the late 1980s. She defines Channel as “A person who has emptied oneself to allow an alternative form of consciousness to flow through” (ibid p151). Horan, unfortunately, still implies (p17) a physical channel, but her inclusion of ‘emptied’ and ‘alternative form of consciousness’ would have resonated with me at the time.

<sup>372</sup> For example, it is claimed, in Acupuncture or Shiatsu. That is not to suggest that these modalities are not effective, nor might not assist those on a path of transcendence. They (as opposed to other therapies) are highlighted here as examples of therapies considered based on meridians.

<sup>373</sup> ‘Energy’, in the sense used here in relation to Reiki, is now the subject of significant academic interest, as witnessed by the *1st International Conference “Life Energy, Syntropy and Resonance”* organised by the World Institute for Scientific Exploration (WISE), to be held on August 1–4, 2013. See [www.lifeenergyscience.it/viterbo2013/program.htm](http://www.lifeenergyscience.it/viterbo2013/program.htm), accessed 17.6.13.

<sup>374</sup> Also to be found in an earlier draft; personal file REIKI.RTF dated 21.3.01.

The concept is simple: human consciousness can be seen as existing on a number of levels. Firstly, at the physical level of the material world where interaction is through the senses with subsequent conscious comprehension. Secondly, at a subconscious level where one is influenced, both rationally and non-rationally, instinctively and emotionally, by memories and beliefs; what one has learnt and otherwise assimilated into one's self. Thirdly, at a deeper or higher level of consciousness; what might be called the 'soul' or 'divine' 'essence'.

It is accepted that different traditions have a range of terms and conceptions for these apparently different facets of one's being, and further, that different academic disciplines (for example) disagree as to how many levels of consciousness there may well be. It is not the place of a thesis on transcendence to argue between these alternate details, but rather to accept their commonality: that is to say, that there are a number of levels or types of consciousness.

Even in the hard-science discipline of hospital surgery and within the realm of the operating theatre, the concept of 'levels of consciousness' is prevalent:

This state aspect of consciousness is the one with which anaesthesiologists are most concerned. The same applies to the families of, say, road-traffic-accident victims, whose loved ones are unconscious in the sense of having slipped into states of coma. "Consciousness" in this context refers to the global *state of being awake, aware, and alert*. The state of consciousness is a background level of awareness ... This aspect of consciousness is normally described in *quantitative* rather than qualitative terms. In clinical situations, the level of consciousness is graded on a 15-point scale (the *Glasgow Coma Scale*). (Solms & Turnbull 2002, p86, emphasis in the original)<sup>375</sup>

The highest level of consciousness on the *Glasgow Coma Scale* corresponds to a patient's eyes being open, them being able to "Follows simple commands" and demonstrate the capacity to "converse" and be "oriented" (see footnote). Even this fairly basic scale demonstrates two features of my contentions. Firstly that consciousness is best seen as a continual spectrum, not as a dichotomy that assumes a hierarchy of such notions as 'either: or', 'unconscious: conscious' or 'ego: transcendent'. Secondly, consciousness is not confined to what is happening in a brain: it has far more to do with our interaction with the world around us. Antonio Damasio (1999) does however make a

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<sup>375</sup> The Glasgow Coma Scale can be downloaded from: [www.strokecenter.org/trials/scales/glasgow\\_coma.pdf](http://www.strokecenter.org/trials/scales/glasgow_coma.pdf), accessed 10.8.11, and is taken from Teasdale, G. & Jennett, B. 'Assessment of coma and impaired consciousness. A practical scale.' *The Lancet* 13;2(7872):81-4, 1974.

clear distinction between ‘core consciousness’, which human beings share with other mammals and ‘extended consciousness’ which is, “everything core consciousness is, only bigger and better, and it does nothing but grow across evolution across a lifetime of experience in each individual.” (Damasio 1999, p196)

A second factor common to a range of views on consciousness is that at least some of the different levels or types of consciousness are both within and around us and beyond day-to-day rational consciousness.<sup>376</sup> Typical of these views is that held by the Theosophical movement, after the work of Madam H.P. Blavatsky. Blavatsky, like many authors of her era in such subject areas, is notoriously difficult to understand. Thankfully, the movement has scholars who interpret her work and translate it into comprehensible terms that become useful and meaningful. I consulted scholars associated with the Theosophical Society in North Wales, for this research. Jonathan Darrall-Rew, for example, in describing the characteristic of the Theosophical teaching asserts that:

By the graded series of expansions of consciousness that are the result of the imparted training; these lead a man or woman on from step to step till he contacts his higher self, his Master.<sup>377</sup>

By saying ‘graded series’ and ‘step by step’ the concept of a series of levels of consciousness is immediately obvious. The essence of Theosophical teaching is that progressing through this series is, both personally and collectively, a life’s work. Whilst I dispute the extent to which such steps can be usefully defined and indeed distinguished, the notion of personal *development* as one that reflects human evolution is clearly assumed within this theory. Exposure to Theosophical thoughts over many years has undoubtedly contributed to my acceptance of such notions.

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<sup>376</sup> That consciousness might be both “within and around us” and “beyond day-to-day rational consciousness”, whilst not yet mainstream thinking, is widely accepted by those in the transcendence movement. Likewise, to make a distinction between such descriptions detracts, I argue, from the underlying nature of the transcendence such terms attempt to describe. Authors such as Stanislov Grof and Larry Dossey are amongst the many authors who write about whole-body / non-local consciousness and the value of such states of consciousness to our wellbeing. See, for example: Grof, S. (2006) *When the Impossible happens: Adventures in Non-ordinary Realities*, Boulder, CO: Sounds True; and Dossey, L. (2007) ‘PEAR Lab and Nonlocal Mind: Why They Matter’, *EXPLORE: The Journal of Science and Healing*, Vol 3 Iss3, May 2007, pp191-196.

<sup>377</sup> Notes of talk given to the Bangor Lodge of the Theosophical Society: *Alice Bailey and the Branches of the Wisdom Tradition in the Modern West*, Jonathan Darrall-Rew, July 2009, p81.

Another important common factor is the notion that each individual has the potential to access this ‘higher consciousness’ directly. This happens, according to the Channel model, when a channel opens between this ‘higher self’ and a ‘normal’ or daily level of consciousness. When this occurs the conscious mind and body somehow engages this higher level of existing or Being. That is to say, in the terminology of my thesis, an individual has a whole-body / non-local transcendent experience. This parallels Jung’s idea of ‘individuation’ in so far as the individual can be regarded as realising their personality and fulfilling their psychological destiny, and have thereby integrated the various levels of consciousness. That psychology and metaphysics can share a similar model and view is echoed by others in the Theosophical movement. In a recent issue of *Esoterica: The Journal of the Foundation for Theosophical Studies*, Ryan Secolonda writes:

As a means of looking spiritually inwards Jung recognises that the individual accesses this same hidden realm, a “psychic system of collective, universal, and impersonal nature, which is identical for all individuals.” (Secolonda 2011, p33)<sup>378</sup>

The word “access” offers good support for a channel model and the notion that the better the channel, the more full and useful is access to the “collective” or Oneness. Another significant feature of the transcendent mind is also highlighted here. That is, by placing the subconscious level between the conscious and divine levels of being, it is assumed that the channel may become blocked by obstructions at the subconscious level. Such obstructions (which could be equated to ‘mental blocks’) might, in practice, be reflections of limiting and limited beliefs, expectations, fears and conditioned ways of thinking. From this model it is clear that the less cluttered a mind, the more willing and able that mind is to rise above such mental blocks, and consequently the more likely a channel will open. This illustrates well the reported experiences from my contributors and also resonates with my own personal experiences of transcendence. In other words, as several accounts of Part Two testify, as one identifies and dissolves one’s mental ‘baggage’, so transcendent experiences occur more easily and frequently. John Heron talks about similar processes. In *Feeling and Personhood* (1992), he develops Jung’s idea of individuation into the concept of a ‘self-transfiguring person’ who, he notes, “is

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<sup>378</sup> Quoting from Jung, C.G. (1959) *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, (Collected Works Volume 9, Part 1) London: Routledge, 1991.

transparent for psychic and spiritual energies; celebrates distinctness of being within unitive awareness.” (Heron 1992, p63)

For this transfigured ‘charismatic person’

All the psychological modes are transmuted by a distinct presence extending into the depths and reaching the heights, and expressively manifest in the enterprise of the day. The person participates in a field of being which is differentiated into innumerable beings, networks and interrelated levels. (Heron 1992, p63)

In Heron’s model, energies of higher consciousness pass through all individuals, and those who are at a state of transcendence are tuned into these energies enabling them to access information and to know whatever they need to know in order to experience themselves as developing or transcending effectively. By being present as an open channel, so ego modes of thought are transmuted or transcended.<sup>379</sup>

Considering the mind as a channel emphasises the point that wisdom comes from beyond conscious control, beyond ego; that insights and decisions and thus one’s actions and impact on the world are, if not wholly through the mind (rather than from it), then somehow dependent on the ‘source’. Jean-Pierre DeCausade in *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (1966) offers another, comparable and equally compelling metaphor:

We put nothing of ourselves into it [life] apart from a general willingness that is prepared to do anything or nothing, like a tool that, though it has no power in itself, when in the hands of the craftsman, can be used by him for any purpose within the range of its capacity and design. (DeCausade 1966, p26)

Whether we (as DeCausade suggests) are tools for God to use or a channel for his love and wisdom, the gist is the same: by giving ourselves over as a tool or a channel so we become a co-creator of a far deeper and more meaningful reality than any of us could conceive with our rational minds. To do so is to transcend the ‘modern’ world-view that man-kind is all knowing and all powerful. Rather, as the argument for transcendence goes, we surrender into the Oneness and become an integral part of it.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Heron goes on: “Such persons are, presumably, figures of the future.” (Heron 1992, p63) and, as far as continually transfigured individuals are concerned, I would have to agree. However I would argue that self-transfiguring people are the very core of the transcendence movement and that, even since Heron wrote this in 1992, their numbers and thus those closer to being charismatic (in Heron’s meaning of the word) are growing continually. The evidence of this study would certainly support such a contention.

<sup>380</sup> This view of our place in life has gradually been dawning on me over a couple of decades. As it registered in my mind, so a number of poems emerged, including this very short one, often used as a mantra:

I have perceived that such insights correspond to my changing ‘sense of self’ as discussed later in this chapter. In other words, as the ego- ‘I’ surrenders, so I consider myself a part of the collective divine ‘we’. Whilst such a surrender can be painful, accepting that I am merely a channel or a tool, can also be liberating: knowing that a wiser consciousness (whether we wish to call it the collective: One-ness, or ‘God’, or otherwise) is ‘using’ us can, I and other contributors report, help to reduce the pressures from the demands of life that is often felt. C1 (F28), describing the fruits of current and on-going transcendent experiences says:

I started the [Reiki] class at a time of intense pressure at work. My experiences left me relaxed and clear-headed, and with more energy. ... I also have a better understanding of what I want to accomplish in life. (C1, Q4.10 and 5.1)

As an example of the latter point, these experiences helped her to come to a decision regarding a job uncertainty. Such a response is typical of the benefits that come with the realigning of ego-I to higher self, an alignment that occurs when a mind becomes a clear channel. This transcendence process is both enabled by and further enables the clearing of channels. Transcendent experiences help to clear mental blocks, which, in turn enables further transcendent experiences.

I have used the channel model regularly over fourteen years of teaching Reiki and have always had students nod knowingly when I describe it, smile and agree that it makes much sense. It does not matter what precisely is happening in the brain, but at a symbolic level a truth emerges: to have access to the wisdom of the divine, to be free thinking and in tune with the universe around, clear channels are required which, in turn, requires minds clear of blocks. All subsequent discussions on emptiness and ‘dealing with stuff’ follow from this point, as does my two-facet model of transcendence.

### **The ‘two-facet’ model of transcendence**

The opening up of a channel between our normal and higher consciousness (with the latter representing whole-body / non-local consciousness), is a facet of transcendence that is beyond the rational. During transcendent experiences involving such channelling,

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*I surrender, I surrender  
For ‘we’ know better than me  
I surrender, I surrender  
To surrender is to be free!  
(Beasley 2006, p39)*

rational thought is often impossible and reasoned concepts and language considered inadequate to describe them. As I have demonstrated in Part Two, this mode of transcendence takes one's awareness beyond that of abstract thoughts, words and concepts and is instead a 'felt' awareness. Given that the divine self and physical self are now purportedly 'as one' this is no surprise. Physical senses, previously blocked from the reality of higher levels of consciousness are, in this mode of thought picking up sensations from levels of reality beyond those normally associated with our senses.

Whilst some commentators might describe such experiences as 'numinous' (after Otto) it is not the focus of this discourse to debate what constitutes a specifically 'numinous' experience. Rather it is my intent to propose that the notion of a numinous experience is widely (if not universally) acknowledged at some level and that there is considerable overlap between what Otto calls a numinous experience and what I call an whole-body / non-local transcendent experience. Describing a musical experience (a typical trigger for my contributors' transcendent experiences) Otto, for example, says:

It releases a blissful rejoicing in us, and we are conscious of a glimmering, billowy agitation occupying our minds, without being able to express or explain in concepts what it really is that moves us so deeply. (Otto 1923, p48)

Whilst 'occupying our minds' such experiences release a 'blissful rejoicing' and in so doing express that which is beyond the 'normal' range of perception and rational level of consciousness; to use Otto's term, our comprehension of such experiences are 'Holy' and not of the common category of perception that we would regard as mundane or ordinary. Few would argue that an experience that "moves us so deeply" is purely 'in the mind'; it is, rather one that we embody and overcomes us with feelings within the body.

Otto goes on to identify a clear distinction between such numinous (or, in my terms, whole-body/ non-local transcendence) and rational thought, at the same time providing an excellent example of how we often use both modes in one situation:

The rise and fall and manifold variations of this [musical] experience exhibit - though again only in part - definite, if fugitive, analogies and correspondences with our ordinary non-musical emotional states, and so can call these into consciousness and blend with them. If this happens, the specific 'music-consciousness' is thereby 'schematized' and rationalized, and the resultant complex mood is, as it were, a fabric, in which the general human feelings and emotional states constitute the warp, and the non-rational music-feelings the woof. (Otto 1923, p48)

Otto's 'warp' and 'woof' equate closely to my two facets of consciousness: the one occurring between levels of consciousness and felt, the other 'schematized' and



rationalized' on the mental plane only. This idea is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 2. Just as both facets (numinous plus reasoning) are required for Otto's 'Holy', so these two modes of consciousness together equate to transcendence.

Having identified that 'normal' or rational consciousness occurs on the mental plane, it is a simple step to explain what I mean by 'mental transcendence'. In 'plain English' the key essence would be 'joined up thinking'. It equates closely to Ken Wilbur's 'Integral' thought as already explained in Chapter 2. It is still rational thought, but no longer separated into discrete ideas within the mind. Rather than thought which distinguishes 'art' from 'science', for example, and thinks about these two things in different ways, to the mind that has transcended, art and science are seen as two perspective of one integrated reality. Equally, such a mind will see links, parallels and connections between apparently diverse subjects, rather than the rational propensity to categorise and separate.<sup>381</sup>

My identification of these two facets to transcendence, the one within mental consciousness, the other concerned with aspects of consciousness beyond the mental plane, is not prevalent in the literature. Whilst each facet is separately described in various terms by a number of authors, Otto is rare in concluding a 'combined model' for the 'Holy' or transcendent: i.e. a model that acknowledges the inter-relation between the 'thought' and 'felt' consciousness.<sup>382</sup> It is this bringing together of the development of rational consciousness with whole-body / non-local consciousness that makes my arguments of particular importance.

The models that follow illustrate how my hypotheses are wholly consistent with both the reported experiences of Part Two, and a number of other key theories of human behaviour.<sup>383</sup> Such theories I now identify as I continue with my description of models that have been substantiated from my analysis of experiential data.

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<sup>381</sup> Note that 'making connection' is still a rational mental process: this is why I describe such transcendence as 'mental' transcendence and is distinct from whole-body / non-local transcendence which occurs beyond the mind.

<sup>382</sup> And to Otto we could also add the ideas of C.G.Jung, who exclaimed throughout his works at a higher consciousness cannot be experienced, realised, or harnessed without the rationality of the ego in relationship to it.

<sup>383</sup> That is not to say that other theories might contradict my hypotheses. Throughout this discourse I have emphasised that this is an 'existence' theory: it has been my intent to demonstrate that a consistent picture can be formed, from established theories and models, that

## The ‘tripartite’ transition model

‘Tripartite’ means, quite simply “in three parts”. The term ‘tripartite model’ can thus be applied to any model involving three parts or phases. In the context of a transition over time, these parts would typically refer to the ‘before’, ‘during’ and ‘after’ some transitional state or phase.<sup>384</sup> Examples across a range of disciplines are numerous but a particularly relevant example comes from the much referenced 1930 work of Richard E. Scammon. In *The Measurement of the Body in Childhood*, which reports on detailed measurements made on the growth of different tissue types, he illustrates these with a ‘growth curve’ depicting how human bodies mature in different ways at different times.

Barry Bogin & R. Holly Smith (1996), in referring to this seminal work, demonstrate a typical feature of a tripartite transition model. Their work looks at the phases in human development, including that stage in-between ‘infant’ and ‘adult’, i.e. the transitional phase of puberty which is, they assert: “Typical tripartite stages of postnatal growth of social mammals, infant, juvenile, and adult.” (Bogin & Smith 1996, p707). Precisely where ‘juvenile’ begins and ends varies significantly across the population, given that, for instance, the mental or reproductive facets mature at different rates. Despite the uncertainty in defining the onset or end point, a delineation of three phases is clear.<sup>385</sup>

This sense of transition is something that is in evidence in the reports of my contributors. Indeed, Lockett, for example in responding to a client of his with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME, says:

There is a new awareness coming into being that people are more than their physical bodies; new dimensions and layers of awareness are opening up, which is causing sensitive people like you to feel the pain and fatigue of all human consciousness.

You have chosen to be one of the people to release this for group consciousness. It is a painful and tiring experience, which is leaving you with little energy to do anything else.

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supports the description of a transcendence process that I describe herein. Acceptance of such an integrated series of models comes not, I argue, from philosophical debate nor scientific proof, but through personal experience.

<sup>384</sup> As shown in Appendix 12, Figure 3.

<sup>385</sup> The transition from child to adult is often seen as a critical one, with rites of passage, or rather lack of them often cited as the cause of social or psychological problems. This is also seen, for example, by Nick Clements in *The New Ages of Men* (Clements 2011) as integral to the question of lack of depth and meaning in the lives of those affected. He maintains that re-introducing rites of passages to those cultures where they have been lost, could significantly assist the overall transcendence process.

Know that this is a temporary transition and is nearing its completion. (Lockett 2009, pp77-78)

From the accounts of transcendent experience there is, for some (e.g. C21 and C24), no sense of a 'before' state: they claim to have always felt different. In the case of Leach and Flinn there was a very specific event that started the transition phase. In my own case, as I have described in Chapter 4, even the transition into the transition was gradual. Either way, a 'before' or 'old' mode of thought and an 'after' or 'new' mode (to which one is heading) can be seen; the latter relating to a more fully transcended state of being. In-between is a phase where, to some extent, the subject is undergoing the process of transcendence.<sup>386</sup>

Just as this tripartite model can be applied to each individual, so (in accordance with holographic theory) it also applies to humanity as a whole: the notion of 'cycles of change' applying to each new era in human history is well established. During the 'pre' phase there may be a few hints of what is to come, but only a few forward-looking individuals will be consciously aware of an emerging new era.<sup>387</sup> Once into the 'after' phase, the key features of the new era are accepted as 'normal'. In-between, the 'during' phase of transition is often characterised by chaos and uncertainty as new ideas or practices are assimilated by a population. Whilst the start dates, end dates and distinctions between these phases are often blurred or poorly defined, the essence is clear: transitions typically occur in three phases.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Given the difficulty in defining beginning, end and transition points in this process, a case could probably be made for a four (or more) phased process. In the context of this thesis however, with its emphasis on effects rather than mechanism, whether there are three, four or more phases is irrelevant. My choice of a tripartite model serves to emphasise the transitional aspect of the process. A tripartite model is also consistent with Hegel's dialectical method, whereby the 'thesis' (in this case a 'before' way of (rational) thinking and behaving) transits through an 'antithesis' (a period of chaos and/or irrational behaviour) to reach a 'synthesis' (a transcendent mode of Being that embraces both previous modes). For a concise summary of Hegel's dialectical method see Singer, P. (1983) *Hegel* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, pp77-80.

<sup>387</sup> Such individuals might be considered those naturally 'in-tune with' the emerging paradigm. They may, or may not, be consciously aware of it. Being 'in-tune with' the new epistemologies might even make them 'out of touch' with the collective norms of the time and thus considered outcasts or even 'mad'.

<sup>388</sup> At the commencement of this research I had in my mind, from accumulated knowledge, a mental image, of what I would now call a tripartite model, for the industrial revolution. The pre-industrial age characterised by manual labour transforming into the industrial age. The middle, transitional, phase of this particular revolution was particularly noted for its chaos and confrontation as adherents of the 'old' and 'new' ways battled for the hearts and minds of the

This model fits the description by a number of respondents of how they currently see their lives,<sup>389</sup> or matches the description of a period of mental confusion following a transcendent experience. C8 (M63) is typical in saying:

It assisted me in my move towards druidry and the acceptance of both the Goddess of the Earth and ‘spirit’ in all things. (C8, Q3.10)

Equally, the period at the start where many felt disoriented by the changes taking place could be considered as representing the current transitional state of humanity with regards to my hypothesis that humanity as a whole undergoes parallel evolutions in consciousness, as it collectively develops towards its transcendent states of experience. Now, in addition to the inner changes described by my contributors from within the transcendence movement, significant changes are taking place throughout the world as previously stable, if authoritarian, governments are seemingly ‘falling like flies’. Since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989,<sup>390</sup> ‘people power’ has brought about the downfall of a number of non-democratic regimes and at the time of writing this section, BBC News was reporting:

Unrest is continuing in cities across the Middle East and North Africa following uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt”.<sup>391</sup>

With Presidents Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak removed from power, the public demonstrated in Bahrain and Yemen causing major concessions from their respective governments. The anti-government protesters were from across the religious and social spectra. ‘The people’ had united in their wish for democracy in their country:

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people whose lives were to be so changed by the new technology. The Luddites, who destroyed the new machines, characterising the resistance to change that is typical of the middle of the three phases. In this transitional period everything is ‘up in the air’. This phase might also be equated to the chrysalis stage in the life-cycle of caterpillar and butterfly: a necessary relinquishing of one identity whilst a new one emerges. The tripartite model is well accepted as a description of transitions, reflecting the typical reality that the changeover from one state to another involves a period of chaos and/or uncertainty.

<sup>389</sup> In addition to the overwhelming agreement amongst contributors that they were on a development path (see Chapter 6), no fewer than 9 (out of 22) wrote specifically about ‘change’, ‘growth’ or ‘development’ in their lives.

<sup>390</sup> On November 9<sup>th</sup>. See, for example, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/9/newsid\\_2515000/2515869.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/9/newsid_2515000/2515869.stm), accessed 23.2.11.

<sup>391</sup> BBC News 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12307698>, accessed 24.2.11.

“I had been asking myself, where are the Egyptians? I came here [Tahrir Square, Cairo] and I found them,” said Hoda Abdel Moneim el-Sharaawy, a 58-year-old professor of economics who one night was waving a flag and screaming over the loud chants in the square, her body quivering. “I found the poor and rich, the Muslim and Christian, the educated and the illiterate. I found my Egypt, and Mubarak cannot take it away from me.” (El-Naggar 2011)<sup>392</sup>

Such individuals have transcended their differences and their fear of their previous leaders’ regimes and had the courage to stand up for a higher truth. This is precisely the courage required of transcendence described in Chapter 13. It is also a classic example of the chaos and suffering often associated with periods of major change and can be seen as applying at both the collective level and at the individual level. That is as an evolutionary cycle for humanity and as a period of personal self-development; from being unaware and conventional in outlook to being ‘connected’ and flowing.

C21, like others, described how she has always had a ‘knowing’ beyond the rational. She would be within the ‘after’ population of Figures 4 and 5: so long as she was brought up in an open and supportive environment, her transcendent awareness would have become established as natural. By contrast, until 1987 I was unaware of other ways of knowing. Then my transcendent experiences began, I wrote an article on Emotional Intelligence and I found I had a generally aroused curiosity into such topics.<sup>393</sup> Now I would place myself as just emerging into the ‘after’ phase.

This model can be seen as directly comparable to the Kübler-Ross model of the process of grieving (Kübler-Ross 1969), typically expressed as DABDA: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance. The tripartite model’s ‘pre’ phase (and associated ‘modern’ ways of thinking) equating to the time before the grief event and an initial denial of it: a ‘nothing has changed’ attitude. The final ‘after’ stage (the transcendent phase in my model) equates to a time when the grief has been worked through, when the situation has been accepted. In-between, equating to my transitional phase, Kübler-Ross highlights the period of real grieving, with associated anger, bargaining and depression. The often painful transitional period is thus seen by Kübler-Ross and myself as particularly significant.

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<sup>392</sup> Accessed from [www.nytimes.com/2011/02/20/weekinreview/20tahrir.html?page=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/20/weekinreview/20tahrir.html?page=1) on 8.8.11.

<sup>393</sup> See Beasley, K. (1987) ‘The Emotional Quotient’, *Mensa* May 1987, p25.

The middle phase for some people, if it exists at all, might be brief: such as in a single ‘dark night of the soul’ or perhaps a 40 days in the wilderness.<sup>394</sup> More typically, as in my case, it can last many years. This is not unusual, as illustrated by the case of a Reiki client of mine: I will call her R. When she first took Reiki training with me around the late 1990s she was regularly in and out of the local psychiatric hospital. In her own words she was “fucked up”. It showed in her face, general health and in an inability to cope with life. Recently she asked to meet me to share Reiki.<sup>395</sup> She looked a different woman: so much healthier, vibrant and at peace with herself and the world around her; not just functioning in the world but engaging joyously with it. During Reiki treatments at her worst periods we would both have the sense of huge blocks of concrete in her head: heavy, stuck, both in energy and ideas. During the fourteen years in-between then and now, during which I had seen her periodically, she had been working through much family grief and trauma. By the autumn of 2010 she had had eighteen months of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) on the NHS and was full of praise for her therapist. That period had been tough: painful. But she had come through it. It is not unusual for such transitional periods to last for decades, during the struggle to undo conditioning and to feel repressed traumas. This period of suffering is, for many, a necessary part of transcending the barrier that self-protection and circumstances had built up in their minds.

Thus, according to models accepted within the transcendence movement, transitional periods, at both a personal and a collective level, correspond to a major change in how we view ourselves and how we see our place in the world at large. Whether this is called grieving, evolution, revolution or spiritual growth, all are terms usefully embraced by what I call the transcendence process. Likewise all these processes affect how we see ourselves and our place in the world.

In August 2011, the United Kingdom experienced some of the worse riots it has seen for many decades. Politicians freely admitted that gangs of youths attacking and looting shops in a number of British cities is a sign of “sickness” in society. George Osborn, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said: “This is about some deep-seated cultural changes in

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<sup>394</sup> But even if brief in chronological terms, it can feel like a lifetime to the person concerned.

<sup>395</sup> In healing circles a ‘share’ is an occasion when two healers give each other Reiki (or other forms of healing) ‘as equals’.

our society”<sup>396</sup> and he called for “a renewed commitment to bringing communities into the mainstream of society.” I would suggest that the feeling of isolation felt by the ‘underclass’ and the resulting frustration expressed in the rioting is a clear sign of the transitional ‘chaos’ period in humankind’s evolution. Likewise the call by the government to integrate them and other communities into mainstream society is a clear sign of the emerging commitment to “inclusiveness” that is part of the transcendence movement.

Clearly this is an involved situation with many facets requiring in-depth analysis and, as such, well beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate in detail. However the riots and their causes are, I maintain, very much part of the ‘bigger picture’ identified in this thesis, as Britain (and beyond) begins to question its values and structure of society. Future work that demonstrates the ethos and practices of the transcendence movement may well offer a solution to the crisis indicated by the riots.<sup>397</sup>

The issue at hand is one that questions how an individual ‘sense of self’ and personal inner needs are reflected in the world around, or fail to be. My remaining model helps to integrate the various models I have presented to address this ‘sense of self’.

### **Sense of self**

My analysis of those reports from respondents to my ‘request for contributions’ reveals that it is one’s perception of self in relation to the rest of humanity and to life as a whole that comprises the chief change as a result of transcendent experience. That is, as one assimilates periods of transcendent experiences and engages with one’s suffering, one’s attitudes towards the world and one’s sense of place within it develops. In this section I examine such a model, illustrating how this attitude changes from a view of self consistent with the prevailing present-day world-view to one that has transfigured and has transcendent representation. The model is shown diagrammatically in the Figure 6.

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<sup>396</sup> *The Telegraph*, 14 August 2011, accessed from [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8699663/George-Osborne-says-riots-are-not-just-about-money.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8699663/George-Osborne-says-riots-are-not-just-about-money.html) on 14.8.11

<sup>397</sup> Whilst outside the scope of this research, during my investigations I have come across a number of excellent examples of transcendence practices being of use by those who feel outside of society. *Resonance*, the magazine of the UK Reiki Federation has, for example included articles on Reiki with crack cocaine addiction (Summer 2005, Iss9, p4) and in Spring 2001, (Iss1, p1) Rosie Anderson wrote *Pioneering Reiki in Prisons*. Also Nick Clements writes about the power of community arts to engage disaffected youths at a level few conventional methods manage. (Clements 2011, p116 for example).

Prior to transcendent experiences or conscious commitment to a spiritual path, it seems that the conventional dualistic sense of self is typical: there is 'me' and 'the rest'. To some extent the self is considered separate from other humans and all other facets of the world or universe. The 'I' is all important, it embraces all the things we do, belong to and believe in. That is not to say that other people and things are not important to us; rather that they too are separate, disconnected from this 'I'.

As one becomes open to transcendent experiences and accepts the possibility of interconnectedness, by feeling at first hand that one is immersed within the collective of humanity and life as a whole, the boundary that had been erected to set the self apart from the collective starts to dissolve. The 'self' may still be regarded as a unique individual, but its interconnectedness with and between all things, human and non-human is acknowledged. The sense of self is enhanced by considering 'I' not as separate but as taking up its own special place within the whole. It is those who consciously do this whom I identify as comprising the transcendence movement. I am reluctant to coin a new term and thus do not capitalise this idea as 'Transcendence Movement', and would not wish to create a new 'ism'. Above all, the transcendence movement is about expressing one's uniqueness alongside one's connectedness: as individuals within 'One World'. And to do so without the need to formally (or even informally) belong to a group or movement that publicises themselves accordingly. I use 'transcendence movement' merely as an identifier, a collective term for any and all who display at least some of the characteristics of being consciously aligned to the transcendence process. Some will embrace the fact that their commitment is part of a larger movement, others will not. Such an acceptance is just one of many factors of being part of the transcendence process.

This situation could be compared to that of the artists referred to as The Impressionists:

The term 'Impressionist' was first used as an insult in response to an exhibition of new paintings in Paris in 1874. A diverse group of painters, rejected by the art establishment, defiantly set up their own exhibition.<sup>398</sup>

What brought them together was a common need to challenge the convention of the time, to develop in more open and expressive ways:

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<sup>398</sup> See: [www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/learn-about-art/guide-to-impressionism/guide-to-impressionism/\\*/viewPage/1](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/learn-about-art/guide-to-impressionism/guide-to-impressionism/*/viewPage/1), accessed 21.12.10.



What held the group together was not so much a single approach to painting, but the close friendships and rivalries that encouraged the sharing and development of ideas.<sup>399</sup>

Or indeed to the philosophical movement of existentialism (that appeared most prominently after the second world war), the philosophers of which refused to identify their ideas as pertaining to the rigid confines of a philosophical *school* of thought per se, but sought to establish debates on a common theme. Thus, within philosophical discourse, ‘existentialism’ has become known as a *movement* of shared themes and ideas, that are argued for in as many different ways as there are theorists within it.

A similar situation exists with the transcendence movement: there are many different views and approaches, but the underlying driving force, the evolutionary imperative that perhaps influenced the Impressionists painters (and existential philosophers) too, is common. Thus

Over the next 12 years, a further seven exhibitions were held, with artists including Monet, Cezanne, Renoir, Degas and Morisot taking part. A reviewer of the first exhibition described the painters as ‘lunatics’. Strange to think how strongly that reputation has changed, and how admired these paintings are today. (ibid)

Just as any new approach, be it to painting, making cotton by machine or to thinking, will initially be dismissed or ridiculed, when its value is eventually acknowledged, that approach becomes more mainstream and assimilated into collective attitudes. This gradual change denotes the transitional process described above, and also illustrates the holographic principle.<sup>400</sup> The holographic principle can be stated ‘as above, so below’: i.e., what is happening at the microscopic level is reflected in the macroscopic and versa visa. Thus, when individuals develop and express a new way of thinking (or painting) they establish a collective ‘movement’, which reflects their new values; individual values gradually become assimilated into wider society as a whole.

Those within the transcendence movement seek to achieve through their experiences and reflections, understandings of their place within the world that transcend obsolete notions of separation between aspects of existence—be it from within themselves or

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<sup>399</sup> See: [www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/learn-about-art/guide-to-impressionism/guide-to-impressionism/\\*/viewPage/5](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/learn-about-art/guide-to-impressionism/guide-to-impressionism/*/viewPage/5), accessed 21.12.10.

<sup>400</sup> The holographic principle (as introduced in Chapter 1) is also illustrated by ‘self-similarity’ and ‘Fractals’ which have become an important mathematical modelling concept in recent decades. See for example Heinz-Otto Peitgen et al (1992) *Chaos and Fractals*, New York: Springer-Verlag, especially pp64-65.

between themselves and others. Those within the transcendence movement agree that separateness is an illusion: minds are not separate from bodies and neither are they themselves separate from the society or universe as a whole. Furthermore, such illusions can be detrimental to our health and happiness. Inclusiveness applies at all levels and is very much part of the notion of self that underpins transcendent thought.

Thus my model of 'self' can be applied at both the personal and collective levels. It could, for example, be applied to a political party. In the 'modern' paradigm, each party sees itself as separate and, in dualistic manner, in so doing excludes the approaches of other parties. Only in times of war have coalition governments been able to transcend party beliefs for the good of the nation. I would argue that the current Conservative - Liberal Democrat coalition represents a genuine desire to 'put the country first' and, in so doing, to transcend at least some of the party rhetoric. Even politicians are beginning to recognise that those youths who rampage and loot in British cities are a function (or dis-function) of society. Such behaviour is part of a collective responsibility. Again the model of self, or party, within a One-ness (in this case a country) is illustrated. The same ideas can be applied at regional and global levels. The interconnectedness of the markets, climate and general human behaviour cannot be denied any longer. It is no longer unrealistic to talk about an evolution of epistemology.

My interpretation of this evolution is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 7, and can be described as follows. The 'modern' epistemology has been a consistent and broadly accepted combination of a set of values and approaches to life comprising rationalism, individualism and dualism, supporting an emphasis on materialism and exclusive reliance on the physical data arrived at by the senses and scientific method. Such has been the 'Grand Narrative' as described, for example, by the postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998).<sup>401</sup>

The above values and 'isms' seem in recent times to have become more extreme, overly promoted to the exclusion of other modes of thoughts and behaviour. This has happened to the extent that other individuals and groups have been discouraged or denied expression. The result has been a break-up of the very structure of society and the epistemology that underpinned their nature. The leaders of both the UK Conservatives

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<sup>401</sup> Lyotard uses the term 'postmodern' in relation to 'The Grand Narrative' and its 'collapse' (see Lyotard, J-F. (1984) Bennington, G. & Massumi, B. (tr) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

and Labour parties have both recently acknowledged that the individualism that had been a key feature of Thatcherite policy had become selfishness, expressed in both bank-workers' bonuses and youth looting. Likewise, seeking a high standard of living has become an expectation of material growth. Materialism which had been an incentive to hard work has now become an addiction and pre-occupation. Supporting these trends has been the insistence that the rational human mind can answer everything, with no room in social policies for compassion, intuition, or faith in anything other than the power of money. It is the picture of a harsh, uncaring, society which, as such, only has itself to blame for its current ills.

By contrast, the more positive hypothesis that I expound in this thesis is that a transcendent epistemology may well be emerging from out of the chaos instilled by the dangers of reducing things to reason alone, as has been the preoccupation of modern Western epistemological mind-set. Key to this transition is the interconnected facets of transcendence, not least an acceptance of the power of the unknown and a mystical mode of thought and living.<sup>402</sup> These are closely linked to an emphasis on the 'experiential' as a mode of learning and consensus building, supported by an acknowledgement of the need for an awareness of our interconnectedness, expressed by such powers of love and compassion in all aspects of life. Whilst always present for some individuals and some groups, and ever present in philosophies and religious traditions, these transcendent realities or powers seem to be increasingly assimilated into attitudes as necessary for a peaceful, global, world.<sup>403</sup>

These models also indicate that what I refer to as transcendent modes of thought are themselves natural, authentic, and organic.<sup>404</sup> Indeed, the channel model in particular suggests that the natural state of mind is one that is clear and one that corresponds to a consciousness in which an individual is aware and in-tune with both inner and outer worlds. As my models demonstrate, this state of mind is prevented by long-established structures of thought that have conditioned the person to think in a particular way that is

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<sup>402</sup> As illustrated in the previous chapter by reference to Teasdale's work. The practical implications of this mystical approach are discussed further in Chapter 11.

<sup>403</sup> See, for example, Taylor, C. (1992) *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

<sup>404</sup> Hence my acknowledgement (in Chapter 1 and Appendix 1) of individuals who are naturally transcendent as being, at least in their attitudes and behaviour, part of the transcendence movement.

out of tune with his or her own convictions, and with personal attachments. This view is among many emerging from cross-disciplinary studies of the mind, brain and consciousness, all of which support my hypothesis that transcendence as a way of life is on the rise within human populations.<sup>405</sup>

Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull, for example, demonstrate mental transcendence in their collaboration, *The Brain and the Inner World* (2002). Here they bring together psychotherapeutic and neuroscientific perspectives on consciousness to offer an inclusive understanding that embraces both the reality perceived by a client undergoing psychotherapy and objective measurements made of brain functioning. Through tracing signals arriving in the brain, their origins and effects, the authors make a convincing case for ‘feelings’ as the basis for human consciousness:

Consciousness has everything to do with being embodied, with awareness of one's bodily state in relation to what is going on around one. Moreover, this mechanism seems to have evolved only because bodies have needs. Consciousness is therefore deeply rooted in a set of ancient biological values. These values are what feelings are, and consciousness is feeling. (Solms & Turnbull 2002, p94)

They say much about the human ‘inner sense’ and how sensors measuring the inner bodily state have significant influence in the working of the brain and thus one’s ‘state of mind’.<sup>406</sup>

The notion of ‘all body consciousness’ is thus clearly supported by some scientists. Solms & Turnbull, referring to the work of Antonio Damasio<sup>407</sup> consider that other mammals have the same brain structure and thus share our basic emotions:

Any animal with a brainstem designed roughly like our own - that is, a brainstem that modulates visceral processes and relays its output to cortex - is likely to experience consciousness. As it happens, all mammals have brainstems with nuclei that are structured and connected in roughly the same way as are those of humans ... There is therefore very good reason to believe that dogs, cats, dolphins, whales - even laboratory rats and mice - possess “core consciousness.” This Implies that all mammals share our most basic (biologically rooted) values. The same elementary things are likely to make a mouse and a human being feel “good” and “bad.” (Solms & Turnbull 2002, pp94-95)

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<sup>405</sup> This is reflected, for example, in the *Mystics and Scientists 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference* (April 2012, Winchester) which provides a typical example of on-going work on *The Mystery of Consciousness*. Speakers include Laurence Freeman (*Ways of Knowing and Unknowing*) and Robert Frager (*Models of Consciousness in the Sufi Tradition*).

<sup>406</sup> See also discussions on ‘Bodymind’ in Chapter 3.

<sup>407</sup> See, for example, Damasio, A. (1999) *The Feeling of What Happens* London: Heinmann.

They go on to suggest that “Recognizing these facts has profound ethical implications for humanity.” (Solms & Turnbull 2002, p95) and add (albeit in a footnote):

It even holds out the possibility that answers to the philosophical problem of how to live a worthwhile and fulfilling life might someday be grounded in objective, biological facts. (Solms & Turnbull 2002, p95)

That science might be able to provide an objective basis for our choice of ‘philosophy of life’ bodes well for the future of interdisciplinary research in this area. And whilst many in the transcendence movement might not need ‘proof’ from scientific method, others (those perhaps earlier on their transcendence path) will find such evidence and understanding of great value in their on-going mental transcendence and acceptance of the interplay between body and mind, between thoughts and feelings.

Solms & Turnbull trace feelings not just to specific locations of the brain, but to the inner, visceral, sense of the body. It is this intrinsic awareness of the state of our body that forms, they argue, consciousness. Just as importantly, the whole point of consciousness is to mediate outer and inner worlds, to ensure that thoughts and actions provide the bodily needs (temperature, water, food, etc.) that are needed to survive.

The basic emotions exist because they have established survival value. In Situations of biological Significance (e.g., mortal danger, proximity of a fertile mate), these emotions provide ways of reacting that increase the likelihood that the organism will survive and reproduce, and thereby propagate its genes. For this reason, Panksepp (1998) suggests that the basic emotions should be thought of as “e-motions” -“evolutionary motions.” (Solms & Turnbull 2002, p113)<sup>408</sup>

Thus a “basic-emotion command systems”<sup>409</sup> have arisen as a survival mechanism, i.e. as an evolutionary imperative. It is reasonable to hypothesise that human consciousness is continually evolving to ensure our survival, for example, by becoming more conscious, more aware of those factors that might help or hinder our ability to thrive. As an example of the mechanism underlying this process Solms & Turnbull (2002, pp115-119) describe the ‘Seeking System’, otherwise known as the ‘drive’ or libido, which:

Does not appear to know what it is seeking ... The SEEKING system appears to be switched on in the same way by all triggers, and, when activated, it merely looks for something in a nonspecific way. All that it seems to know is that the “something” it wants is “out there.” A nonspecific system like this cannot by itself meet the needs of an

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<sup>408</sup> Referring to Panksepp, J. (1998) *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>409</sup> The nomenclature of Panksepp (see above note) to describe these systems: SEEKING, RAGE, FEAR, and PANIC.

animal, it has to interact with other systems. The mode of operation of the SEEKING system is therefore incomprehensible without reference to the memory systems with which it is intimately connected. These systems provide the representations of objects (and past interactions between the self and those objects) that enable the organism to learn from experience. (Solms & Turnbull 2002, pp118-119)

That is, one's body 'knows' that it needs something to help it survive and thrive. This might be a basic need such as water, or a sexual partner, but it might be something less physically tangible; it might relate to immediate survival or to longer term evolutionary needs. The question immediately poses itself as to how the neurological Seeking system relates to the inner need, expressed by my contributors, for depth and meaning in their lives? It seems reasonable to assume that there must be some connection and thus a direct link between the consciousness recognised by neuroscience and the evolutionary consciousness that equates to transcendence process. Such a question is well beyond the scope of this current project, but suggest a fruitful and important line of future research.<sup>410</sup>

Thus it is established that the brain is an integral part of the transcendence process. No more and no less than a co-creator, with the body's innate internal sense, of our reality and sense of self. From such neurology comes a scientific recognition of whole-body consciousness, not as a 'special' sort of consciousness, but as an inherent and vital part of what it is to be human. Consciousness, Solms and Turnbull agree, is non-local, it is not restricted to the activity within the brain. This adds considerable weight to my contention that whole body / non-local transcendence is a natural state, one that anyone and everyone can not so much aspire to as return to. This begs the questions: what is stopping us? If an inner knowing is designed to help our survival why do many individuals get locked into destructive behaviours? Is it possible to remove the 'mental blocks' (as in my channel model) that get in the way of knowing what is right for us?

Solms & Turnbull answer is to emphasise that much of what is taken as perception is in fact memory:<sup>411</sup> "As a result, much of what we take for granted as "the way the world

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<sup>410</sup> One might speculate, for example, that our very inner 'fire' (Teilhard de Chardin), acting through our DNA, provides such a link. This would be consistent with those who believe that we have a 'Spiritual DNA' which we can activate through commitment to what I call the transcendence process. See, for example: Young-Sowers, M.L. (2007) *Spirit Heals: Awakening a Woman's Inner Knowing for Self-Healing*, Novato, CA: New World Library, 2007.

<sup>411</sup> They also suggest that some of these memories are irreversible, a condition that would explain why changing some 'old habits' can seem impossible. Again, an area where collaboration between neuroscience and those practicing transcendence could be invaluable.

is”- as we *perceive* it - is in fact what we have learned about the world - as we *remember* it.” (Solms & Turnbull 2002, p154, emphasis in the original). This adds valuable support to my contention that an inability to ‘connect’ is due to conditioned reactions: we see what we expect to see.

If this is the understanding of conventional consciousness, what then happens during a more profound transcendent experience? What is happening, in neurological terms when, during a healing or meditation, for example, one feel blissful and subsequently discovers an acceptance of some previously intractable piece of reality? Given the unhappy state of much of humanity, such questions urge a significant investigation into such matters as urgent and necessary future research.

My own metaphysical model would suggest, for example, some sort of ‘rewiring’, whereby instead of making decisions based on conditioned reactions, the mind switches to being able to tune into and respond to a sense of inner knowing. Such an, admittedly simplistic, model would seem to reflect fairly accurately the sort of neurologically processes now known to be happening and those which also match theories offered by my contributors. I present this ‘rewiring’ in Figure 8. The ‘old’ (modern) way of thinking (as indicated by, ‘*From*’ in the figure), as Solms and Turnbull describe it, is based on how we first learnt to respond to that situation, i.e. through our remembered reaction. As the transcendence process takes effect, so the ‘new’ (‘*To*’ in the figure) way of thinking, the transcendent state of Being, is approached.

My contributor Ilze, for example, wondered if she was “differently wired” to other people.<sup>412</sup> Always aware of other dimensions of reality she had thought that everybody could see and feel life as she did, until later in childhood.<sup>413</sup> In my own case, although I do not recall any psychic or transcendent experiences as a child, I was always rather a loner, preferring to observe others to participating in activities that had little interest for me (such as playing football or desiring designer clothes).

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<sup>412</sup> She also reported that being in rooms of a particular colour or in the presence of certain shapes, would make her feel uncomfortable to the point of having to leave. This sensitivity is one I can relate to personally and is often experienced by those committed to the transcendence process. It is, I would suggest, a sign of a generally heightened awareness. Such feelings might provide topics suitable for experimental analysis of a neurological type.

<sup>413</sup> A number of contributors reported having had transcendent experiences since childhood, e.g. C7 “since age 10” and C16 “All my life”.

Despite this feeling of being different, Ilze is quite clear that everybody has the potential for transcendent experiences, for such potential is, she maintains, inherent. However, depending on our starting point the detail will vary. For most people with a conventional ‘modern’ mind-set, the transcendence process opens them to non-rational thought processes. For those ‘born differently’, the transcendence process is about accepting reality in all its nuances. Either way, the process is about embracing two very different ways of relating to the world, and is often, as I have already highlighted, a traumatic one. In trying to make sense of my own process, I developed my own model for it; now included as Figure 9 (as a diagram) and Figure 10 (as a table of ‘key features’).<sup>414</sup> Again reflecting Kübler-Ross (who I had not read at the time), the model identifies the following stages during a typical transcendence process: first a ‘high’, the actual transcendent experience that typically leaves us feeling elated and joyous. Next often comes a period of irritation or anger, when we are faced with the ‘harsh’ reality of life in contrast to the high just experienced: this can be expressed as, “why can’t it always be like this?” Finally, and often over a longer period, is a time of heaviness, even depression, as one works to accept both the new and old realities together.

All of this reviewing and rewiring of how one see oneself and the world around one, can be seen to occur at both the personal and collective level. Just as becoming transcendent in one’s way of living requires an individual to face disconnected conditioned ways, so too is this process required and found at a collective level. In Chapter 3 I indicated how organisations within the transcendence movement operated in ways that reflect the models described in this chapter. In such groups, any new participant is not just welcomed as an inclusive member but feels welcome and welcomed. Such events, whilst still planned, ‘flow’ according to the changing moods and needs of participants. Decisions tend to be made by ‘tuning into’ the ‘greater good’.<sup>415</sup> The group engages in debate, and also in shared reflection, which takes into account the global and deeper perspectives. Further discussion on such factors is given in Chapter 13. The key point for my current focus on models is that as transcendence is practiced at a societal level, so models of society need to evolve too.

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<sup>414</sup> Personal PC files of drafts of this model are dated 24.2.2007.

<sup>415</sup> For example by a shared meditative or healing exercise.



The rewiring model previously described for an individual, can also relate to society. In a ‘modern’ community, decisions are made, according to the established norms and rules of the time, which will depend on the model chosen by the individual or body in power, be it an elected president, government or (unelected) dictator. However good the democratic process, there will inevitably be an ‘us’ and ‘them’, those minorities not part of the governmental process (which usually means being part of the governmental ‘machine’) will often feel excluded. This model cannot support the transcendence process, which is why, I would hypothesise, we are experiencing such events as the revolts in the Middle East and riots in the UK. Society can thus be regarded as being in the chaos of transition, a phase where old values are being rejected and new values and ways are in the process of being sought. Alternative models, as presented above and already successfully used by organisations within the transcendence movement, seem to be increasingly being applied within mainstream society. From the *Positive News* newspaper and web-site, for example, we can read that:

Bolivia is to become the first country in the world to give nature comprehensive legal rights in an effort to halt climate change and the exploitation of the natural world, and to improve quality of life for the Bolivian people.<sup>416</sup>

It is no longer a few activists who are campaigning on behalf of the planet. Transcending the ‘modern’ split between a country’s people and its resources in such a way as Bolivia is clear evidence of the evolutionary shift indicated by the models presented here.

In the UK, with a coalition government that is aware of a ‘sickness’ in society, an opportunity now exists, as a response to the 2011 riots, to extend the ethos and practices of the transcendence movement into society as a whole. Needless to say, I would recommend future work to enable an implementation of the ideas presented in this discourse.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have provided a number of models that collectively describe different types of consciousness, the various processes involved in transcendent experiences and the relationships and transitions between them. These models developed from my reflection on my own personal experiences and subsequently helped me to theorise

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<sup>416</sup> See [http://positivenews.org.uk/2011/peace\\_democracy/justice/4377/bolivia-to-give-legal-rights-to-the-earth/](http://positivenews.org.uk/2011/peace_democracy/justice/4377/bolivia-to-give-legal-rights-to-the-earth/), accessed 16.8.11.

about my own experiences. As I compared ideas with other individuals I found that they too have had similar experiences. As they have reflected on and assimilated such experiences, so their perspective on reality has developed in parallel ways to my own. I can thus conclude that the models presented here do apply fairly generally. Equally, evidence from the literature of multiple disciplines (as history, fine art, psychotherapy and mathematics), provide further support for my models. This work is primarily, however, about a 'philosophy of life', a practical insight into what it means to Be human at this point in our history. In the next chapter I compare my models and contentions with those of Heidegger and other key philosophers of the last century.

# Chapter 8

## Being Human: transcendent thought and Heidegger's *Being*

So far in this thesis I have argued that transcendence is more usefully considered not as something 'out of this world' but as a spectrum of growth experiences (from mundane to awesome) that have two facets: mental and whole-body / non-local. To support this contention I have provided experiential accounts from recognised spiritual teachers and from ordinary people that describe such a range of transcendent experiences and how they have enabled a new way of thinking for those involved. This evolving transcendent thought, I have argued, is natural and available to anyone open to it. In the previous chapter I developed models of what I am calling the transcendence process and I indicated there that this model is consistent with theories from across the spectrum of academic disciplines. That human beings have the potential for a deeper, more profound way of thinking can be seen in both the Arts and the Sciences. To expound on one—albeit very important—example from philosophical discourse, I shall compare and critique my models of the transcendence process in detail from an Heideggerian perspective.

Considered one of the most influential concepts of the modern age for making sense of our human ontology, Martin Heidegger's idea *Dasein*, of 'Being in the World', would seem particularly relevant to my theme of transcendent thought. Both *Dasein* and transcendence seem to describe a mode of thinking and 'being in the world' above and beyond a rational and descriptive way of thinking. But how closely to the two align? Does transcendent thought, as defined in this thesis, equate to Heidegger's Being?

My answer, which I expand below, is a typically post-dualistic one: yes *and* no.

Like Heidegger, I acknowledge a depth to thinking that has more of a spiritual than rational basis. Like Heidegger I too am constrained, in how I describe my ideas (and related states-of-mind), by the only methods available in academic discourse, i.e.

through words. In many of the features of these concepts and in the essence of their underlying nature, striking similarities are found, which I review below. Indeed, it could be argued that Heidegger's influence, like that of Teilhard de Chardin (for example) has, to some degree, helped the transcendence movement to position itself amongst the competing philosophies that now exist. It is not however my intent to argue for or against the extent of Heidegger's influence, rather to examine where Heidegger's views echo those of my contributors, and where his writings seem to contradict the theories and experiences of those within the transcendence movement.

It is my contention that the areas of divergence between Heideggerian ideas and those outlined herein result not from any fundamentally differing view on the nature or potential of Being, but due to the different attitudes and state of society prevalent at the times of writing, i.e. the *Zeitgeist*. These differences, far from being evidence of disagreement between Heidegger and myself, in fact provide a clear example of the very evolution of consciousness of which both Heidegger and my contributors expound.<sup>417</sup>

Given that this specific debate forms but a fraction of my overall thesis, an in depth analysis of Heidegger's work is impractical. Neither is it necessary: by using examples from Heidegger's writings, key issues are readily identified. Before discussing areas of divergence, I will highlight those that demonstrate how the experiences and personal stories shared in Part Two are examples of Being as expounded by Heidegger. I begin with the question of language and the role of logic.

In Chapter 3, as an example of the transcendence movement in practice at the forefront of academic thinking, I referred to various conferences I had attended (and reported on in Appendix 4). In doing so I emphasised that such gatherings provide a far more accurate picture of the emergent modes of thinking than mere literature and its literary review could. This claim is wholly consistent with Heidegger's view of the written word. In *Letter on Humanism* (1947) he maintains that:

In writing it is difficult above all to retain the multidimensionality of the realm peculiar to thinking. The rigor of thinking, in contrast to that of the sciences, does not consist merely in an artificial, that is, technical-theoretical exactness of concepts. It lies in the fact that speaking remains purely in the element of Being and lets the simplicity of its

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<sup>417</sup> The concept of evolutionary consciousness is discussed in Chapter 9. The term 'Cosmic Consciousness' is also used. See, for example, Sheldrake, R., McKenna, T. & Abraham, R. (1992) *Chaos, Creativity and Cosmic Consciousness*, Rochester: Park Street Press (2001).

manifold dimensions rule. On the other hand, written composition exerts a wholesome pressure toward deliberate linguistic formulation. (Heidegger 1947, p195)

In the preceding paragraph Heidegger has gone so far as to state that the analysis of thinking by logic, “may be compared to the procedure of trying to evaluate the nature and powers of a fish by seeing how long it can live on dry land.” (ibid)

As soon as one tries to define or describe thinking, Heidegger argues, one has lost its depth and true essence.<sup>418</sup> Many of those who have contributed to this thesis would agree. Deep thought—transcendent thought as I am calling it—is above and beyond the rational ways of thinking that are currently prevalent. So far above and beyond, I would suggest, that only those who have experienced whole-body / non-local transcendence can even begin to understand what Heidegger is describing. And even then, such understanding is an embodied knowing rather than a rational understanding and thus beyond comprehension by ‘normal’ thought.

In *Letter on Humanism*, as elsewhere in his works, Heidegger attempts to raise the issue on ‘what is thought’ and ‘what is Being’ above mere words. This is a direct counter to Descartes’ *I think therefore I am*, with an

Insistence that Dasein or existence is and remains beyond the pale of Cartesian subjectivism. Again Heidegger writes *Existenz* as *Ek-sistenz* in order to stress man’s “standing out” into the “truth of Being.” (Heidegger 1947, p191)

By writing “‘standing out’ into the ‘truth of Being’” he is again emphasising that at its most profound, a thinking man becomes aware that he is part of life itself. Or:

Thinking, in contrast [to doing], lets itself be claimed by Being so that it can say the truth of Being. Thinking accomplishes this letting. (Heidegger 1947, p194)

Being through transcendent thinking, in this sense, is not something one can do or explain rationally, it is part of a co-creation of reality both within the minds and the world in which he or she lives. Key to achieving this level of thought is that the mind “lets itself” Be. This letting, or allowing, is a key to achieving transcendent states, as many of my contributors to Part Two have concluded.

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<sup>418</sup> Michael Polanyi too writes convincingly about different and important ways of knowing and types of awareness. See, for example, Polanyi, M. (1958) *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1998. and Polanyi, M. (1969) *Knowing and Being*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.

Others quoted herein would probably also agree with another of Heidegger's statements: that "'isms' have for a long time now been suspect." (Heidegger 1947, p195). Such "isms, he points out, result purely from a "market of public opinion" (ibid) rather than from having any inherent meaning. Any debate over concepts such as subjectivism, naturalism or any other such terms, risks a rapid decline from worthwhile philosophy into semantics. My work here is thus about the 'essence' of transcendence and related practical implications, in line with Heidegger who shuns semantics whilst revelling in 'essence':

Thinking *is* - this says: Being has fatefully embraced its essence. To embrace a "thing" or a "person" in its essence means to love it, to favor it. Thought in a more original way such favoring [*Mögen*] means to bestow essence as a gift. Such favoring is the proper essence of enabling, which not only can achieve this or that but also can let something essentially unfold in its provenance, that is, let it be. (Heidegger 1947, p196)

This notion that thinking corresponds to Being 'embracing its essence' again emphasises that Heidegger is referring to a level of thought significantly different to and beyond that of logical analysis or functional necessity. This thinking is a loving, a 'fateful embrace' for which one has to be a willing participant. This is a process with far more depth than that typically involved in making a rational decision or choice.

Those, like Heidegger, who have experienced Being, argue that human's much vaulted 'freedom of choice' pales into insignificance compared to the inherent power of Being. Heidegger elaborates about possibilities and potential (to Be), but is again at pains to emphasise that this is far more than choosing one (say) future over another:

When I speak of the "quiet power of the possible" I do not mean the *possibile* of a merely represented *possibilitas*, nor *potentia* as the *essentia* of an *actus* of *existentia*; rather, I mean Being itself, which in its favoring presides over thinking and hence over the essence of humanity. (Heidegger 1947, p196)

Or, to put this in the language used by my less academic contributors: anything is possible. To think the improbable is to embrace its possibility and thus be open to it happening. Such a concept in Heidegger mirrors the explanation given by Yogananda for miracles (see Chapter 5), and again confirms my hypothesis that unless and until one is willing to mentally embrace a new idea or possible reality (mental transcendence), then Being in that reality (the actual transcendent experience) will probably be elusive. Heidegger is clear as to what enabling something special entails:

To enable something here means to preserve it in its essence, to maintain it in its element. (Heidegger 1947, p197)

To preserve something ‘in its essence’, or element, means to retain its inherent truth and depth of meaning, its place in the Oneness of creation itself. This is very much a feature of the integrated thinking or ‘joined up’ thought which I have been describing throughout this thesis. By contrast, rational thought tends to isolate that something, analyses it as a separate entity and gets caught up in its own self-importance. As Heidegger says:

When thinking comes to an end by slipping out of its element it replaces this loss by procuring a validity for itself as *techne*, as an instrument of education and therefore as a classroom matter and later a cultural concern. By and by philosophy becomes a technique for explaining from highest causes. One no longer thinks; one occupies himself with “philosophy.” (Heidegger 1947, p197)

It is for this reason that I have been wary of quoting too much abstract philosophy or theology in this study. Instead I have focussed on the lives and lived examples of the type of higher thought of which Heidegger writes. Transcendent thought and experience is beyond the *techne*, is far more than a ‘cultural concern’, i.e. it is not limited to the thought (or language) expected by society. Such thoughts confine us to a superficial existence. But we do have an alternative:

If man is to find his way once again into the nearness of Being he must first learn to exist in the nameless. In the same way he must recognize the seductions of the public realm as well as the impotence of the private. Before he speaks man must first let himself be claimed again by Being. (Heidegger 1947, p199)

In this one (part) paragraph alone, Heidegger lends significant weight to a number of my contentions. A key factor in the enabling of transcendence I have argued, is our willingness to surrender into the Oneness, to rise above the temptation to control situations and analyse everything. That is, to “learn to exist in the nameless”, to be comfortable without labels and intellectualisations. To re-establish one’s place in Being one has to transcend both the norms expected by society (“seductions of the public realm”) and one’s isolated, personal worlds (“the impotence of the private”). And then one has to allow oneself to be ‘claimed’ by Being.

Just as Heidegger is forthright in his views on thoughts and Being, so too does he have strong views on language, which resonate with the conclusions reached from the analysis of transcendent experiences presented in Part Two of this thesis. These concerns are the focus of my next section.

## Language

Through thought, Being, and language, Heidegger argues for a greater depth, for inherent meaning far beyond that typically attributed to these concepts in modern society. Language, particularly the written word, he says, is far too often divorced from the essence of the life it attempts to describe. David Farrell Krell (as editor) in a footnote to *Letter on Humanism*, summarises Heidegger's definition of language:

In section 34 of *Being and Time* Heidegger defines the existential-ontological foundation of language as speech or talk (*die Rede*). It is as original a structure of being-in-the-world as mood or understanding, of which it is the meaningful articulation. To it belong not only speaking out and asserting but also hearing and listening, heeding and being silent and attentive. As the Greeks experienced it, Dasein is living being that speaks, not so much in producing vocal sounds as in discovering the world, and this by letting beings come to appear as they are. (Heidegger 1947, p198)

Coming through strongly here is the theme of 'letting' things *be*. Authentic language, if allowed to, comes into being through here-and-now situations, it does not come from rational deliberations. Likewise, language embraces "listening, heeding and being silent and attentive". Like Abram (see Chapter 2) Heidegger attempts to restore language to a Beingness that reflects the existence of the moment. Such language goes beyond mere words to convey not only the object being spoken about, but also its context and its subjective place in creation.<sup>419</sup>

Heidegger is scathing in his criticism of the modern use of language:

Language still denies us its essence: that it is the house of the truth of Being. Instead, language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings. (Heidegger 1947, p199)

If this enfeebled language is the norm today, would that not explain why many of those seeking transcendence prefer silence to words? This question is discussed further in Chapter 10.

The 'true' language described by Heidegger is the language he himself often uses: it is poetic, it requires not just mental engagement but emotional commitment if understanding is to be gained. Transcendent language (as I would call it), is that used by inspirational teachers and authors: the words may themselves be powerful, but it is by reading between the lines or listening with the heart and soul that the depth of meaning

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<sup>419</sup> In doing so we are provided with an exemplary example of the transcendence of duality, a feature that reoccurs throughout this treatise.



from the text or oratory are fully understood.<sup>420</sup> *Letter on Humanism* is a particularly good case in point:

Thinking is of Being inasmuch as thinking, coming to pass from Being, belongs to Being. At the same time thinking is of Being insofar as thinking, belonging to Being, listens to Being. As the belonging to Being that listens, thinking is what it is according to its essential origin. (Heidegger 1947, p196)

A simple, technical, description it is not. Neither does this clause provide a clear or logical argument. Indeed, the style is comparable to the beginning of Saint John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."<sup>421</sup> The similarity in structure, in flow, of the two pieces of writing: both talking of a reality above and beyond the functional and thus needing to use a language often considered inaccessible, or at least needing to be read as poetry. Martin Buber too knew and used this approach. In the *Translator's Preface to I and Thou* we read:

To the reader who finds the meaning obscure at a first reading we may only say that *I and Thou* is indeed a poem. Hence It must be read more than once, and its total effect allowed to work on the mind; the obscurities of one part ... will then be illumined by the brightness of another part. For the argument is not as it were horizontal, but spiral; it mounts, and gathers within itself the aphoristic and pregnant utterances of the earlier part. (Buber 1937, p5)

The spiral is often used, particularly in the transcendence arena to illustrate the 'gathering' of depth and meaning that applies whenever topics holistic or integral are considered. Indeed my model of mental transcendence inter-relating to whole-body / non-local transcendence reflects a similar 'growth' pattern.

That Heidegger was attempting to bring our focus beyond conventional language is a point endorsed by Jeremy Woodcock (2010), who writes:

As well as enquiring into our subjectivity and laying the contemporary philosophical ground for an appreciation of our ever unfolding subjectivity, in some of his work Heidegger pointed toward the utter relevance of our dwelling, and of our pre-verbal interior space: a state of mind and body that I believe is captured in the term, deep subjectivity. (Woodcock 2010, p12)

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<sup>420</sup> One could, at this point, debate the power of mantras. Whilst acknowledging their value to many individuals, any further discussion here is beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>421</sup> King James Bible. Other versions put it differently but many Christians feel that only the King James edition provides the poetic depth that is required to fully understand the significance of the words. For example: "Prince Charles is Patron of the King James Bible Trust and is known to be a passionate advocate for the "poetry and cadence" of the Authorised Version, which was first published 400 years ago by royal command." ('Royal wedding: How Kate Middleton's brother risks upsetting the Prince of Wales', *Daily Telegraph*, 29th Apr 2011.)

Whilst ‘deep subjectivity’ could be considered yet another muddying concept, it conveys much of the meaning that Heidegger seems to be emphasising: that Being is far more than a mere feeling of sense-experience. The term ‘deep subjectivity’ suggests very much a connection to all that is both within and beyond one’s normal senses, i.e. an whole-body / non-local transcendence.

Woodstock talks not just about a “pre-verbal interior space” but emphasises that ‘deep subjectivity’ enables “greater depth and compassion” in all our relationships. Most importantly, Woodstock is not discussing such terms in abstract isolation from daily life. The purpose of his paper is to explain how ‘deep subjectivity’ can help to improve the relationship between psychotherapist and client (this being a very specific example of Being, of particular relevance to the wellbeing focus of this thesis). In doing so, he quotes from Julian Young’s *The Fourfold*, which offer the following as an explanation for Heidegger’s ‘dwelling’:

“To dwell is to belong within the fourfold of earth and sky, mortals and divinities” (Young, 2006). In writing this, Heidegger does not want to sacralise dwelling in any particular sense. In fact, he is wishing to point to the unfathomable mystery of existence, which comes forth in the mundane details of our lives. “To dwell is to be on the earth – spreading out in rock and water, rising up in plant and animal – and under the sky – the year’s seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of weather” (Woodcock 2010, p13 quoting Young 2006, p389)<sup>422</sup>

Neatly described here is the ‘connecting’ experience of rain on an umbrella (of my contributor Tamlyn), for example.<sup>423</sup> This dwelling, or presence, is but another way of describing Being. It is an immersion into the present moment. None of these terms adequately describes the experience, but once felt fully with both inner and outer sense then (and only then perhaps) can the gist of Heidegger’s words be grasped.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Young, J. (2006) ‘The Fourfold’ in C. Guignon (ed), *Heidegger*. 2nd Edition, Cambridge: University Press, 2006, pp373-392.

<sup>423</sup> The value of rain or a storm is also identified by Hardy. On his research trips on board *George Blight*, he would apparently stand in the bows of the vessel and delight in the “great waves ... breaking over him in liquid shards” (Hay 2011, p101).

<sup>424</sup> Jean-Luc Marion also places great emphasis on ‘presence’ and ‘consciousness’. Despite the title, *God Without Being* adds considerable weight to many of the themes of this chapter. See Marion, J-L. (1991), *God without Being* (tr Carlson, T.A.), Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Just as an awareness of the limitations of conventional language is required, so too is the risk of too much philosophising. The foreword to *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* (1972) reads:

We may venture the step back out of philosophy into the thinking of Being as soon as we have grown familiar with the provenance of thinking. (Heidegger 1972, p390)

In other words, in order to escape the dangers of thinking for the sake of it and embrace the depth of transcendent thought, then it helps to understand how thought (and Philosophy) has evolved over time and how it has been influenced by society. Given an understanding of the extent to which the depth and potential of thought (and of language) has been usurped by political motives and ego aggrandisement, then one can admit to its limitations, as I have done here.

This is perhaps true of many if not all of the ways of thinking and behaving into which a typical human is conditioned: it is not until a rule or societal expectation is understood that ways to personally adapt it can be found. This is, in the terms of my two facet model of transcendence, another example of mental transcendence: to be open to more integrated and/or higher modes of thoughts requires an opening of the mind beyond the strict ‘letter of the law’ or conditioned use of language or thoughts. Heidegger emphasises this in *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*. Written as a review of *Being and Time* (which he had written forty years earlier) his arguments now involve discussion of ‘Lighting and Presence’, again words very familiar to those in the transcendence movement.<sup>425</sup>

He goes on: “Only this openness grants to the movement of speculative thinking the passage through what it thinks. (Heidegger 1972, p384). Such openness would seem to correlate directly to the clear channel that I propose in my ‘Mind as a Channel’ model (see previous chapter). Only after mental blocks have been removed can one ‘see the light’, or as Heidegger puts it “Light never first creates openness. Rather, light presupposes openness.” (Heidegger 1972, p384)

Even a numinous form of transcendent experience, may not be recognised as an enlightening one unless there is a willingness to embrace the depth of the experience. The ‘lighting of Being’ requires an open mind. This open mind is a natural state; what thinking might be like in the absence of excessive ego thought:

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<sup>425</sup> *Die Lichtung des Seins*, the lighting of Being. (Heidegger 1972, p371)

Heidegger recounts clearly and decisively what his own thinking wants to accomplish. Neither a “system of science” grounded in the absolute identity-within-difference of substance and subject, nor a “rigorous science” that appeals to an untainted source of ultimate evidence, but something less grand and less influential is the matter for whose sake Heidegger thinks and writes. (Heidegger 1972, p371)

That is, his thought somehow needs to be more ordinary. Such is the paradox of transcendence: it is at the same time both profound and ordinary. Whilst Heidegger continually stresses the limitless potential and magnificence of the thinking of Being, he also attempts to impress upon the reader that such potential is within the everyday. In most cases, such potential has, I would suggest, been restricted by the prevailing societal norms, but the potential for a depth of Being within the everyday still exists. He says:

The preparatory fundamental analysis of Dasein tries to define concrete structures of human being in its predominant state, “average everydayness.” For the most part Dasein is absorbed in the public realm (*die Offentlichkeit*) which dictates the range of possibilities that shall obtain for it in all dimensions of its life: “We enjoy ourselves and take our pleasures as they do; we read, see, and judge works of literature and art as they do.” (Heidegger 1947, p197, footnote)

That is to say, rather than daring to be our true self and thus different to others or the social norm, we give in to peer pressure. The need for courage is immediately obvious.<sup>426</sup> With that courage one can truly Be, without it one attains a mere fraction of one’s potential.

In *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger highlights another key feature that also emerges from analysis of the accounts from my contributors and from the ethos that spans the transcendence movement: that of compassion, or a transcendent love or, as Heidegger puts it, a ‘caring’:

For this is humanism: meditating and caring, that man be human and not inhumane, “in-human,” that is, outside his essence. But in what does the humanity of man consist? It lies in his essence. (Heidegger 1947, p200)

In his footnote, editor Krell, clarifies that:

“Care” is the all-inclusive name for my concern for other people, preoccupations with things, and awareness of my proper Being. It expresses the movement of my life out of a past, into a future, through the present. (Heidegger 1947, p200)

Such care is very much that felt and expressed by spiritual ecologists as they work tirelessly for the sake of the planet and the compassion shown by those striving for peace in places of war. It is a compassion for all that recognises that we, all humans, all

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<sup>426</sup> The importance of courage is discussed further in Chapters 9 and 13.

creatures, all facets of life, are part of the same Being. To Be thus requires an acknowledgement of the boundaries inherent in much modern thinking and that one transcends such limiting and limited modes of thought. In Heidegger's caring is the same unlimited compassion expressed by, for example, both the Dalai Lama and by Jesus. Also to be found is the gist of a practical philosophy expressed interspiritually in the following:

A monk or mystic contemplative in the mainstream of society is an agent of change, of reform. He or she has a vision of a human world animated by the best qualities of which we are capable, a world where compassion is alive, where love takes precedence over indifference, kindness over neglect, and mercy over oppression. (Teasdale 2002, p135)

I would argue that Teasdale's 'Monk in the World' is a living example of authentic Being.<sup>427</sup> This is perhaps not surprising since both, Teasdale tells us, found inspiration from the same German mystic. In Heidegger's case it was via a key initiator of the interspiritual movement, theologian Raimundo Panikkar:<sup>428</sup>

Panikkar also had an amazing — amazing because it happened at all — friendship with and impact on Martin Heidegger. As close friends for the last fifteen years of Heidegger's life, Panikkar's influence awakened an interest in mysticism in the German philosopher, especially in Meister Eckhart. (Teasdale 1999, p36)

Zimmerman confirms this influence, in particular in the context of nothingness (which I shall discuss in Chapter 10):

Western thinkers who emphasized the importance of nothingness have been primarily mystics such as Meister Eckhart, the latter of whom greatly influenced Heidegger's writings. (Zimmerman 1993, p241)

Whilst Heidegger—despite Eckhart's teachings—might not have considered himself a 'Monk in the World', there were aspects of his own personal life in which he did feel closer to the *Dasein* that he was constantly trying to define. His monologue of 1934, *Why do I stay in the provinces?* provides powerful examples of this. He begins by describing the ski hut to which he would often retreat:

This is my work-world — seen with the eye of an observer: the guest or summer vacationer. Strictly speaking I myself never observe the landscape. I experience its

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<sup>427</sup> Note that Teasdale, like Heidegger, does not encourage change for the sake of change, even in the name of love and compassion. For both, compassionate caring is as much about accepting that everything has its place in Being.

<sup>428</sup> Panikkar, who often called himself "a Christian-Hindu-Buddhist", had a Spanish mother and Brahmin father from southern India and worked hard to integrate the three traditions in his life, inspiring many others in the process. (Summarised from Teasdale 1999, p36)

hourly changes, day and night, in the great comings and goings of the seasons.  
(Heidegger 1934, p27)

Immediately of note is Heidegger's flowing 'connecting' language: not the abstract, often confusing, theory but simple words that more than paint the scene, help the reader to feel at home in this place of reflection and, I would strongly suggest, of Being.

In this short but powerful piece of writing, Heidegger says far more about the practice of Being than in any of his perhaps more recognised works. Here, for example, describing evenings spent with those who live yearlong in the mountains, he says:

But in the evening during a work-break, when I sit with the peasants by the fire or at the table in the "Lord's Corner," we mostly say nothing at all. We smoke our pipes in silence. Now and again someone might say that the woodcutting in the forest is finishing up, that a marten broke into the hen-house last night, that one of the cows will probably calf in the morning, that someone's uncle suffered a stroke, that the weather will soon "turn." The inner relationship of my own work to the Black Forest and its people comes from a centuries-long and irreplaceable rooted-ness in the Alemannian-Swabian soil.  
(Heidegger 1934, p28)

That Heidegger values silence and that such silence is enhanced by the presence of those whose minds know little of academic philosophy speaks volumes. He states that in this Being "My whole work is sustained and guided." (ibid).

Equally significantly, Heidegger admits "I am not at all in command" (ibid). Here we have Heidegger's clear admission that to Be requires an allowing and a surrendering. Up in his hut in the Black Forest, Heidegger did not develop his theories by rational analysis or conventional 'rigour' but rather perceived them by drawing in 'The Essence' through his connection with the landscape. Sharr, in *Heidegger's Hut*, (2006) describes it thus: "To Heidegger, there was nobility in an intimate connection with the slopes. He felt that his thought and writing drew from the taproot of situation." (Sharr 2006, p64). Sharr continues:

He was emphatic that the landscape was not a picturesque fancy to be admired by the "city-dweller." To him, there was an ethical contrast between the city - absorbed in its own delusions - and a pastoral life which he perceived as more straightforward. The provincial had a special authority and a unique voice. In the mountains, life and shelter were philosophy as craft, a rigorous exploration of human need. In that situation, for Heidegger, philosophy itself became almost a natural force. Thought at Todtnauberg was not strictly his, having its own "hidden law." This law was itself a matter of moral observance, to be engaged with as part of the terrain's inherent rigor. (Sharr 2006, p65)

That a city might be 'absorbed in its own delusions' is an idea that resonates with my own experiences: the natural flow of a more rural life seems far more conducive to both

philosophical thought and Being itself than to human controlled city life. More importantly and relevant to the present discussion, Heidegger's thought, according to Sharr, "was not strictly his". By immersing himself in the "hidden law" that being in Todtnauberg enabled, so for Heidegger "philosophy itself became almost a natural force". This should come as no surprise, since Heidegger constantly argues that real thinking comes naturally through Being.<sup>429</sup> What comes through investigation into Heidegger's relationship with his hut is clearly highlighted by Sharr, as Simon Sadler writes in the Foreword: "The book will likely startle readers in the way it "grounds" the Heideggerian theory of grounding: rather than simply claim a connection between place and being." (Sharr 2006, pix)

Whilst Heidegger, particularly in his early work, is often at pains to ground his perhaps grandiose ideas in the hammers and nails of 'the real world' (see, for example, Guignon 1993, p7), saying it and doing it show very different levels of commitment. Anybody can talk about grounding a philosophical or theological theory in daily life, but it takes a different class of individual altogether to actually live that theory. This thesis is predominantly about those individuals (whether they be acknowledged spiritual gurus such as Yogananda and Dass, or research physicist such as Leach) who have been or are willing and able to do this. Reading Sharr, and indeed Heidegger's own *Why Do I Stay in The Provinces?* (1934) or *The Pathway* (1948) clearly demonstrates that Heidegger too belongs to the transcendence movement. He, like my other contributors, and at least when in his mountain retreat, was able to surrender into the "hidden law" and just Be.<sup>430</sup>

Pursuing this line of enquiry, my aim is to determine whether, from Heidegger's lifetime quest for meaning to life, we might glean simple approaches to life that can help any human-being to understand and thus cope with life better. My question of Heidegger relates to the practical applications of his philosophy: how it might be lived.

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<sup>429</sup> As I have already illustrated in Part Two, the natural world is often found to be a good starting point for the transcendent experiences described. One could deduce therefore that those who dwell in the countryside were more susceptible to transcendent experiences. Whilst this research provides insufficient evidence to support such a conclusion, the importance of nature to transcendence is discussed further in Chapter 13.

<sup>430</sup> Heidegger's use of the word 'hidden' is pertinent here: the natural 'law' is ever present, yet not visible with senses or rational mind.

Heidegger was at pains to develop an interpretation of human experience that was both applicable to and relevant to daily life and at the same time, emphasised and enabled a depth and meaning to life. Guignon (1993) summarises his intent thus:

The phenomenology of everydayness is coupled with a hermeneutic or interpretation designed to bring to light the hidden basis for the unity and intelligibility of the practical life-world. (Guignon 1993, p7)

He goes on:

Heidegger says that it [his interpretation] formulates “transcendental generalizations” concerning the conditions for any interpretations or worldviews whatsoever. (Guignon 1993, p7 quoting *Being and Time* p244)

That his intent is to “formulate[s] ‘transcendental generalizations’” may well explain that: “What is most striking about Heidegger’s appropriation of historical sources is the way he blends together points of view generally regarded as irreconcilably opposed.” (Guignon 1993, p2)

I would argue that Heidegger’s intent exemplifies what I have termed ‘mental transcendence’. Rather than insisting on a dualistic view or providing compartmentalised descriptions of philosophers who have gone before him, he is both willing and able to see the whole, to integrate previously disparate perspectives into a world view that insists on being One, that is resolute in Being, without separation or distinction through conceptualisation.

Heidegger had much to say on the question of a philosophy that is both of this world and beyond our typical mental preoccupations. In Guignon’s view, which resonates well with my own reading of Heidegger: “Heidegger explicitly rejected epigonism and pedantic scholarship, calling on thinkers to travel along the paths he traversed instead of pondering his words.” (Guignon 1993, pp2-3). Might this be taken not just figuratively, as in using philosophy as a path to a depth of understanding, for example, but also literally? Given the importance that Heidegger gave to the time he spent in his ski hut, might he have been encouraging others to experience Being in this very down-to-earth way? That he does not seem to do so directly is at first puzzling but, as I shall discuss shortly, it might be explained by examining the difference between the epistemology prevalent in his time compared to ours.



Even without such encouragement however, there is little doubt that, given the significance that is now typically given to Heidegger and his work, his aims, as concluded by Guignon for example, would seem to have been met:

Heidegger's lofty ambition was to rejuvenate philosophy (and, at the same time, Western culture) by clearing away the conceptual rubbish that has collected over our history in order to recover a clearer, richer understanding of what things are all about. (Guignon 1993, p2)

This is precisely the added depth to life that all 'seekers' aspire to. Most importantly, it is a depth that comes through living life, not through conceptualising it. As Thomas Sheehan notes:

Heidegger in 1919 already regarded the objectifying outlook as originating not so much from natural science as from the theoretical attitude itself: "It is not just naturalism, as [Husserl] thought, . . . but the general domination of the theoretical that is messing up the real problematic" (*Gesamtausgabe* Vol 56/57 p87 cited by Guignon 1993, p5 )

The question remains as to whether Heidegger himself is guilty of generating yet more "conceptual rubbish" and "messing up" a simple, transcendent, Beingness with all his theorising.<sup>431</sup> Again my answer would be "yes and no". In the sense that his reputation suggests that he has had some success in conveying at least some of the essence of the deeper reality of Being through his work, then 'yes'. He has also undoubtedly contributed to developments in the field of ontology. And, given their sheer breadth, variety and interconnected nature, the works of Heidegger must surely have enabled at least some mental transcendence in those who have read them.

Conversely, in the sense that much of his work is often considered difficult to grasp, if not incomprehensible, then Heidegger work might be considered flawed. It is also known that he kept returning to his key areas of work, indicating that he himself was not content with his writings or conclusions. In this respect Heidegger's example does not seem that of an individual who has reached the transcendent possibilities of which he writes.<sup>432</sup> However, he does as I have highlighted above, warn us against philosophy as a purely scholarly pursuit. To the individuals and groups that have informed and inspired this thesis, philosophy is perhaps better considered, as the philosopher Simon Blackburn

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<sup>431</sup> And invention of new terms – *Dasein* itself being one of many examples from his work.

<sup>432</sup> Although some of his poetic works might be considered transcendent. See, for example *The Thinker as Poet* (Heidegger 1971) in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York & London: Harper & Row. Although I, personally, find such work moving, a literary critique is beyond the scope of this discourse.

writes: “Conceptual engineering. For just as the engineer studies the structure of material things, so the philosopher studies the structure of thought.” (Blackburn 1999, p2)

Having chosen, when I started my academic training and working life, to be an engineer rather than a scientist, Blackburn’s words resonate with me. His ‘middle-ground’ answer to the question “What’s the point?” (of philosophy) is also highly pertinent to the transcendence movement. He says: “Reflection matters because it is *continuous* with practice” (Blackburn 1999, p7), i.e. one cannot separate one’s interaction with the world from one’s beliefs and ways of thinking about it. To understand one’s actions requires an awareness that comes through reflection. Blackburn’s ‘low-ground’ answer takes this a stage further: in the middle of a dispute, the ability to ‘take a step back’, to philosophise, is essential if resolution is to be found: “critical awakening is the antidote” (Blackburn 1999, p11). Thus, it is not the Philosophy, or thinking for the sake of it, that helps us to engage with and cope with life, but a practical philosophy, one grounded in life’s experience. This is certainly the sort of philosophy favoured within the transcendence movement and fully consistent with Heidegger’s understanding of human Being in the world.

Heidegger’s *Dasein* emphasises that reflections or “philosophic contemplation” is, as Bertrand Russell notes in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912): “An enlargement of the Self, but this enlargement is best attained when it is not directly sought”. (1912, p92). Not only are philosophies of the transcendence movement seeking an ‘engineer’s’ approach, they recognise the importance of relinquishing ego in the process; that is to say, to allow rather than strive.

My analysis of the philosophies of the individuals that I have featured (in Part Two) clearly indicates two striking factors: they have chosen an approach to life, attitudes and way of living that are simple, easy to apply and relevant to their daily lives. Whilst specific formulated philosophies may still feature, they are present as intellectual support: they enable mental transcendence; they are not hard rules by which to live.

Heidegger’s too is a ‘philosophy of life’ in so far as it exhorts one to focus on two things: the depth of Being and the immediacy of Being in the here and now. That is his gist, and these ideas alone provide a practical ‘philosophy of life’ that is available for anyone to adopt. His philosophy is mirrored in the practice of mindfulness, it is mirrored in any personal philosophy (for example of my contributors) that helps an individual to

be present in the here and now, to be fully connected into the moment, with the mind not preoccupied or attached to desires or fears. Those who have experienced the depth and beauty that often accompany transcendent thought, would almost certainly agree that these experiences are the 'Being in the World' to which Heidegger constantly refers.

In *The Age of the World Picture* (Heidegger 1938), translator and editor William Lovitt provides many valuable insights into the worldly nature of Being, including this one on the German word *Weltbild* which Heidegger used extensively:

The conventional translation of *Weltbild* would be "conception of the world" or "philosophy of life." The more literal translation, "world picture," is needed for the following of Heidegger's discussion; but it is worth noting that "conception of the world" bears a close relation to Heidegger's theme of man's representing of the world as picture. (Heidegger 1938, p128)

Thus it is perfectly valid to consider Heidegger work as a "philosophy of life". But, as such, what does that mean in practice? First one needs to know, as Lovitt asks:

What is a world picture? Obviously a picture of the world. But what does "world" mean here? ... "World" serves here as a name for what is, in its entirety. The name is not limited to the cosmos, to nature. History also belongs to the world. Yet even nature and history, and both interpenetrating in their underlying and transcending of one another, do not exhaust the world. In this designation the ground of the world is meant also, no matter how its relation to the world is thought (Heidegger 1938, p129).

In other words, an integrated and holistic view of the term needs to be taken. Heidegger does not mean the typical but limited human idea of 'world' as the planet on which one lives and may make one's fortune. In this context then what is meant by world 'picture'? Lovitt continues:

With the word "picture" we think first of all of a copy of something. Accordingly, the world picture would be a painting, so to speak, of what is as a whole. But "world picture" means more than this. (Heidegger 1938, p129)

It is necessary, I argue, to mentally transcend the typical modern idea of 'picture' to something that is far beyond what we store on computers as .jpg files. At one level, 'picture' refers to an inner mental image of the world; and yet *Weltbild* also means, to Heidegger, the totality of the world as it actually is. Here then is the heart of Heidegger's philosophy: to Be, to experience the truth depth of *Dasein*, requires that an individual's inner image of the world matches the world as it is experienced. The separation that so often exists between how the world is perceived and how it actually is needs to be

transcended.<sup>433</sup> This, I would argue, is the crux of the transcendence process. Like Kabat-Zinn ‘critical acceptance’, this practical philosophy or approach to life requires one to stop denying things around us that do not match selfish desires or expectations. *Dasein* and transcendence require critical acceptance; that one rises above ego and attachments.

Returning to my earlier discussion on detachment being part of the transcendence process, we can underscore the idea that such detachment needs to include the release of attachments to words and the belief that they, of themselves, have an intrinsic meaning or value. This is sound practical advice that is offered not just by Heidegger but seen across the Arts. A particularly striking example comes from the musical partnership of Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe (1956):

*Words, words, words, I'm so sick of words ...  
If you're in love, show me!  
(Elisa, My Fair Lady)*

Eliza’s frustration with her poetic suitor Freddy finally boils over in this powerful song that speaks volumes about the limitation of words. Sometimes they are not sufficient. Actions do indeed speak louder than words. *Dasein* is far better demonstrated and enabled through presence and action than left to mere words, especially in affairs of the heart.

Love, whilst a very abstract concept, is very real as a lived experience and feeling. Heidegger was very much aware that such feelings can provide a ‘way-in’ to *Dasein*. In *What is Metaphysics?* (1949) he writes:

There is another possibility of such revelation, and this is in the joy we feel in the presence of the being - not merely the person - of someone we love. Because of these moods in which, as we say, we “are” this or that (i.e. bored, happy, etc.) we find ourselves (*befinden uns*) in the midst of what-is-in-totality, wholly pervaded by it. The affective state in which we find ourselves not only discloses, according to the mood we are in, what-is in totality, but this disclosure is at the same time far from being a mere chance occurrence and is the ground-phenomenon of our *Dasein*. (Heidegger 1949, p364)

It is worth noting that individuals reporting transcendent states (as in Part Two) often describe that they feel ‘loved’. So, one may ask, is love a cause or effect of Being? When in a transcendent state, the question becomes superfluous, but if an answer must

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<sup>433</sup> Which might, for example, require that one acknowledges that those we live amongst may have other perspectives on reality.

be given, it might be along the lines of a ‘positive vicious circle’: when open to love and being willing give love, then that love will be felt as a presence, as Being.

As soon as discussions enter the realm of human love, so account needs to be taken of the often harsh reality of human relationships. To those within the transcendence movement, facing such issues fairly and squarely is of paramount importance: but does Heidegger enlighten us in these matters? Charles Guignon in *Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy* (1993) provides an answer to this question, as he explores the value of Heidegger’s work to psychotherapy. He examines how Heidegger’s view on what it means to Be human, may shed some much needed light on the cases now typical in the psychotherapist’s consulting rooms. In doing this Guignon reminds us:

That Heidegger expressed the hope that “his thinking would escape the confines of the philosopher’s study and become of benefit to wider circles, in particular to a large number of suffering human beings.” (Guignon 1993, p215 quoting Boss 1978)<sup>434</sup>

Guignon, referring to the work of Morris Eagle, goes on to describe typical present-day clients of a psychotherapist:

These individuals feel purposeless, adrift, and deeply dissatisfied with life. Although the immediate cause of such "self-disorders" may be faulty parenting, Eagle suggests that they ultimately spring from such social factors as "the lack of stable ideologies and values ... or an atmosphere of disillusionment and cynicism in the surrounding society." (Guignon 1993, p217 quoting Eagle 1984)<sup>435</sup>

This lack of meaning and its resulting quest for ‘something more’ is precisely the inner yearning, to belong, to Be, that sets many individuals on a personal path or spiritual seeking. As I have shown in Part Two, it is often this lack of depth in current societal norms that, at some level (sometimes consciously, often not), gives seekers the impetus to ‘go within’ and to question ‘the meaning of life’. Modern society often seems to fail to provide what Guignon calls ‘morality’.

Guignon recognises in Heidegger’s work the conviction that to become more authentic in and of oneself means taking an active place in the world. Equally important, this process (of transcendence) requires a major re-alignment of what is important or not in

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<sup>434</sup> Boss, M. (1988) “Martin Heidegger’s Zollikon Seminars,” (Kenny, B. tr), in *Heidegger and Psychology*, special issue of *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, (Hoeller, K. ed) reprint of Vol 16 Nos 1, 2, and 3 (1978-9): pp7-20.

<sup>435</sup> Morris N. Eagle, *Recent Developments in Psychoanalysis: A Critical Evaluation*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984, pp72-73.

one's life. He says: "The *path* to this deeper involvement in the public world passes through a radical breakdown of our complacent absorption in everydayness." (Guignon 1993, p228)

Those in the transcendence movement are willing to see the superficial in their lives for what it is and to let go of it. The need, Heidegger and Guignon maintain, is to trust to the 'self-focussing' of *Dasein*. In so doing:

Our stance toward the future is that of "anticipation" or "forward-directedness": a clear-sighted and unwavering commitment to those overriding aims taken as definitive of one's existence as a whole. (Guignon 1993, p229)

Thus one tunes into the self that one is projecting oneself into, and also, through Being in the world, become able to face the reality of other people with whom we share reality.<sup>436</sup> Heidegger, perhaps deliberately and wisely, seems to stop short of advising, or even suggesting how his philosophy may be of benefit in such matters. But his underlying view on how one might exist at a far deeper level than currently predominates echoes many key hypotheses of this thesis.

Having found, through comparison, many significant areas of agreement between Heidegger's ethos of Being and my proposed notions of transcendent thought, it is appropriate to also identify areas of disagreement or apparent divergence. In one significant respect, for example, Heidegger appears to contradict himself. A major argument through his work is how language has, through the pressures of social conformity, become devalued and how too much emphasis on the *techne* of language makes it incapable of adequately expressing the depth or essence of Being, and yet he persists in using language and the scientific analysis that he criticises, often vehemently, in his attempt to fully describe *Dasein*. A compelling argument can, however, be made for the effects on Heidegger of the 'prevailing wisdom' that emphasised scientific epistemology, the *Zeitgeist* of rationalism and the overwhelming belief of his era in the supremacy of rational modes of thought.

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<sup>436</sup> This issues touches on the controversial question of Heidegger's involvement with the Nazi's. A detailed response is outside the scope of this work, but one might say that as we accept the limitations imposed on our Being by the Beingness of those with whom we share our lives (in the widest sense) then fewer possibilities exist for us. If for example, as Heidegger himself was (and many in the Middle East today are), we find ourselves living in a dictatorship, then our potential for action is reduced. How can we judge Heidegger, or anyone either rebelling against or supporting a firm-handed regime, from our privileged position outside of that situation? Is it not the case that we each have to Be as best we are able given the situation we find ourselves in?

Even to propose the theories he did was, in the 1920s to 1950s, to risk (and indeed receive) fierce criticism and to challenge many of the ‘scared cows’ of philosophy and of society. One can only speculate as to what he would have said had he been writing at the start of the 21st century and endeavour not to judge him from this very different place in history.

By writing in the period dominated by two World Wars, Heidegger lacked what philosophers and researchers of today have in ever growing abundance: an array of alternative methodologies that better reflect the nature of his subject area. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, anthropologists and social scientists have, in recent decades, developed ‘participative inquiry’ and ‘action research’ methods which would have provided Heidegger with a significant new approach to the question of *Dasein*. It did not occur to Heidegger, I would argue, as it had not occurred to others of his era, that there was a different way of getting across the message of his work: to portray the essence of Being one must Be a living example of it.

Only by Being present oneself and enabling and encouraging others to do so, can the experiential evidence be conveyed. The lack of such a suggestion in Heidegger's work, whilst probably contributing to its lack of accessibility, is totally understandable and forgivable given the lack of alternatives to modern epistemology at the time. Now however, with ideas of transcendence flourishing, researchers in the field can freely quote Kolb (for example) and encourage ‘experiential learning’, for how else can one learn about Being save through personal engagement *in* Being?

## Summary

I began this necessarily brief review of Heidegger’s work with the open question as to whether his philosophy of what it means to Be human corresponded in any way to the experiences and philosophies of the individuals who have been the focus of this research. That is, to what extent is Heidegger’s *Dasein* and Beingness akin to transcendent thought as defined and discussed in this thesis. I can conclude that Heidegger’s theories endorse and support the ideas behind and approaches to transcendence as hypothesized here.<sup>437</sup> That Being correlates to a higher or deeper mode

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<sup>437</sup> There is also the question as to the extent to which Heidegger influenced those who now form what I call the transcendence movement. Almost certainly some influences should be credited to Heidegger, but an examination of this question is beyond the scope of the current work.

of thought and that Beingness requires a willingness to surrender into the Nothingness from which it manifests, is consistent with the need for both mental transcendence and the actual experience of (whole-body / non-local) transcendence. Equally importantly, Heidegger knew the necessity of authentic living if humans are to rise above their individual and collective suffering. From psychotherapy to deep ecology and from poetry to technology Heidegger knew, above all else, that all facets of human life and of the physical world on which we live are interconnected.

Sheehan, having introduced the contributions to *Heidegger: the Man and the Thinker* (1981), concludes thus:

Heidegger writes, “*Alles ist Weg*,”<sup>438</sup> “Everything is way,” and man’s Being is to be on-the-way (Greek, *meta tei hodoi, methodos*), i.e., in essential movement. Hence there is no method which could show us for the first time the topic of philosophy or lead us to the place of thought. Rather, we are already there ... In the words of the poet:

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*  
T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding* (Sheehan 1981, pxix)

“Everything is way”. Few inspired by the *Tao Te Ching* would disagree. “We are already there”: so why say more?

In the years leading up to this research I had been coming to the conclusion that I (and perhaps humans in general) ‘think too much’. It may be useful, I was concluding, to have a simple and practical philosophy by which to live, but any generalised philosophy is only of use if and when it is applied to the ‘here and now’ situation. And even then, can one’s rational minds ever assess the full depth or significance of all aspects of that situation? By Being however, one Knows all that one needs to know and, just by Being, one does whatever Beingness needs doing.<sup>439</sup>

If this post-rational, transcendent, reality had been dawning on me, then reading and reflecting on Heidegger grounded these ideas and confirmed the point: there is more to thinking than rational thought. The emerging transcendent way of using our minds is

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<sup>438</sup> Heidegger, M. (1954) *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1954, p198.

<sup>439</sup> That such a state of Being leads to success in many, if not all fields, is illustrated, for example, by the stand-up comic: only by connecting into the mood and needs of the audience, by being present with his (or her) material, the venue and beyond, can a comic hope to ‘win over’ an audience. See for example Kane, R. (2012) *The Humorist* London: Simon & Schuster, 2012.



very much what Heidegger was attempting to explain and enable. In the world of today however, thinking (according to Heidegger and many commentators from within the transcendence movement) is far removed from authentic Being. The question thus remains: how can one become more authentic in one's thoughts? What can be done to help bring about personal Beingness? The simple answer, which follows the advice of Heidegger and other writers featured in this study, is to enter into a personal process of transcendence; and of Being.

In the next, final part of this thesis I examine a number of areas that, in their relevance to the process of either mental transcendence and/or whole-body / non-local transcendence are found to assist individuals in this direction'. In Chapters 9 and 10, I shall explore two important areas of mental transcendence: i.e. concepts and theories that can help minds to accept what is possible of them. Firstly I discuss *Evolution of Consciousness* and how, by embracing the process of 'coming into Being', so one becomes a part of a self-enlightening process. Secondly, in recognition of the source of Being, I bring together theories and experiences of *Nothingness: Transcendent thought and the empty mind*.

Just as Heidegger emphasises the need to take our place in the world in which we live, I suggest (in Chapter 11) how, by supporting and aligning personal journeys with of other individuals and groups within the transcendence movement, whole communities (whether local, international or virtual) can also be helped. By integrating personal Beingness to networks committed to transcendence, so one's sense of isolation diminishes and of 'meaning to life' increases.

Before concluding (Chapter 14) I return to the practical focus of this work and examine what engaging in the transcendence process means in practice. Chapter 12 focuses on *Transitions, suffering and acceptance*. This is the harsh emotional reality of daring to step out of the conventional world-view into the full potential of what it means to Be. To feel nurtured and supported during this challenging process, there are many practical things that can be done: this is the theme of Chapter 13: *Activities and factors that enable transcendence*.

# **Part Four**

## **Relating theory to practice:**

## **Discussions and conclusions**

### **Chapter 9**

#### **Evolution of consciousness: its**

#### **‘drive’, indicators and effects**

It has been my contention throughout this work that the transcendence process and movement described here are considered inherent to Being human.<sup>440</sup> In this chapter I focus on the evolutionary aspect of what I hypothesise to be a very natural and necessary process.

In my autobiographical section (Chapter 5) I called upon the experiences of respected authors from India (Paramahansa Yogananda), Switzerland (Carl Jung) and the USA (Ram Dass). This list I supplemented with lesser known published life stories from a Canada (Dorothy Maclean), from New Zealand (Helen Brown) and from Ireland (Lorna Byrne). Add these to the accounts collected specifically for this thesis and England, Wales and states of the former USSR are all represented as places of birth and upbringing of those whose lives and experiences offer significant support for my hypotheses.<sup>441</sup> Whilst admitting that the quantity of information is insufficient to provide

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<sup>440</sup> Whether it is inherent to humanity is a separate question and outside the scope of the current work.

<sup>441</sup> Each of these authors and participants I would consider within the transcendence movement. It is this movement that I contend is a global and inherently human development.

statistically valid data to make quantifiable claims, that has never been the objective of this work. From the outset, this has been an ‘existence theorem’, the aim of which is to demonstrate that a transcendence movement exists and that, in individuals and groups of many races, there exists a very real, daily-life, form of transcendence that, as its members concur, reflect the emergence of a higher level of human consciousness.<sup>442</sup>

In making such a contention I emphasise that the individuals quoted in this thesis represent but a small proportion of those who are ‘transcendent aware’, and whom I have met since the mid-1980s (when I first took an active interest in transcendent-related topics). In the 1990s, whilst secretary of the then local holistic network in Northamptonshire (*Sailing with Spirit*) I met many dozens of individuals whom I would now consider as being committed to the transcendence process. Likewise since settling in North Wales in 2009 I have had the pleasure of sharing ideas and experiences on many aspects of transcendence, again with many dozens of people.

Whilst I can obviously only count the individuals with whom I have spoken personally, when surveying all the conferences attended (and reported on in Appendix 4), there have been tens of delegates with the experiences and commitments consistent with the hypotheses of this work. Taken together with those with whom I have had contact with over the internet and through my Reiki teaching, this brings my tally of ‘connected’ Beings, into the hundreds. And that is just my, limited, exposure in a fraction of the groups and forums, physical and virtual, that now exist to enable such individuals to share and communicate with one another. The evidence presented here represents the tip of the proverbial iceberg. And, like the iceberg, there are undoubtedly many practitioners pursuing their personal transcendent paths well below the parapet of public engagement. What proportion is impossible to say, but given the preference for quiet reflection amongst such individuals, the numbers involved is likely to be significant.

That my list of contributors also spans the globe does, I maintain, reflect the possibility that the changes reported are expressive of an inherent change in our ways of thinking:

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<sup>442</sup> The idea of an evolution of consciousness is well supported in the literature. See, for example, Austin, J.H. (1998) *Zen and the Brain: Towards an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998 and Gidley, J. (2007) ‘The Evolution of Consciousness as a Planetary Imperative’, *Integral Review* 5, 2007. The work of Julian Huxley, for example in describing behavioural selection and social evolution, also provides strong support: see, for example, Huxley, J. (1974) *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis* (Third edition), London: Allen & Unwin, 1974.

at an early stage in terms of the number of individual compared to the overall population, but very much present (in both senses of the word).

Although those within the transcendence movement perceive an evolution of consciousness, it is accepted that commentators from other perspectives would argue against it, or indeed against consciousness itself. One such example would be Stuart Sutherland, widely stated for the following statement:

Consciousness is a fascinating but elusive phenomenon; it is impossible to specify what it is, what it does, or why it evolved. Nothing worth reading has been written on it. (Sutherland 1989, as quoted by Blackmore 2001, p522)

That consciousness is “impossible to specify”, at least with any precision, I would have to agree. Indeed, this has been a gist of my argument throughout: ideas such as consciousness and transcendence are not amenable to description through words. It is for this reason that the focus of my research has been on the praxis and ‘way of Being’. If consciousness and its evolution cannot be defined then, I and those in the transcendence movement would maintain, it can be felt; it can be perceived through full immersion into the experience of life. Whether one calls it evolutionary consciousness, Being, life or prefer not to label it at all (as with Sutherland), is not the important issue at stake here. What those in the transcendence movement emphasise is that they perceive a change in how they and others are thinking and behaving; a change in attitude. Others, including Sutherland, may perceive it differently. Each individual has their own perceptions (depending, for example, on how and where they have been brought up).

In Sutherland’s later work, *Irrationality* (2007), he argues that much human behaviour considered irrational (or non-rational) can be traced (for example) to wrong assumptions and the propensity to justify one’s beliefs rather than be open to change or difference. Therapeutic work within the transcendence movement takes a similar view, where transcendence praxis requires one to be open to change and to become aware of and move beyond assumptions. At this practical level, transcendence practitioners would argue that the notion of consciousness (or not) becomes largely irrelevant. Semantic debates as to what one might call the process of awareness (for example) serve only to

distract one from the more important task (they would say) of making fewer assumptions.<sup>443</sup>

As in all such debates, there is a wide spectrum of views. Given the tripartite transition model (as presented in Chapter 7 and illustrated diagrammatically in Appendix 12, Figs 3-5) it is reasonable to conclude that signs of transcendence appear far more prevalent in certain groups, populations or parts of the world compared to others.<sup>444</sup> In any developmental or evolutionary shift of a population, at any given point in time, there will be a spectrum of degrees to which this shift has affected each member of that population. Thus in 2011, if considering a range of individual humans around the globe, each stage of my tripartite model will be represented, as follows.

At the extreme of the ‘modern’ phase, unaware of the shifts taking place and contentedly living their lives according to modern norms, are those individuals who, if they have transcendent experiences, brush them aside or deny them. World-wide, this is probably still the largest proportion of the population.

At the boundary between the modern and transitional, are those individuals who have sufficiently opened their minds to new possibilities (i.e. mentally transcended) to be willing and able to allow and enter into whole-body / non-local transcendent experiences. Whilst spending most of their time thinking rationally, at others, they might become confused or in conflict (typical of the transitional phase, as discussed further in Chapter 12) as old norms are continually being challenged. Two of my contributors, (C20 and C21) illustrate this spectrum within the transcendence movement and also demonstrate how progress along the transcendence path can be reflected in one’s confidence in subjects outside the conventional norm. Although C21 reports always having known “Things we can’t quite explain with your normally perceived reality”,<sup>445</sup> she was hesitant in talking about her experiences and expressed discomfort at not being like most people. This seemed to be rather a ‘chicken and egg’ situation in that she

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<sup>443</sup> The suggestion could also be made that the danger of strongly held beliefs, of which Sutherland speaks, might apply to the perceived need (outside of the transcendence movement) to rationally explain everything.

<sup>444</sup> It is beyond the scope of the current work to quantify this statement, if indeed it can be quantified. One can however ‘feel’ the difference in the sense of ‘humble welcome’ one receives in some regions compared to others, to appreciate my point.

<sup>445</sup> Interview transcription; describing what ‘transcendence’ means to her.

described how she had few people she could really talk to about such subjects: that is, she felt isolated, and was greatly relieved to be able to talk to me on such topics. C20 was equally pleased to be sharing her experiences with me, but was far more open about and confident in her ‘transcending self’. By contrast to C21, C20 had been active in healing circles and in the Theosophical Society and, as a result, felt part of what I am calling the transcendence movement.

Such a contrast emphasises that engaging with the transcendence process is considerably easier when one is able to share experiences and ideas with ‘kindred spirits’. I would strongly argue that the ability to think in a transcendent manner is a ‘life skill’ that should be taught at all levels along with language and communication skills. In meeting others on their spiritual journey I have met many, like C21 and myself, who have struggled through being different in our alignment with transcendence. Given the value (‘fruits’ of transcendence) at the individual and collective levels of these transcendent modes of thinking it would seem imperative that they be given not only a place in academic curriculum but also become a corner-plank of it. Such is the view of many organisations within the transcendence movement (see Chapter 3) and indeed their reason d’être.

Life for those individuals within the transitional phase is typically a constant challenge as alternative world-views battle for supremacy. This may occur wholly within each person’s mind or, in the case of the Middle Eastern countries at the time of writing, as actual fighting in the streets as the people rebel against long-standing dictators. One reflects the other, the personal reflecting the national according to holographic and fractal logic.

Many of my contributors (myself included) could probably be positioned at the boundary between the transitional and the transcendent phases. For us, transcendent philosophies and practices are largely accepted intellectually and transcendent experiences welcomed. Some inner conflicts still exist however and some periods are far from peaceful as the mind attempts to assimilate and accept both prevailing old ways of being and the emerging Beingness.

At the other end of the spectrum, well into the transcendent phase, are my more advanced and settled contributors such as Dass and Clements. They still freely accept

that life has much to teach them, but any lessons are faced openly and with humility. Courage and compassion, joy and a natural flow are their hallmarks.

There is undoubtedly a vast spread between these two extremes and one that is visible in the spectrum of attitudes that are witnessed in the world at large. Whether there are some parts of the world 'more evolved' than others is debateable, but Clements has suggested that Great Britain is at the forefront of this evolutionary shift.<sup>446</sup> He argues that as the originators of the Industrial Revolution, the British have had longer to live with the materialistic society and to see it for what it is: shallow and of little significance compared to the depth of a spiritual way of life. This view too is in total agreement with my models of the transcendence process and of the importance of accepting reality as it is in the world around us.

For those within the transcendence movement It is essential that humanity evolves in the direction described, as I discuss in the next section.

### **Evolutionary necessity**

Whilst the number of texts suggesting an emerging transcendent era consistent with the views within the transcendence movement is still comparatively small, literature warning of the problems facing humanity and the need for a fundamental change in how we live (and thus think) are now significant. They include texts which endorse my contention that the current transitional times signal an end of modernism and the beginning of something radically new and different; or else the end of humanity itself. Writing as a sociologist exploring behind the headlines of globalization, Zygmunt Bauman, for example, writes of how: "The developed part of the world surrounds itself with a sanitary belt of uncommitment." (Bauman 1998, p75). That is, how humanity, to a large extent, collectively ignores those affected by famine or war (for example). Later he describes the situation as a "picture of inhumanity" and considers that this "challenge is truly awesome" (Bauman 1998, p76).

In a similar vein Bauman also attacks the excesses of materialism, describing today's industry as: "the dense and dark, straggly 'deregulated' thicket of global competitiveness." (Bauman 1998, p78). That is to say, current society has so played the

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<sup>446</sup> In a personal discussion following Clements' lecture at Bangor University's *Beyond Boundaries* Conference on 21.1.11.

games of “attraction and temptation” that we are left “without sense, without a meaningful meaning” (Bauman 1998, p79). Whilst Bauman offers no suggestions as to what might follow, it is easy to see what is driving those within the transcendence movement, collectively and individually, to seek an alternative to the global market place. Not only is there an emptiness to life that needs to be sated,<sup>447</sup> but “cultural hybridization” leads to “cultural disempowerment” (Bauman 1998, p100) and, despite the huge increase in technological communication systems, humanity is in: “the age of an almost complete communication breakdown between the learned elite and the *populous*”. (Bauman 1998, p102). Bauman is describing the very chasms and barriers within our culture and societies that requires just the transcendence I am indicating to be taking place.

Thus, the topic of evolutionary consciousness, in emerging from evolutionary theory, also bridges subject gaps, for example, between biology and sociology.<sup>448</sup>

As one pieces together previously fragmented understanding of life so, personally and collectively, the boundaries between disciplines are transcended. Equally important, practice and philosophy are being seen as two views of one reality.

Life is, and only can be, a reality of evolutionary nature and dimension. Physically and historically it corresponds with a function X which determines the position of every living thing in space, in duration and in form.

This is the fundamental fact which requires an explanation: but the evidence for it is henceforward above all verification, as well as being immune from any subsequent contradiction by experience. (Teilhard de Chardin 1955, pp154-155)

For Teilhard de Chardin, as for my focus in this research, the explanation of evolution, its mechanism, is not what is important. Rather than get side-tracked by discussions on the ‘how’, he admits that “we still cannot understand how the machine works.” (ibid) But that does not stop those within the transcendence movement from seeing evidence of evolution around them, or from building up a picture of human’s place within evolution.

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<sup>447</sup> This insatiable need and alternatives to it are also a feature of Leach’s autobiographic book discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>448</sup> Other notable collaborations across disciplines are featured in Chapter 7 (Solms & Turnbull, Psychotherapist and Neuroscientist) and Chapter 13 (Ray & Anderson, Sociologist and Psychologist).



As a leading palaeontologist Teilhard de Chardin builds this picture with an overview of the development of life on earth from bacteria in the Archean Eon to humankind in the Cenozoic Era.<sup>449</sup> His aim is to emphasise just how recent is human's emergence and how small a part of creation we constitute.

He goes on to illustrate a primary way in which we are different. Whilst other species have split into numerous subspecies, we have remained one. Humanity has its cultural groupings, but these are increasingly being broken down by globalisation. Human-kind is, or is at least becoming, one species; accepting our variations and able to think and act as one single entity across the globe.

Within his all-embracing theory Teilhard de Chardin acknowledges the 'blind alley' of 'isolation'; the phase, that perhaps we (individually or collectively) need to go through, in order to explore the "utmost limit of ourselves". He argues that "to be more *alone* so as to increase one's being" would be to "culminate in a dust of active, dissociated particles." (Teilhard de Chardin 1955, p261). Rather, he argues, the deepest urge within human beings is to coalesce; for our 'withins' to combine. Thus "this psychic interpenetrability grows and becomes directly perceptible".

Finally in man, in whom the effects of consciousness attain the present maximum found in nature, it reaches a high degree everywhere. It is written all over the social phenomenon and is, of course, felt by us directly (Teilhard de Chardin 1955, p263).

He argues convincingly that it is this 'radial' energy of evolution, humanity's noogenesis that drives an ever extending degree of consciousness. He calls this our 'hominisation' process, through which we are becoming "more truly human". (Teilhard de Chardin 1955, p13).

This trend can be seen even in the traditionally hard-headed world of business. As Daniel Goleman explains in describing the benefits of an Emotionally Intelligent approach to business:

Emotional intelligence can be an inoculation that preserves health and encourages growth. If a company has the competencies that flow from self-awareness and self-regulation, motivation and empathy, leadership skills and open communication, it should prove more resilient no matter what the future brings. And that, in turn, places a premium on people who themselves are emotionally intelligent. Old ways of doing business no longer work. (Goleman 1998, p313)

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<sup>449</sup> The Archean Eon is 3800 to 2500 million years ago and the Cenozoic Era is 65.5 million years ago to present day

If, as Goleman insists, the old ways, the hierarchical, controlling ways of doing business are ineffective in the chaos of the present day, then Emotional Intelligence (EI) provides a core set of ‘soft’ skills that bring not just personal success but business success.<sup>450</sup> As befits a development consistent with transcendence, EI consciously and deliberately sets out to balance personal needs with those of others.

Whilst ‘individualistic’, in the sense of consciously working with one’s own feelings, EI is equally concerned with the emotional needs of others. The two developments go hand in hand, as if one cannot surrender into the Oneness without having first ‘found’ oneself (from amidst conditioning for example). From my personal experience, this makes much sense: it was only after a period of fifteen years living alone, working out what and who I was as an individual that I was ready to embark on a serious relationship with another human. As I have written elsewhere, surrendering into a partnership with a single loved one and merging into a perceived one-ness seem to be part of the same process: that of transcendence. It seemed to me that one cannot embark to the depths of such melding until one has transcended family and cultural influences. Teilhard de Chardin would seem to agree.

Another facet of human development which Teilhard de Chardin argues is an essential part of the grand evolutionary plan is our technological advances. He says:

The spiritual success of the universe is bound up with the correct functioning of every zone of that universe and particularly with the release of every possible energy in it. (Teilhard de Chardin as quoted by Leroy in *Teilhard de Chardin* 1957, p40)

That is, to be fully fulfilled as a species, humanity would need to develop along all possible avenues, technological and financial included. In doing so we are “helping the world to form itself around us” (ibid). Teilhard de Chardin is thus arguing that life is the way it is, that there is no right or wrong even when it comes to the aspects of society that might appear to be leading us away from a divine future. On the contrary, they are merely part of the greater, unfolding, picture. This refusal to label anything as ‘bad’ is a characteristic of the transcendence movement, a typical acceptance of what is.

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<sup>450</sup> Goleman includes many case studies of businesses ‘turned-around’ by increasing emphasis on Emotional Intelligent ways of working.

Teilhard de Chardin sees this evolutionary unfolding as a process which: “could only proceed even further along its original line on condition that it underwent some profound readjustment at a given moment”. (Teilhard de Chardin 1955, p167)

Drawing the parallel between ever increasing temperatures requiring ice to turn to water and water to steam, an ever increasing degree of consciousness must, he argues, reach a point of ‘*metamorphosis*’; a quantum leap in the *quality* of our awareness within the world. A shift to transcendent modes of thought would surely fulfil such a prediction.

The idea that the human race will transcend its current ways is common in many quarters. In yoga, for example: “To surmount *maya* [the principle of relativity and duality] was the task assigned to the human race by the millennial prophets.” (Yogananda 1946, p299)

Likewise, the notion that such a time is fast approaching. Madeline Sewell, for examples, introduces her visionary poems thus:

During the 1970s and 1980s I had a series of visions and was guided to paint and record in words what I had been given. (Sewell 2010, p2)

Her poem echoes many of the themes and feelings reported by many who experience periods of transcendence:

*Awake! Awake! You sons of men;  
Awaken now! The time has come;  
The age of shadowy fear is done;*  
(Sewell 2010, p2)

“Awake *now*! The time has come” (my emphasis) brings across the perceived need for urgent change in how one lives one life, but not change in the future: awakening to a higher consciousness is already happening. There is a powerful sense in this poem of how those engaged in transcendence recognise that it is up to each individual to find their own courage and develop their own, more evolved, way of thinking and interacting with the world.

Such sentiments, I would suggest, echo the famous contention of Hegel that: “The history of the world is nothing but the development of the idea of freedom” (Hegel quoted by Singer 1983, p22)<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Quoting Hegel (1837) *The Philosophy of History* p456.

To Hegel, Singer and many within the transcendence movement, humankind's history can be seen as an increasing degree of freedom for (at least some) human individuals. If one takes this view, then a progression might be observed: first there is freedom from a despot or freedom from nature's vagaries, followed by freedom to be individuals: be that at the level of freedom from physical slavery or of being a slave to conditioned thoughts. Transcendent thought would then be considered a liberating and a natural continuation of this evolutionary process.<sup>452</sup>

Underlying the philosophies of those such as Hegel and Sewall can be seen an inner drive within human being to be free and to be their own unique individual self. At each stage in human history this has emerged in a new development. Within the transcendence movement, I contend, this evolutionary process has reached a new level. Now it is recognised that freedom is an inner issue and that consciousness can be more than rational thought. A significant part of this next step is the realisation that each individual both can and needs to integrate the spiritual aspects of life with their day-to-day lives; each one in their personal lives on an on-going basis. Yeung says:

That is what makes post-New Age spirituality so challenging - unlike previous ages, where those in pursuit of the ultimate spiritual objective have lived in retreats - temples, monasteries, convents, etc., our ultimate goal requires us to stay rooted in the stark reality of everyday life.<sup>453</sup>

Yeung continues:

Integration of self in terms of external and internal worlds (i.e. integration with another human being as well as internal integration) is a real challenge. However, that is ultimate integration - microcosmic-macrocosmic integration. I believe it has not been possible to achieve this in times gone by because the cosmic frequency has not been of a high enough vibration. Now it is though. (ibid)

Whether one calls the process 'integration' or 'transcendence', by bringing the process out of retreat centres and religious establishments it is made part of a cultural transcendence. The increasing globalisation provides both the opportunities and need for a 'one humanity' perspective that reflects a significant evolutionary step for homo sapiens. It is, for example, no coincidence that I write this thesis as an Englishman with

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<sup>452</sup> That the ultimate freedom is the freedom from the tyranny of our own thoughts is also a keystone of Buddhist teaching. For a detailed view of the Tibetan Buddhist view, for example, see Rinpoche, S. (1988) *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, London & Sydney: Rider, 2002.

<sup>453</sup> Personal e-mail from Alison Yeung, dated 6.4.10, used with permission and reflecting the work of her PhD thesis, Yeung 2004.

a Chinese girlfriend. The research for much of this project has been undertaken against a backdrop of personal challenge as my partner and I seek to identify and to rise above cultural conditioning that was so deep that we were not even aware of it.<sup>454</sup> What is important both to my partner and I and to this discussion is that we have been able to distinguish between conditioned attitudes (as something we have the option of changing) and our deeper feelings for each other. In short, our love has given us the courage to transcend and move on from embedded attitudes that could have torn us (as a couple and as emotional individuals) apart. Even so, it has been a challenging and painful period of accepting a new sense of self beyond a previously held cultural identity.<sup>455</sup>

Of course, there is nothing new in the power of love attempting to transcend barriers. In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare famously wrote of the love that blossomed between members of feuding families. In 1957 the story was brought up to date with the highly original music of Leonard Bernstein and powerful lyrics of Stephen Sondheim, as love attempted to transcend the cultural divide between Puerto Ricans and Harlem gangs. In both these cases the love was doomed: even in the underlying energies of the 1950s' *West Side Story*, the result was tragic.

Since that time, with increasing globalisation, individuals of various cultures have travelled both for short-term visits and to settle in a new country. Cheap air fares and internet communications are enabling a whole generation to see beyond their conditioned view of themselves and instead recognise that, despite the many differences between the World's richly diverse cultures, humans are, deep down, all one species. Furthermore, within the transcendence movement it is recognised that, at the same time as being true to one's own unique personality, one can continue to enjoy those aspects of

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<sup>454</sup> The details of this are too personal to share in an academic treatise, but initial misunderstandings and conflicts have largely been resolved since.

<sup>455</sup> Just as valid to this discourse is the question, which I have asked more than once, 'Why? Why us? What brought us together?' After reading Teilhard, my suspicion that it was some 'higher power' has been strengthened. Could it be that relationships such as mine are but examples of the very evolutionary imperative of which Teilhard de Chardin speaks? Are we at the forefront of the emerging "hyper personal psychological organisation" (Teilhard de Chardin 1955, p19) that is humanity's future?

an English or Chinese culture (for example) that is still resonant. This, I would argue, is a good example of the evolution that Teilhard de Chardin predicted.<sup>456</sup>

Taking the broader definition of transcendence on which this thesis is based, the history of the human race can be seen as a sequence of ‘transcendence of differences’. In the early days of our species human beings transcended many of the tribal differences that had been inherited from ape ancestors and their roaming pack culture, in order to live in villages, towns and later as nations. The evolutionary imperative for the species to survive gradually began to override the individual selfish genes within each individual. Survival of the community was already becoming more important than survival of an individual’s gene. This ‘behavioural selection’ has, in recent decades become an acknowledged facet of evolution theory, as developed by (amongst others) (Alister) Hardy.<sup>457</sup>

The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 highlights another significant move towards transcendence: the beginning of today’s emphasis on equality and a general intent (if not yet total achievement) of accepting all human beings as equal irrespective of colour, creed, belief and any other physical or personality differences. To rise above such differences shows a major commitment to transcend labels and variation of traits and to acknowledge homo sapiens as a single species. Through intellectual reasoning and an underlying empathy for others of our kind comes a realisation that to survive as a species requires working together. Such transcendence of individual desires ‘for the greater good’ in an evolving collective ethos, even if it may still have some way to go in practice, is a clear indicator of a deeper, inner drive: precisely the evolutionary imperative to develop into a unified, integrated whole.

It could be argued that at certain times in human history this inner urge has, perhaps, been hijacked by religious or political ideology which has brought with it a pressure to conform. But eventually the difference between uniformity and being unified became clear to those with the courage to question and rebel. Through the transcendence process one learns that it is possible to be both unique and interconnected, by having inner

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<sup>456</sup> A detailed review of trends in mixed-cultural relationships is clearly outside the scope of this project, but even within the circle of my friends and family the indication is that such relationships are on the increase, with corresponding opportunities for cultural transcendence.

<sup>457</sup> See, for example, Hardy, A. (1966) *The Divine Flame*, London: Collins, 1966 and Hardy, A. (1979) *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.

power as an individual self within a cooperative collective, then and only then, can both personal needs and those of our species both be sated.<sup>458</sup>

The outer form taken by the transcendence process will, because of inherent uniqueness, vary from individual to individual. Some may chose an overtly religious or spiritual path, some may take a 'career' path, but the underlying journey may still show similarities.

As a teacher of Reiki Healing it is my privilege to meet many wonderful individuals, each on their own, very personal, journeys. These I have now reviewed to identify many common features evident between their respective journeys, not least that most would agree that they are on a 'spiritual journey'.<sup>459</sup> As Argyle identified, a typical trigger for a religious/transcendent experience is some form of breakdown or major life crisis.<sup>460</sup> A recent Reiki student, I will call her A, is a good case in point.

A Chemistry graduate, A was an effective and appreciated expert in Health & Safety. Her use of intuition alongside subject knowledge enabled her to resolve problems by focusing on (as she and I described it between us) 'the spirit' of the problem, rather than the 'letter of the law'. She had been allowed free expression as a child and always had an innate faith in life. However, with a husband and children to support she had become chief bread-winner and spent many years doing little but constantly working hard to support them. In September 2009 she told colleagues "if things don't change, I'm out of here in March". Things did not change and she was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue

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<sup>458</sup> This point was aptly illustrated during the lunch break at the *Wrekin Trust* Round Table of 2010: Many of those arriving for lunch early had opted out of the previous session and were calling the first table to fill 'The Rebels Table'. Those sitting down together had decided, individually, that the exercise being performed was too regimented, too ritualistic, for them to participate in it comfortably. One commented on the dangers of uniformity to which others applauded the intent of the 'rebels' to remain unique.<sup>458</sup> At the same time, we all appreciated that those who had stayed in the session had done so for their own good reasons and they too had benefited from the sharing. Later, when all had gathered, a common aim of 'one humanity' was still very much palpable within the whole gathering. It was an excellent example of 'unity through diversity' in action and thus of the realities of transcendent Being.

<sup>459</sup> And Reiki seen as a part of the enabling process for this.

<sup>460</sup> See for example Argyle 1999, p138: in this case describing how "Glossolalia ... is further predicted by devotional activity, desire for a deeper spiritual life, disillusion with existing traditions, a life crisis and the encouragement of friends". Whether for glossolalia (speaking in tongues) as in this case, or for a broader spectrum of transcendent experiences, such a list of triggers is wholly consistent with the reports of my contributors.

Syndrome in April 2010 and has not been able to work full-time since. In the subsequent months, she had regular acupuncture treatments and Reiki healing sessions. She also meditated, rested and read widely (from Jung to Wilber and beyond).

Having an active mind she was continually analysing her physical and mental condition, and was able to see a significant mirroring between them. She knew that this was her time to 'realign', to find a more realistic balance between herself and her family, between creative time and conventional work activities. She knows that she now has to transcend the barrier that had existed between the responsible parent in her and the adult/child with the intuition and creative flair. This will mean seeking a revised balance of responsibilities within her family; it will mean facing conditioned mental blocks and insecurities, but she sees this as a necessary process for her future.<sup>461</sup>

Having always been able to access and use intuition and having always had faith, A, is comparatively lucky: her 'time out' from working life was around 6 months. For another Reiki client (as discussed in Chapter 7), it has been some decades. It could be concluded that the more divorced an individual has become from their soul (their deeper self), the longer and harder the process of transcendence is. This is certainly the view of Goleman who says, in describing the length of time required to learn new emotional competences, says:

Underlying deep attitudes and related values are harder to change than work habits. ...Beyond the complexity of the competence being learned, the distance from the person's baseline behavior to the new matters immensely. For people who are already fairly empathic, learning to give performance feedback artfully or to attune themselves to customers' needs may come quite easily. since these competencies represent specific applications of a capability they already have. But for those who struggle to empathize, this mastery requires a more determined and lengthy effort. (Goleman 1998, p328-329)

Reflections on my own attempts to change conditioned behaviours and on related discussions with my contributors would certainly endorse this point.<sup>462</sup> Also, we are all different. Thus, the length of the process varies from person to person. As James says:

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<sup>461</sup> The need to find a balance between the adult, child and parent within each person is the basis for Transactional Analysis, devised by Eric Berne. This form of psychotherapy is wholly consistent with process of transcendence. See Berne, E. (1964). *Games People Play: The Basic Handbook of Transactional Analysis*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996.

<sup>462</sup> Ray and Anderson, for example say "It takes a long time to learn well the substance of what the consciousness movements have to teach. You can pick up a new idea or technique or change your favorite hobby in a few weeks or months, but it takes decades to change yourself." See Ray, P.H. &



The severity of the crisis in this process is a matter of degree. How long one shall continue to drink the consciousness of evil, and when one shall begin to short-circuit and get rid of it, are also matters of amount and degree. (James 1902, p488)

This variation between individuals is reflected, I contend, in the extended transitional phase for humanity as a whole.

Evolution of consciousness or evolutionary consciousness can be considered as the on-going development of how we as humans think. Inevitably this will reflect and be reflected in how individual humans perceive the world around them. Blavatsky, for example, in predicting an opening of human awareness to dimensions beyond two, three or four dimensions 'of matter in space', suggests that clairvoyance will then be considered a 'normal' trait:

The characteristics of matter, must clearly bear a direct relation always to the senses of man. Matter has extension, colour, motion (molecular motion), taste, and smell, corresponding to the existing senses of man, and by the time that it fully develops the next characteristic - let us call it for the moment permeability - this will correspond to the next sense of man - let us call it "normal clairvoyance". (Blavatsky 1966, p111)

Blavatsky also emphasises that there is nothing new about this evolutionary process nor in its acceptance by established authors of her day.<sup>463</sup>

Steiner, who for many years studied under Blavatsky, considers that 'Knowledge of the Grail' as he calls it (equating to transcendent knowledge in the terms of this thesis) provides the ultimate evolution position for humanity:<sup>464</sup>

We see then that the 'Knowledge of the Grail' culminates in the highest imaginable ideal of human evolution - the ideal of spiritualization, brought about by man's own efforts. (Steiner 1963, p310)

Just as importantly such knowledge, a participative or embedded knowledge, is both the end result and the path one treads; and a path each individual makes for themselves.

If, as I contend, evolutionary consciousness is intrinsic to human beingness, then one would expect evidence of it in all areas of human endeavour, including academic research. Indeed, this is very much the case, even within the methodology of research. In

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Anderson, S.R. (2000) *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* New York: Harmony, p184.

<sup>463</sup> See, for example, Blavatsky, H.P. & Hoskins, I.H. (ed) (1990) pp56-57.

<sup>464</sup> The transcendence paradigm would not use the word 'ultimate', accepting that any such claims is "invariably proven to be both naïve and deceptive" (Ferrer 2001, p187).

Chapter 4, in discussing the work of Rapport & Harris, for example, I highlighted how transcendent approaches are emerging in anthropological studies. Further evidence can be seen in what Peter Reason calls ‘Participative Enquiry’. In *Participation in Human Inquiry: Research with People* (Reason 1994) he devotes a whole chapter to *Participation in the Evolution of Consciousness* (Reason 1994, pp16-29). Here he identifies three stages in humankind’s evolution:

In the first phase human consciousness is undifferentiated from the natural world and people live in deep unconscious communion with their surroundings. In the second phase human beings progressively differentiate themselves from their environment, developing a separate sense of self and of community; in an extreme of this phase (which characterizes much of Western consciousness at the present time) participation is denied and people live in an alienated consciousness. In the third phase the sense of participation is regained but in a new way so that human beings participate intentionally and awarely in the creation of their world. (Reason 1994, p17).

Reason’s first phase belongs to the pre-modern era, his second to the modern period of history and his third phase equates directly to the emerging consciousness in what I call transcendent era. Reason calls this the *Future Participation* mode of consciousness and devotes his Chapter 4 to it. (Reason 1994, pp30-39). He emphasises that this new mode is not a return to the pre-modern ‘original participation’ but a way of thinking that transcends the contradiction of the pre-modern and modern modes:

Future participation arises as a possibility from the contradiction between the immersion of original participation and the alienation of unconscious participation if humankind were not deeply familiar with both, the emergence of this third possibility would not be possible (and in this sense future participation is a part of a developmental evolution). (Reason 1994, p31)

Returning to the issue of research methodology, Reason adopts the above theory and explains how it can be applied to any research. In promoting his approach he is at pains to point out: “That there is no one right way to go about it: each research situation is unique and will respond to different approaches in different ways.” (Reason 1994, p4). Such is the essence of Participative Research: one’s method evolves as one participates in the research situation, adapting it and evolving with it. I would argue that this is nothing less than evolutionary consciousness in action. It is certainly a primary research method of this thesis.

As in academic research, so too in technology. If the computer is considered here a poor analogy for the mind in terms of its function, the evolution of Information Technology (IT) provides some useful metaphors when it comes to the evolution of consciousness

and its practical implications. We could, for example, equate modern rational thinking with the earliest PC operating systems (e.g. MS-DOS, first released in 1982), with which one could communicate only in simple keyboard instructions. The latest IT systems, by contrast, can be interfaced directly via voice, video input, touch or movement sensors. Taken with the introduction of the World Wide Web and ‘Web 2’,<sup>465</sup> the successors to the MS-DOS machines are increasingly being integrated into the world. As their scope and depth of penetration extend, so too do the language and means of communication.

The process of upgrading a PCs operating system, for example, may be compared to the enabling of a new level of consciousness: in both cases, the normal operation of the PC or day-to-day thinking, has to be suspended during upgrading. In both cases, many previously functional programmes are found to have been affected: things that had been previously accepted have to be re-thought. Just as PC operating system have come from nowhere to play often vital roles in vast swathes of human behaviour, so too are transcendent modes of thinking changing the way one interfaces with other facets of existence.

One of the effects of this shift in consciousness is the manner in which decisions are made. In the modern era one needed to read, to write and reason out ideas before coming to conclusions and taking a particular course of action. With the transcendent paradigm there is a definite sense that no such rational process is necessary: an individual can just ‘know’ whatever it is they need to know. The implications of such a shift in thinking behaviours are enormous and well beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>466</sup>

Undoubtedly there are many who deny such modes of thought and the evolutionary process from which they are emerging. It is not the purpose of this discourse nor of the transcendence movement to persuade them otherwise. The transcendence process is one that each individual engages in as and when they are ready to. With the transcendent way of life, self-determination is not just allowed but encouraged and enabled: no one persona can force or persuade another to go against how they feel. Having said that, it is

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<sup>465</sup> That is, social networking: including, for example, Facebook.

<sup>466</sup> One example might be in teaching and learning methodology. One might envisage an even greater emphasis on experiential learning (than at present) and a new emphasis on techniques for clearing the mind. Whilst already prominent in meditation and mindfulness studies, for example, one implication of a more general shift in consciousness would be their ‘teaching’ in mainstream education. This is undoubtedly a subject for future research.

the aim of this thesis and of many within the transcendence movement to highlight the numerous indicators of the positive changes (towards a transcendence of thought) that are occurring in the world today. I will end this chapter with two examples that exemplify such changes over the last few decades. They are, intentionally, from ‘normal’ life, thus grounding my claim of an evolutionary imperative in the day-to-day world of the second decade of the 21st century.

On 25<sup>th</sup> May 2011, during a state visit to Britain, US President Barack Obama and UK Prime Minister David Cameron gave a press conference on the lawn of Lancaster House. Watching coverage on the TV news I was struck by a comparison between this meeting of the leaders and those of the 1980s between President Reagan and PM Thatcher. Not only were the words and commitments different but the whole tone was markedly different. Few would disagree that the Reagan/Thatcher years comprised ‘fighting talk’, of leaders who had bi-laterally (or unilaterally) made up their minds and would do whatever was necessary to implement those decisions: no room for other views, no space for compromise.

The 2011 meeting of leaders was very different, reflecting the new Zeitgeist of which the transcendence movement is part. From the Western leaders now came a commitment to let the people of the Middle East decide their own future. Western leaders would support and encourage democratic change, but Cameron and Obama admitted they had learnt lessons from past conflicts. “Patience” and “Listening” were key words throughout. The on-going special relationship between the US and the UK was very much present but it is now part of a broader recognition of an integrated world. As one columnist describes it:

“We are one civilisation” resonates because it is true – now more than ever. American and British business, American and British media, American and British consumers nowadays aren’t just close or similar, they are identical: they inhabit the same ecosystem, influencing and being influenced by one another in a million ways impossible to quantify. (Applebaum 2011)

When Obama and Cameron talk about sharing ‘the same ecosystem’ they have reasonable understanding of what that means and a recognition of its implication in the context of Global Warming. In the Reagan/Thatcher era the respective administrations were, at best, lukewarm to such issues. Those in the transcendence movement feel that times are most definitely changing and if this is not called evolution, what should one call it?

My second example concerns a TV programme about the changing fortunes of the wildlife in Madagascar: *David Attenborough and the Giant Egg*.<sup>467</sup>

Attenborough, as millions who have been enthralled by his ground-breaking series will attest, has been presenting fascinating documentaries about the Natural World for decades. In *David Attenborough and the Giant Egg* he charts the story of and between two visits to the African Island of Madagascar, the first in 1960 when he filmed his first ever wildlife series (*Zoo Quest*) and the second sixty years later. The comparisons presented provide many examples of changes that, I contend, clearly illustrate the speed and extent of change in human attitudes within this time frame.

In 1960 Attenborough found significant fragments of a large egg which he pieced together. The result was identified as the egg of the largest bird that ever lived, the now extinct 'elephant bird'. The programme asked how and why the bird became extinct, concluding that we cannot know for sure but that climate change and habitat destruction due to human agricultural practice probably contributed to the process. The negative effect of 'modern' human behaviour is further brought home by Attenborough's not unreasonable suggestion that the humans of the time almost certainly ate the huge and nutritious eggs extensively. Almost certainly there would have been no 'sustainability management' employed and the rest, as the saying goes, is history; and in no way an example of integrated thinking.

The situation in Madagascar today however is strikingly different. One local man, who in 1960 was filmed describing how he would hunt, for food, one of the many species of lemurs, in 2010 was interviewed again. In the accompanying film he is shown holding food in his hand, which individuals of the same species of lemur now come to feed from. In the intervening years he, and many others like him around the world, have come to see how integrated the lives of humans and all forms of wildlife are. It is better to track a lemur for the benefit of tourists and earn a living that way, than to kill it.

In the realms of broadcasting too there have been major changes in the last sixty years. Besides the obvious technical improvements in filming, the role of Attenborough himself is markedly different. The *Zoo Quest* series was, he seemed embarrassed to admit, partially funded by London Zoo and his aim was to gather species of animals to

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<sup>467</sup> Originally shown on BBC2 on 2.3.11

take back to the Zoo. The thinking then was that Zoos could preserve a creature simply by removing it from its home environment and keeping it in a cage. Our increased and still growing awareness of the way in which all creatures interact and depend upon each other, as described in Attenborough's programmes over the decades since 1960, is a clear sign of an expanding consciousness. Aware individuals now embrace other beings of the planet as never before.

To embrace these ideas intellectually is an example of mental transcendence. To embrace physically, or at least to be in a physically intimate situation with other creatures, provides the other facet to transcendence: whole-body / non-local. Few can fail to have been moved by the now iconic video clip of David Attenborough's first encounter with a silverback gorilla.<sup>468</sup>

Through examples such as the above it is clear, at least to those whose own experiences have opened them to the insight, that the evolution of consciousness as discussed by Heidegger, Teilhard de Chardin, Hardy and many others is a process in which we are actively engaged in.

One response to such descriptions might be to ask: "when did this process really begin?" In a recent *Times* article, Jane Shaw (2011) provides one answer:

This shift towards a more personal religious sensibility is usually identified as a post-war or even post-1960s phenomenon, but we can date it much earlier. At the beginning of the 20th century there was a turn towards the mystical, heralding a new interest in personal religious experience. (Shaw 2011, p88)

Shaw's starting point to spirituality outside of institutional religion is the 1899 'Bampton Lecture' by William Ralph Inge (1899) entitled *Christian Mysticism*. She quotes Inge's contention, which matches fairly accurately the stance of the interspiritual movement described in Chapter 3, that:

Mysticism has its origin in that which is the raw material of all religion, and perhaps all of philosophy and art as well, namely, that dim consciousness of the beyond, which is part of our nature as human beings. (Inge 1899, p19)

Shaw goes on to identify the pioneering work in spirituality published by William James (1902) and Evelyn Underhill (*Mysticism*, 1911). Clearly important works that can be seen as underpinning or pre-existing the transcendence movement. Undoubtedly the

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<sup>468</sup> Originally from the BBC's *Life on Earth* series. Now viewable (and described) on: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth\\_news/newsid\\_8273000/8273655.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8273000/8273655.stm), accessed 18.9.11.

work of Inge, Underhill, James (and others) has been hugely influential. At this point, one could debate as to which author started the movement and who has been the most influential. Both questions divert attention from the key issue: that since around 1900 interest in mysticism has been in revival. In those times however, the number of books and speakers on the subject was very small. In the intervening years this base of authors committed to opening up the debate on subjects transcendent has clearly expanded and includes Heidegger and Teilhard de Chardin, James and Jung, for example. From a specialist area in the 1960s, today's market for books and courses on all aspects of spirituality is very much main-stream. The growing awareness in the mystical is undeniable. As my models of Chapter 7 suggest, the starting point of the transcendence movement is not a single point in time and depends very much on how it is defined. My broad start date of 'the 1960s' reflects the era in which members of the public in reasonable number first became active. It is neither in the spirit of transcendence nor necessary (for those in the transcendence movement) to 'pin down' a specific start date or founder.

As I have illustrated in Chapter 3, the public interest is reflected in the growing number of networks and groups committed to some or many facets of transcendence. Again in accord with the holographic principle, the formation of groups within academia also reflects the growth in public awareness. In 2010, for example, following a gathering (in May of that year) of internationally recognised speakers at Cumberland Lodge (in Windsor Great park), the *British Association for the Study of Spirituality* was established. Recognising that spirituality was now part of "health, management, education, religious studies [and] theology" (Bailey 2011, p19), without being tied to any one, if any, religion. That such an interdisciplinary group should be established, with a focus on the spiritual dimension of human life in general, is again striking evidence that a shift of awareness is underway.

My research has, time and time again, brought to light examples of the transcendence process taking place across human endeavours. Whilst this may be insufficient to prove transcendence as a current evolutionary process, the evidence presented is, I contend, a clear indicator of something very powerful occurring. Those within the transcendence movement would say it is both positive and necessary for our species.

Having placed transcendence in the context of evolutionary consciousness, in the following chapter I identify some of its key features, beginning with a review of perhaps one of the most critical issues: the nature of ‘an empty mind’ and its part in the transcendence process.



# Chapter 10

## Nothingness: Transcendent thought and the empty mind

*Tao is empty-  
Its use never exhausted.  
Bottomless-  
The origin of all things  
(Lao-Tzu (3rd Cent. BCE) Tao Te Ching, p4)*

The nothingness of transcendence, like the Tao itself, cannot be encapsulated in words: it is beyond the concepts of ‘no-thing’ and of nothingness or emptiness. The only definition that comes anywhere near explaining the depth and significance of the nothingness under discussion, might such as, ‘the unlimited potential; the void from which all things are manifest.’ Nothingness is far from being a ‘lack’ of something; rather it is an immense reservoir of all things possible. As I suggested in Chapter 8 the writings of Heidegger perhaps come closest to expressing such notions, as the origin of all Being-ness.

In many respects however, as I also discussed in Chapter 8, even Heidegger gets caught up in the words. An essential element of nothingness is thus natural silence; situations where those involved freely and consciously refrain from talking and welcome the state so obtained. Within the transcendence movement, there is an acknowledgement that the feeling of nothingness provides a preferable ‘meaning’ compared to any of the available meanings or explanations.

One attempt at an interview for this research aptly illustrates the importance, value and preferred reality of silence. As Ilze and I sat down to begin our conversation, my mind came over blank. I had my questionnaire and other prepared notes in front of me as prompts but they were a blur in front of my eyes. Ilze volunteered that she did not feel like talking, so I suggested that we just sit quietly together and so we both closed our

eyes. To convey in this thesis what happened next I would need, somehow, to attach not a recording of what was said, but a recording of what was felt.

After about five minutes we had both opened our eyes. “What happened there!” Ilze asked with an obviously sense of pleasure at the experience.

“A shared presence”, I suggested in response; this being the explanation that came to my mind which best fitted my own experience. Ilze nodded and smiled as I described how, by both being open to and appreciative of a this peaceful connection, we had enabled in each other a shared immersion within this sense of peace.

A while later Ilze had agreed to a recorded interview and I had switched on my digital recorder. Again our minds went blank and even when we tried to converse, few words were uttered. Ilze was upset that she could not provide me with any ‘hard evidence’, but the reality for us both was that we felt words to be inadequate for the task and inappropriate at that time. The shared silence, by contrast, brought to us both a sense of peace and calm that we had both been in need of and found particularly welcome.

As an objective researcher I have to report the situation as it happened, particularly as the above situation is by no means unusual when meeting others committed to a transcendence path. Time and time again the need will be to sit together in a peaceful shared silence. Communication at such times becomes a ‘communion’, a higher level ‘dialogue of the higher self’.

To be comfortable when immersed in and surrounded by such nothingness is a good sign of a high degree of ego surrender. It is to have evolved beyond the fear of giving oneself into the greater Oneness of life. My own first personal experience of this came when undertaking a meditation from Beatrice Russell’s *Beyond the Veils* (Russell 1957). It begins:

The Freedom of the Spirit is yours tonight ... Presently I shall draw you into the Higher Consciousness. This is a natural consummation of your evolution. Discard your identity, repeating these words – “I am nothing yet All ...” (Russell 1957, p6)

Ever since first reading this, *I am nothing yet All* has been a powerful expression of much that I now call transcendence. In the Russell meditation, not only is nothingness equated to the ‘All’, but the ‘I am’ emphasises that this is not a vague concept to be discussed in words, but a very personal experience. *I am nothing yet All*, as an idea,

helps with the mental transcendence of the typical dichotomy of ‘something or nothing’. Conventional thinking implies that if a person is not something in particular then they are nothing. Not so within transcendent thinking, in fact the reverse is the case.

Rather than being about the lack of physical things, in the context of transcendence nothingness is more about the lack of attachment to particular things or ideas, it is about having a mind that is empty of fears and preconditions and is thus able to be a true, pure, channel from which the depth of Beingness can be manifested in the human world.

Thus: *I am nothing yet All*. Through giving up labels, identities and attachment one allow oneself to be freely immersed in the fullness of the experience of Being and therefore able to be whole, fulfilled and joyous.

Whilst perhaps less joyous, an equally powerful example of silent presence is expressed by Kübler-Ross in the context of approaching death:

There is a time in a patient's life when the pain ceases to be, when the mind slips off into a dreamless state, when the need for food becomes minimal and the awareness of the environment all but disappears into darkness. ... This is the time when it is too late for words. (Kübler-Ross 1969, p246)

Facing death with an empty mind is seen as ideal preparation for death (and indeed for life) by Sogyal Rinpoche too. In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (Rinpoche 1988) he gets right to the heart of the matter, identifying the real aim of stillness, silence and emptiness:

If you follow the voice of your wise guide, the voice of your discriminating awareness, and let ego fall silent, you come to experience that presence of wisdom and joy and bliss that you really are. (Rinpoche 1988, p125)

To ‘let ego fall silent’ is, I would agree, the essence of nothingness, the place from which truth and joy can then flow. In practice that means being at peace with a mind that is not preoccupied with some belief or goal. No matter how worthy a religious or philosophical principle may be, it is still considered an ‘ego voice’ in the head which prevents a connection to one’s natural essence.

Throughout my research I have emphasised the application of a range of theories and drawn attention to their practical implications. Transcendence, to those in the transcendence movement, is about bringing together theory and practice. This is particularly pertinent to the question of nothingness and emptiness. One topic that helps show how theory and practice come together is stillness.

## Stillness

Anybody who has given themselves to sitting and reflecting beside a peaceful lake is likely to be aware of stillness, not as an emptiness or lack, but as a depth. ‘Still waters run deep’ is an appropriate expression. To examine any natural, peaceful situation in detail will always show activity when a first glance would suggest none. Microscopic Beingness is everywhere. Even when one are breathing slowly and physical still, the body is still engaged in numerous, usually automatic, processes. By being physically still and by calming the conscious mind however, one can become aware of other levels of activity: of other levels of consciousness, both within and around the physical body. Such awareness can lead to ever deeper appreciation of other forms of life within the stillness and thus to a presence. A recent edition of the SDI’s *Listen. A Seekers Resource for Spiritual Direction* aptly illustrates this process by suggesting a contemplation on Psalm 46:10a:

*Be still, and know that I am God.*

*Be still and know that I am.*

*Be still and know.*

*Be still.*

*Be.*

(Bernecker 2011, p3)

The instructions include “pause between each line for however long you desire”. (ibid) an essential part of finding the stillness and allowing a deeper presence to emerge from the words.

That nothingness might have depth seems a strange notion, but one that is typically paradoxical, as too with another important facet of nothingness: being transcendent is beyond space and time. As the Tao puts it:

*Deeply subsistent-*

*I don’t know whose child it is*

*It is older than the Ancestor*

(*Tao Te Ching*, p4)

A contemporary folk song that I find particularly inspired and inspiring states, simply and succinctly, how one might achieve transcendence of time:

*Time, time, time. There’s no man can command*

*Seek not to conquer time and time will vanish in your hands*<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Words from *The Wizard to Talay*, from the album *Hieroglyphics* by Graham and Eileen Pratt, Plant Life, 1985.

To find the timelessness beyond time, one must allow it to materialise, just as, when one's time comes, the death process takes its own course and challenges our traditional view of death as an immediate cessation of mental activity.

The various mental states observed could throw new light on the perceived nothingness that comes with death, as my next piece of evidence suggests. At the CEP 2010 conference one of the keynote addresses was delivered by Dr Peter Fenwick, who asked the question: *Is Non locality an essential ingredient of any explanation of consciousness?*<sup>470</sup> Past chairman of the SMN (see Chapter 3), Fenwick has been interested in Near Death Experience (NDE) for many years, having published on it as far back as 1997 (Fenwick & Fenwick 1997). He is now active within *The Human Consciousness Project*, an international consortium of multidisciplinary scientists and physicians researching the nature of consciousness and its relationship with the brain.<sup>471</sup> In describing this and other related work in his lecture, Fenwick shared extensive and convincing evidence of 'consciousness beyond the brain' during a range of states associated with death and dying.

The phrase 'terminal lucidity', for example is used to describe those moments when, just before death, a patient will (for example) sit up in bed with energy and alertness, when before they had been incapable of moving at all. When the brain is so close to inactivity and death, where does this sudden burst of awareness come from? The research described included extensive brain scan results including the measurement of gamma pulses in the brain for up to five minutes after death. By focussing on the experience of death and related neurological activities Fenwick clearly demonstrates how the process of death can inform our understanding of consciousness and how the mind seems to transcend many conventional limitations during this transition. If brain is non-local at death, then why not at all times?

Likewise reports of premonitions of death, as collected by Fenwick and associates, are remarkably frequent and accurate in terms of time of impending death. How can this be

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<sup>470</sup> The CEP is the British Psychological Society's Consciousness and Experiential Psychology Section. It's 2010 Annual Conference: *Nature and Human Nature*, took place on 10th-12th September at St. Anne's College, Oxford. Dr Peter Fenwick is currently Consultant Neuropsychiatrist Emeritus to the Epilepsy Unit at the Maudsley Hospital which he ran for twenty years.

<sup>471</sup> See: [www.horizonresearch.org/main\\_page.php?cat\\_id=74](http://www.horizonresearch.org/main_page.php?cat_id=74), accessed 22.11.10.

possible unless consciousness can somehow ‘see the future’? If there is ‘nothing’ after death, how can this be possible?

At the time I was reflecting on Fenwick’s presentation regarding enhanced consciousness immediately prior to death, I was also reading King’s *Spirit of Fire* (1996). In this biography of Teilhard de Teilhard de Chardin, King includes an account of a vision he had whilst serving as a medical orderly in The Great War. It was sufficiently powerful to influence his thinking from then on. Of relevance here was the following: “He caught a glimpse of these absorbing eyes once again “in the glance of a dying soldier.” (King 1996, p61). That is, Teilhard de Chardin saw the ultimate human experience: “indescribable agony” and “superabundance of triumphant joy” in this dying soldier’s eyes.

It struck me that if, as Fenwick says, there is a particularly enhanced level of consciousness at the time of death, then it is not surprising that someone as aware as Teilhard could well see ‘the ultimate’ in the face of a dying soldier.

Another interesting piece of evidence for this may come from the oft quoted notion that just before we die ‘our whole life flashes before us’. It seems reasonable that such an idea comes from the phenomena of a transcendent consciousness prior to death. Again, it would be appropriately paradoxical and in line with the essence of transcendence if, as a dying man sees his whole life passing through his mind, an observer might see an infinite void behind those same eyes.

Nothingness, an empty mind, is thus I argue, a transcendent state whereby there is no separation between inner and outer perceptions of the world. It is the ‘critical acceptance’ of Kabat-Zinn. There are, it seems, two distinct elements to this acceptance, corresponding to my two facets of transcendence:

Firstly, there is a non-local, whole-body acceptance: a feeling and inner knowing of a truth and reality above and beyond the rational mental mode of thought. Some call this a mystical state and are increasingly living life as a mystic, within the ‘normal’ world (as I discuss in my next chapter).

Secondly, there is a mental acceptance of a range of theories on the nature of reality and of truth together with a conscious, rational, acceptance that needs to take responsibility not only for one’s own life but also for the state of humanity. This acceptance is not just

a theoretical one: it is one applied by those in the transcendence movement in day-to-day life. In the present economic climate, for example, it means not only accepting the need for less extravagant ways of living, but also acting on this acceptance. It means being willing and able to ‘tighten one’s belts’ not just encourage others to do so. As Michael E. Zimmerman explains in *Heidegger, Buddhism, and deep ecology* (1993) there is a strong correlation between transcendent states of mind, committed to a spiritual journey and a deep commitment to the environment.<sup>472</sup>

Zimmerman also provides a compelling comparison between Heideggerian and Mahayan Buddhist view on nothingness and related human suffering:

Both maintain that inauthenticity or suffering arises from conceiving of oneself in a constricted manner: as an isolated ego craving security, avoiding pain, and seeking distraction. Both maintain that the “self” is not a thing, but rather the openness or nothingness in which the incessant play of phenomena can occur. Both criticize the dualistic view of the self as a cogitating ego standing apart from the “external” world. Both emphasize that the un-self-conscious nature of everyday practices reveals that people are not separate from things, but are rather directly involved with them. (Zimmerman 1993, p255)

Nothingness is not necessarily about doing nothing. On the contrary. Zimmerman goes on to describe:

Their shared belief that “authenticity” or “salvation” involves becoming the nothingness that we already are, such that we are open for and responsive to the phenomena that show up moment by moment in everyday life.

That is, to Be is (amongst other things) to have a mind empty of pre-conceived ideas.<sup>473</sup> This is the way in which nothingness is consistently highlighted in the literature. Likewise its practical realisation, silence, is also seen as a critical element by those who practice transcendence. To illustrate this point and provide a link to my next chapter on

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<sup>472</sup> In my many years before and during this research mixing with individuals committed to ‘ecological’ and ‘spiritual’ paths or actions, it has been my observation that the two paths are closely interwoven. The already extensive scope of the current work means that I have not had opportunity to gather evidence of this correlation, but such research could readily be undertaken, should there be any doubt remaining.

<sup>473</sup> Zimmerman goes on to confirm that ‘allowing’ is also critical (an on-going topic throughout this discourse): “While maintaining that one can never resolve to become authentic or enlightened, however, both later Heidegger and the Soto Zen master suggest that spiritual practices may help put one in the position of a paradoxical ‘willingness not to will,’ thereby preparing one for the releasement that brings one into the world appropriately for the first time.” (Zimmerman 1993, p256)

transcendence practice, I offer the following examples from a twenty-four hour period during the latter stages of this research.

Taking advantage of a lovely summer evening I was walking with my partner in nearby Newborough Warren National Nature Reserve, one of the largest areas of protected sand dunes in Europe. Remote from human settlements, we were soon out of earshot of roads and homes. With little effort it was possible to hear the crickets and other insects in the surrounding brush land. But above all, to me at least, was the overwhelming and palpable ‘sound of silence’. The presence only of quiet natural sounds and the absence of man-made noises, here at least, had a depth and intensity to it that announced vibrancy and potential. Such was the power of the ‘sound of silence’ that I was transported out of the feeling of heaviness that had been with me all day. Through the no-sound and nothingness had come peace of mind; the experience of which far outweighed any words from Heidegger.

The following day I was listening, for the first time, to a recording of Sir John Tavener’s *Towards Silence - For Four String Quartets and Large Tibetan Bowl*.<sup>474</sup> As the piece progressed from the third to the final movement I found I had to give it my full attention.<sup>475</sup> I felt my eyes close and my hands were heavy on my lap. They seemed to be throbbing noticeably, perhaps with my heart beat, but the sensation was far more important to me than any explanation for it at that moment. What matters was that the music had ‘taken me over’ and taken me *Towards Silence*. The feeling was indeed very similar, in terms of the degree of peace that came over me, to the natural silence I had experienced the night before.

That it is possible to communicate with a “latent Deity” within a nothingness is endorsed by Theosophical ideas:

DEMOCRITUS. with his instructor Leucippus, taught that the first principles of all things contained in the Universe were atoms and a *vacuum*. The latter means simply *latent* Deity or force; which, before its first manifestation when it became WILL - communicating the first impulse to these atoms-was the great *Nothingness*, Ain-Soph, or

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<sup>474</sup> Signum Classics 2010, SIGCD221, inspired by Rene Gueron’s *Man and his becoming according to the Vedānta* (1925).

<sup>475</sup> “Movement IV - Turiya: That which is Beyond. The Greatest State (Mahattara) is the fourth, totally free from any mode of existence whatever, with fullness of Peace and Beatitude without duality.” (From CD notes of the above).



NO-THING; was, therefore, to every sense, a Void-or CHAOS. (Blavatsky 1966, p129, author's italics & capitalisations)

That the word 'chaos' appears in the description may go some way in explaining why many individuals who report transcendent experiences also report chaos in their lives. Since chaos is the opposite of the order, structure and control that 'modern' society has led us to expect of life, many individuals are uncomfortable with it. This would explain why nothingness, emptiness in whatever form, is something many go to great lengths to avoid.

However, those who embrace the nothingness and related chaos, are able to transcend the dualities that afflict the 'modern' world-view:

Chaos-Theos-Kosmos, the triple deity, is *all in all*. Therefore, it is said to be male and female, good and evil, positive and negative; the whole series of contrasted qualities. When latent (in pralaya) it is incognizable and becomes the *unknowable Deity*. It can be known only in its active functions; hence as *matter-Force* and *living Spirit*, the correlations and outcome, or the expression, on the visible plane, of the ultimate and ever-to-be unknown UNITY. (Blavatsky 1966, p129, author's italics & capitalisations)

This 'Unity', is often perceived as a sense of belonging to the Oneness and emphasises the depth of harmony that exists despite of, or perhaps because of, the chaos and emptiness. Logically this makes little sense at all, but that is perhaps not surprising: the nothingness that I am discussing transcends logic.

This demonstrates, I would strongly contend, the practical reality that reflects what eminent philosophers have been trying to explain to their fellow humans over the centuries: when one lets go of mental attachments to allow entry into, for example, the full depth of nothingness of silence, so one engages with a deeper level of Being, a transcendent level of thought. In the next chapter I examine more features of this, not as abstract philosophy, but as transcendent ways of thinking and behaving.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Towards the end of this research, for example, at a time of inevitable pressure to complete the thesis and uncertainty over my future, my partner was also looking for a new job. Despite the likelihood of moving and considerable lack of certainty regarding many aspects of our lives, we felt an inner calm. On the morning my partner left for an interview at the other end of the country I awoke early with some, not unexpected, anxiety, but feeling remarkably peaceful. With that feeling was one of emptiness; uneasy perhaps, but one that reflected a marked absence of fearful thoughts or nagging, unanswerable, questions about our future (that would have been typical of such situations a few years earlier).

Such ‘in-the-moment; inner feelings represent the practical reality of the ‘nothingness’ from which all things are possible. Yogananda, quoting the wisdom of his guru Lahiri Mahasaya, puts it thus:

The great guru taught his disciples to avoid theoretical discussion of the scriptures. “He only is wise who devotes himself to realizing, not reading only, the ancient revelations,” he said. “Solve all your problems through meditation. Exchange unprofitable speculation for actual God communion. (Yogananda 1946, p362)<sup>477</sup>

Thus, in daily life, where unanswerable questions about the future are concerned, only the emptiness that comes through “God communion” provides reassuring answers.

In this chapter I have shown that ‘nothingness’ is a core theme of transcendence and at the heart of both the ancient and modern mystic’s practice. In the next chapter I examine other key ingredients of the philosophy and approach of those within the transcendence movement.

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<sup>477</sup> He also includes, as a footnote, the following Persian proverb: "seek truth in meditation, not in mouldy books. Look in the sky to find the moon, not in the pond." (ibid.)

# Chapter 11

## Transcendence practice and the present-day mystic

To the individuals and groups that I regard as comprising a transcendence movement, there is but one world. There is no distinction between ‘the mystical’ and ‘the normal’, both are facets of the lives each lead. Thus, mystic practice is not now something set apart from day-to-day life, nor restricted to times set aside for religious or spiritual practice or to be performed only in a sacred pace. In my own case, until perhaps five years ago, I would have made such distinctions: times spent on retreat and periods of reflection were still required to provide periods of ‘mystical’ focus within ‘normal’ life. What is happening now, at the beginning of the second decade of the second millennium, is that mystic practice has spread into the day-to-day lives of those committed to a spiritual view of and approach to life.<sup>478</sup>

Whilst such individuals within the transcendence movement may well have a personal mystic practice, such practise is likely to take place whilst waiting for a train, sitting on a bus or walking the dog. Likewise although the practice of yoga, meditation or Reiki Healing, for example, are still important ingredients in the lives of many, the practice chosen to assist in ‘connecting’ is just as likely to be some form of singing, dancing or

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<sup>478</sup> Removal of the distinction between ‘the mystical’ and ‘the ordinary’ is deemed necessary by a number of other authors. In particular, both Robert Gimello and Steven Katz highlight the significant interplay between an individual’s (religious) conditioning and ‘acquaintances’ and the nature of their mystical experiences. This is wholly consistent with my 2-facet model of transcendence where mental transcendence (and thus our way of describing our experiences) informs and is informed by our whole-body / non-local transcendent experiences. See, for example, Katz, S.T. (1983) ‘The ‘Conservative’ Character of Mystical Experience’ in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, Oxford & New York: OUP, pp3-60 and Gimello, R.M. (1983) ‘Mysticism in Its Contexts’ in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, Oxford & New York: OUP, pp61-88.

pursuit in nature: the creative arts and communing with the natural world are all, within the transcendence movement, acknowledged mystic practices.<sup>479</sup>

In this chapter however, my focus is on mystic practice as, first and foremost, a state of mind. To live, as Teasdale puts it, as *A Monk in the World* requires the ability and willingness to think transcendently, or at least to have the intent of so doing. To live as a mystic in day-to-day life means being naturally part of the flow of life in all its challenges and facets, to automatically respond to the moment without reacting through fear or trying to control situations from ego. It means ‘being’ not ‘doing’; responding from a mental space of peace rather than conditioning. In Chapter 13 I examine practices and attitudes that, in daily life, are found by many to be beneficial to transcendence. In this chapter I highlight some ‘philosophies of life’ and general approaches that are frequently identified by those I have been studying.

Tillich provides an excellent starting point, in particular in *On the Boundary* (Tillich 1936).

If a reunion of theology and philosophy is ever to be possible it will be achieved only in a synthesis that does justice to this experience of the abyss in our lives. My philosophy of religion has attempted to meet this need. It consciously remains on the boundary between theology and philosophy, taking care not to lose the one in the other. (Tillich 1936, p52)

Tillich is thus emphasising the need to embrace the ‘abyss’, the emptiness (as discussed in the previous chapter). He also warns of the risk of losing ‘one in the other’. In this case Tillich is referring to theology and philosophy, but he could also be talking about ‘self and society’ or the two sides to any argument. Tillich provides a good example of being able to see both ends of a spectrum of approaches, to see a validity in both extremes yet avoiding attaching himself to either. In the earlier years of my seeking I had learnt a similar lesson from Malcolm Stern: be ‘self-full’ he advised, by which he meant to be aware of and able to move between the two extremes of being selfish and selfless, to act (or ‘be’) according to the needs of the moment.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> That the transcendent or mystical is best considered an integral part of life itself, and all around *Homo religious*, ‘religious animals’, is clearly illustrated by Hardy in his second series of Gifford Lectures. See Hardy 1966.

<sup>480</sup> I was attending *The Art of Loving* workshop at Cortijo Romero in Andalucia, Spain in 1996. Both Cortijo Romero and Malcolm Stern continue to run similar workshops: see <http://malcolmstern.com/> and [www.cortijo-romero.co.uk/](http://www.cortijo-romero.co.uk/), accessed 19.9.2011.

This is an example of transcendence available for use by anyone. Sometimes, for example, when one is really tired and asked to undertake an unreasonable task, there is a need to be selfish, to put oneself first and say “no”. At other times, the need is to override selfish desires and find compassion within for self-less acts. To be comfortable at either extremes is to be self-full, to live ‘on the boundary’, attached to neither one hard-line view or the other, to be sufficiently in tune with the needs of the moment and to ‘act accordingly’, or as Tillich explains: “We must understand that thought itself is rooted in the Absolute as the ground and abyss of meaning”. (1936, pp55-56). Not only is this another facet of the nothingness discussed in Chapter 10, but the practical realisation of the post-dualistic way of life. Tillich goes on to note, “Knowledge of pure essence is possible only to the degree in which the contradictions within existence have been recognized and overcome”. (ibid, p85). The gist of Tillich’s experiences is that to those pursuing a mystical life, reaching mental transcendence on a given matter is about first gaining awareness of any paradoxes involved. This is no vague concept, but a harsh reality. How can a situation be fully accepted until all sides of that situation have been seen and felt? Living ‘on the boundary’, in Tillich’s sense of the phrase, is not the same as ‘sitting on the fence’ or avoiding making any decisions. Tillich recognises that to transcend a situation it is necessary to engage with it, to experience it in all its nuances and to feel one’s way forward.

In practice this is often painful (as discussed in Chapter 12 in the context of suffering), but the ‘here and now’ reality is the one that matters. Reviewing the work of Kierkegaard and Marx and their conclusions on the finding of truth beyond beliefs, Tillich writes:

The highest possibility for achieving non-ideological truth is given at the point of profoundest meaninglessness, through the deepest despair, in man's greatest estrangement from his own nature. (Tillich 1936, p86)

Another way of describing such ‘transcendence of extremes’ is to emphasise balance and equilibrium, as illustrated in the writing of Teilhard de Chardin:

[Christian] mysticism extracts *all* that is sweetest and strongest circulating in all the human mysticisms, though without absorbing their evil or suspect elements. It shows an astonishing equilibrium between the active and the passive, between possession of the world and its renunciation, between a taste for things and an indifference to them. (Teilhard de Chardin 1955, p108)

Perhaps it is by (my) definition that this corresponds precisely with transcendence, for in a transcendent state there is equilibrium between any two extremes. Teilhard de Chardin goes on: “And if any words could translate that permanent and lucid intoxication better than others, perhaps they would be ‘passionate indifference’”. (ibid). Here is the paradox that is both mysticism and transcendence: to be at the same time both utterly detached and yet totally engaged in whatever the moment has brought to our lives.

As such transcendent ways of thinking are still new and little present in most cultures today, maintaining such a state of mind may still be challenging. Hence the need for the support of a variety of mystic practices and of various networks such as those highlighted in Chapter 3. In the remainder of this chapter I will use examples from previous chapters to exemplify what this means in practice.

At gatherings and conferences, for example, living as a mystic is found to be facilitated by morning meditations and regular experiential sessions throughout the event.<sup>481</sup>

Knowing how easy it is for Headmind (effectively, ego) to reassert itself and predominating the thinking processes, activities are included that encourage and enable participants to connect to Bodymind and other facets of the whole-body / non-local consciousness.

This recognition that Headmind needs to be integrated into a broader and deeper way of thinking is perhaps the most critical aspect of transcending thought and of living as a mystic. Within integrated health it is the basis of many specific therapies and of the holistic approach. To break the current predominance of Headmind thinking, i.e. ‘intellectual intelligence’ (Eaton 2006, p19), requires that other forms of intelligence be accessed directly and are encouraged through techniques designed to favour and enable Bodymind. When it comes to their own health, mystic will willingly listen to and respond to the wisdom of their own bodies.<sup>482</sup>

Headmind often reacts to all this. It does not like to relinquish its control: hence the suffering of acceptance, the firm but kind healing of the Headmind as it is encouraged to

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<sup>481</sup> As described (in Chapter 6) for the Wrekin Round Table and AHS gathering, for example.

<sup>482</sup> The importance of Bodymind is being increasingly recognised in academic research, for example, in the context of mindfulness practice and the importance of attitude in physical practice. See, for example: Sze, J.A. et al (2010) ‘Coherence between emotional experience and physiology: Does body awareness training have an impact?’ *Emotion*, Vol 10(6), Dec 2010, pp803-814.

undergo the mental transcendence of accepting its true place within a broader mode of thought.

That which has been considered mystical has, during the modern age, been largely denied or even denounced.<sup>483</sup> At best it has been squeezed into a compartment, separate from day-to-day and material matters, with other facets of life that do not fit accepted scientific understanding. Whilst today it is still treated with fear and scepticism by many, a more typical reaction to it is ambivalence: the proverbial ‘shrug of the shoulders’ that greets any subject which does not personally interest the individual. Those aligned to the transcendent paradigm however embrace the mystical with relief, because they recognise that to deny it is to deny the deepest and, they would argue, the most important part of ourselves.

To those within the transcendence movement at least, the mystical is but a different dimension of the one reality in which we all live: compared, that is, to the three dimension, linear time world of rational thought. From the interspiritual movement spawned by Teasdale’s *Mystic Heart* to the SMN’s *Mystics and Scientists* conferences (as discussed in Chapter 3), for example, humans are embracing the mystical and integrating it into their whole way of life. This is not so much about traditional ‘mystic practice’ (such as taking regular retreats into the wilderness), but about a willingness to admit to a world beyond those of our normal five senses, rational thought and related concepts.

Even ‘positive’ concepts, such as ‘trust’ and ‘common sense’ are still concepts which one can be mentally attached to. The mystic rises above any judgement of a situation regarding others involved in their on-going activity.<sup>484</sup> A true mystic is not someone

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<sup>483</sup> It was this exclusion of the mystical from scientific acceptance that forced Hardy to wait until he had retired before he could fully engage with his vow of “reconciling the theory of evolution and the spiritual nature of man” (Hay 2011, p70).

<sup>484</sup> A good example of this occurred during my final year, whilst engaged in administrative work in my part-time job at the university. Expense claims that I was processing had been returned to me with requests for further information. To my (rational) mind the claims were fair, reasonable and valid. I found myself getting annoyed that the finance system had no room for trust or common sense. I caught myself having these thoughts and feelings and forced myself to take a metaphorical ‘step back’. From a more detached (mystical) mental space came a higher perspective on the reality of the situation: even ‘trust’ and ‘common sense’ are only mental concepts. The truth of this moment was that such concepts were not being applied and were thus irrelevant. For peace of mind, and to ensure the claimant is paid, I had to let go of such notions and accept the ‘letter of the law’ that was being applied.

who lives in a cave or with their head in a cloud, but one who can maintain a state of calmness no matter what is going on around them. Mystics see life as “Merging their inmost being in the stream of humanity as a whole” (Yogananda 1946, p484).

Some involved in Reiki Healing talk about ‘The Mystic Order’ and ‘Mystic Order Experiences’ to describe the synchronistic, non-ordinary reality that Reiki often enables.<sup>485</sup> A ‘Mystic Order Experiences’ refers to those experiences (transcendent in the terms of this discourse) that give the recipient a taste of ‘The Mystic Order’. i.e. the miraculous flow of life itself or ‘God’s Grand Plan’. It may well seem magical and unfathomable to a rational mind, but it ‘rings true’ at a much deeper level.<sup>486</sup>

Within the transcendence movement it is accepted that ‘Mystic Order’ or transcendent experiences happen continually. An example that has happened a number of times as this thesis has been developing serves to demonstrate the real ‘ordinary world’ nature of them. Wanting to check e-mails I would load my e-mail programme and attempt a send/receive. However, nothing would happen. My broadband connection or e-mail host would be down or inactive for some unspecified reason. The mystic accepts such events as a message: that now is not the time to do e-mailing. My experience bears this out. On all such occasions, when I did eventually manage to access my e-mails there was nothing that had needed my attention at the time the service was down. I had been spared the distraction of correspondence interrupting my research. Exactly why the service was down is not important here: the mechanism does not invalidate the effect. For each seeker, a times comes on their journey when the mystical is accepted as a part of life.<sup>487</sup>

Such occurrences might be described as coincidences or as examples of synchronicity, but that does not invalidate them. Since Jung’s now famous *Synchronicity, An Acausal Connecting Principle* (Jung 1955), a higher level of connection between events has been acknowledged by those willing to embrace them. Such ‘strange occurrences’ may

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<sup>485</sup> See for example Beasley 2007, pp66-69 and Klatt et al 2006 (p 253). The co-author of this second book, Phyllis Lei Furumoto, is usually credited with associating the term ‘Mystic Order’ with Reiki, in the contexts of ‘The Aspects of Reiki’.

<sup>486</sup> Phrase such as ‘rings true’ are typical of those used within the transcendence movement to indicate an inner knowing.

<sup>487</sup> Part of the process, as here, involved heeding the lesson of being more focussed on the job in hand.



invoke a laugh or smile, but are increasingly accepted as ‘normal’ and part of a transcendent way of life:

Coincidences etc. that have happened are often just another happy little tap-on-the-shoulder reminder that there is something funny happening that no-one can quite explain yet!<sup>488</sup>

The question inevitably arises as to whether synchronistic events described by my contributors or other examples of transcendent practice that I am describing are any different from how things have always been for humans. This is a fair question and a potential criticism of my hypotheses. Throughout history there have always been mystics. Likewise, in many societies there have always been individuals who have lived with altruistic values and religious groups who ‘practice what they preach’. It is, one could argue, inherent in the human spirit that one can be compassionate for and understanding of fellow man. The Dalai Lama (2005) goes so far as to argue that altruism is not only inherently present within us but a driving force for the evolution of the human species:

In the natural world, which is purported to be the source of the theory of evolution, just as we observe competition between and within species for survival, we observe profound levels of cooperation (not necessarily in the conscious sense of the term). Likewise, just as we observe acts of aggression in animals and humans, we observe acts of altruism and compassion. Why does modern biology accept only competition to be the fundamental operating principle? (Dalai Lama 2005, p122)

I am in no way suggesting that there are more compassionate people around now compared to fifty years ago; indeed the opposite would appear at times to be the case. Compassion and altruism can be seen as reflecting a commitment to humanity as a whole, rather than personal aggrandisement. As such, they are hallmarks of the transcendence movement, thus supporting the Dalai Lama’s contention.

Likewise, I do not deny that many of the features of the transcendence movement have been present in earlier periods of human history. I do not question that, besides the mystics who lived as hermits, there have been individuals who, throughout the centuries, have been able to combine both spiritual and material world.<sup>489</sup> What has changed, however, is the social context (within countries such as the UK) and the

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<sup>488</sup> Contributor Kitty (real name used with permission) responding to Question 5.1

<sup>489</sup> My own parents could be considered good examples of this. They, as ‘community Christians’, have probably acted in ways similar to early Christians in always striving to ‘love thy neighbour’.

mental/intellectual context within the minds of many individuals (in this case, those within the transcendence movement). From the Reformation until the 1960s, British society was predominantly and effectively Christian, if not explicitly, at least implicitly. In the last fifty years however the UK has become increasingly multicultural. By the 2001 Census, the proportion of the population describing themselves as 'Christian' was down to less than seventy-two per cent, with over five per cent declaring themselves as belonging to one or another other faith.<sup>490</sup>

This fact, if not indicative of some form of transcendence process, indicates significant social trends in the last few decades which are wholly consistent with many of the features of transcendence that I am describing. Within villages, towns and cities up and down the country, individuals are being exposed to faiths other than those of their ancestors. This brings with it at least the possibility of transcending previous (mono-faith, Christian) mind-set and/or having experiences of a different faith. That is, opportunities for mental transcendence and/or experiential transcendence (particularly of an interspiritual or inter-cultural nature) are significantly greater post-1960 compared to pre-1960.<sup>491</sup>

Mystics have always recognised that truth can come in many forms and through on-going experience of life in all its myriad forms. Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, for example, far from being full of descriptions and explanation of yoga practices, reads far more like a travelogue. Here Yogananda describes his many and varied experience in

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<sup>490</sup> Source: 2001 Census, Office for National Statistics, see for example, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/uk/03/census\\_2001/html/religion.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/uk/03/census_2001/html/religion.stm), accessed 24.9.11. Over 15% indicated association with no religion and over 7% had not stated their affiliation. More recent surveys put the figure for 'explicitly Christian' at significantly below this 74%, indicating an on-going increase in the number of non-Christians in the UK.

<sup>491</sup> That new experiences can broaden the mind and help to improve health and wellbeing has long been known. Thomas Cook, in founding his now famous travel company, took exactly this view when he organised his first ever holiday excursion on 5 July 1841. Travelling is often perceived as having a higher purpose. Indeed:

A former Baptist preacher, Thomas Cook was a religious man who believed that most Victorian social problems were related to alcohol and that the lives of working people would be greatly improved if they drank less and became better educated. (See [www.thomascook.com/about-us/thomas-cook-history?intcmp=au\\_01\\_promo\\_history](http://www.thomascook.com/about-us/thomas-cook-history?intcmp=au_01_promo_history), accessed 27.2.11.)

What is to 'become better educated', as for example by travelling, other than a form of mental transcendence? Whilst one can become addicted to travel as to alcohol, there is little doubt that stimulating travel encourages us to question our beliefs.

seeking out and meeting other yogis and gurus both in India and, later, beyond. Travelling to remote hermitages was as vital a part of his upbringing as the times he spent studying under and serving his guru Sri Yukteswar.<sup>492</sup> Just as Yogananda found physical travel vital to his personal and spiritual journey, so to do others on a personal journeys of transcendence.<sup>493</sup>

Throughout this thesis I have emphasised a broad definition and use of this term transcendence. Within the transcendence movement, within the hearts and minds of its individuals and embedded in the core principles of its organisations are numerous, specific examples of the gist of transcendence in action. This is a key feature of my argument: this is not a ‘one cause’ campaign. Transcendence is not a project with a single outcome. The transcendence process is not about seeking the answer to just one of the many issues facing the world. The transcendence movement is about all of these. It is about recognising a ‘joined up world’ and personally changing to a way of thinking and living that will enable us all to live together in peace and harmony. Those within the transcendence movement know that they, and humanity as a whole, are changing and are committed to any and all transcending shifts that together make this possible.<sup>494</sup>

This includes transcending all concepts. That is, to use words and concepts to assist in understanding each other without becoming attached to specific meanings of them. Rather than words getting in the way of resolution of conflicts (for example) there is sometimes a need to rise above them; to feel compassion, to offer love.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Interestingly, whilst Sri Yukteswar would say “The world is my homeland” (Yogananda 1946, p527) he never lived outside of India. By encouraging and enabling Yogananda to settle in the West however, he was able to bring about a ‘brotherhood’ of his followers that is now global. In one generation ‘self-realization’ has transcended its Indian roots; surely an example of humankind’s evolution.

<sup>493</sup> The growing recognition of the importance of such ‘experiential learning’ can also be seen in its increasing use in Higher Education. A detailed study of such trends is outside the scope of this thesis, but general observations and background reading would seem to support this contention. An early example might be John K. Thorneycroft’s *Religious Education through Experience and Expression* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978). Whilst not mystical in the traditional use of the word, in the context of this thesis, such trends are very much in line with an emergent commitment to and use of transcendent modes of thinking and learning.

<sup>494</sup> Thus the examples given in Chapter 6 of the work towards international peace by the Quakers and inter-faith groups.

<sup>495</sup> Referring to my example of a perceived lack of trust within a Finance department: rather than a concept to be debated, trust is, I would argue, something felt. Any resolution is far more likely

Blavatsky, for instance, warned against trusting even expert analysis of her own most profound work:

It is worse than useless going to those whom we imagine to be advanced students (she said) and asking them to give us an “interpretation” of the *Secret Doctrine*. They cannot do it. If they try, all they give are cut and dried exoteric renderings which do not remotely resemble the TRUTH. To accept such interpretation means anchoring ourselves to fixed ideas, whereas TRUTH lies beyond any ideas we can formulate or express. (Blavatsky & Hoskins 1990, p64, author’s capitalisations)

Truth, as many of those who genuinely seek for it will agree, becomes incomplete as soon as soon as it is restricted to words. Perhaps more relevant to this thesis is how the concepts of truth relates to an individual’s ability to enjoy life. In this case the detailed truth is one that describes the finer points relevant to a specific ‘here and now’ situation. As soon as that here or now is changed, then the truth also will have changed. For example we might say ‘it’s getting dark’ which at 4:15pm in the UK in winter it might well be. However, in June or even a half hour earlier or later, or in Australia, it would not be. Likewise with any human concept and judgement: it will always depend upon the contingencies of the who, what, where, when, why and how of the question. Those within the transcendence movement have learnt that generalities are limited truths. They know, often through the awakening of bitter experience, that adding details to a theory rarely helps anyone unless their specific situation is clearly specified too.<sup>496</sup>

The difference between conventional consciousness (with objective truths defined in words) and that of a mystic is illustrated in his typically poetic manner by Martin Buber. Describing how he might relate to a tree he contrasts an I-It mode where:

I can classify it in a species and study it as a type in its structure and mode of life ...  
I can dissipate it and perpetuate it in number, in pure numerical relation.  
In all this the tree remains my object, occupies space and time, and has its nature and constitution. (Buber 1937, p14)

With a I-Thou mode wherein:

It can, however, also come about, if I have both will and grace, that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer *It* ...

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in an atmosphere of trust. Likewise, the ‘non-violent communication’ methods used in peace negotiations (also described in Chapter 6).

<sup>496</sup> Yogananda, in describing transcendent levels of consciousness (as discussed in Chapter 5), talks about ‘perceiving’ a truth, through allowing the mind to ‘receive’ the full reality of that moment.

Everything belonging to the tree is in this: Its form and structure, its colours and chemical composition, its intercourse with the elements and with the stars, are all present in a single whole.

The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no value depending on my mood; but it is bodied over against me and has to do with me, as I with it - only in a different way.

Let no attempt be made to sap the strength from the meaning of the relation: relation Is mutual. (Buber 1937, pp14-15)

The idea of a mutual relationship with this tree and “Present in a single whole” provides echoes of the holographic as well as holistic principles, whilst “it is bodied over against me” emphasises the whole-body consciousness elements of the encounter of Buber with the tree. Above all, although “form and structure, its colours and chemical composition” are still part of what I have termed a transcendent experience with the tree, they are weak phrases to describe the now strong and deep ‘Being together’ of man and tree. Such an I-Thou experience in and of the moment, varying infinitely with the specific tree, the person relating to it, the season, time of day and so on. The mystic transcends such words of descriptions and just ‘is’ with the tree.

The difference between Being (an I-Thou relationship) and the ‘modern’ level of engaging with the world (I-It), is the difference between flowing (living in accord with the Tao) and living ‘in our heads’. That the latter mode has gone too far in present day society is aptly illustrated by the lead feature in the *Daily Telegraph* of 24<sup>th</sup> September 2011 (Paton 2011). Referring to a letter to the *Telegraph* from over two hundred academics (circulated by Richard House) and echoing a recently published UN report, it calls for:

A ban on all forms of advertising aimed at the youngest children, the establishment of a play-based curriculum for infants and a public information campaign warning of the dangers of screen-based entertainment. (Paton 2011, p1)

The article and letter go on to criticise the early age at which the UK begins formal education which, they claim, has resulted in “the lowest levels of children’s wellbeing in the developed world”. Such damning criticism of the ‘modern’ approach to child-rearing and education reflects the current emphasis on the I-It relationships described by Buber. By contrast, free-flowing activities, such as natural child play, is essential in fostering an I-Thou approach.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> The role of play is discussed further in Chapter 13.

From the transcendent viewpoint, too much emphasis on facts and figures, planning and control take our minds out of the presence: we cannot 'be present' when we are forever making or trying to keep to pre-determined objectives. That is, the current goal-based approach to much in life runs contrary to being present. Such a view also forms the gist of Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now* (Tolle 1999) who says:

Observe how the mind labels it [the present moment] and how this labelling process, this continuous sitting in judgement, creates pain and unhappiness. (Tolle 1999, p29)

Being present, and thus transcending such painful judgements, requires an acknowledgement of 'the eternal now' and to live there, rather than creating inner 'pasts' and 'futures'. For what is meant by 'now' anyway? Do we mean this second, this hour, this day, this millennium, or some other measure of time? 'Now' to a racing driver probably refers to small fractions of a second that are the difference between winning or losing a race. 'Now' in the context of human evolution refers to a transitional period of many decades if not millennium. Like all words, 'now' is open to interpretation. In a transcendent state however, what is significant is sensed by being present in a now that embraces all past(s) and all (possible) future(s).

All this, in the precision world of academic writing, may seem rather vague, but seeking any form of certainty or exactness in words would lead in the opposite direction to the transcendence process. Grounding, to the mystic, is not about pinning down a concept in words as in the common academic usage. On the contrary, a mystic is far more interested in 'grounding' the academic theory in the depth of transcendent experience. The danger of assuming a particular meaning to a word or concept is again highlighted. 'Grounding', whilst often considered an important concept in meditation and healing, for example, means very different things in different contexts.

In many 'grounding' meditations, the instruction is often to "imagine a root growing down from the base of your spine, far into the earth". Grounding, in such usage, is perceived as the opposite to connecting to the divine. The assumption seems to be that 'higher levels of consciousness' are separate from, even opposite to, earthly ones. In such usage, grounded is used to 'stop us floating away'. Such distinctions I would argue

are misleading: transcendent levels of consciousness and Being embrace both heavenly and earthly dimensions, they represent the divine within the daily.<sup>498</sup>

Heron (1992), in describing the importance of ‘feeling’ rather than thinking, offers this view on grounding: “Feeling asserts groundedness. It insists on particularity. It subverts improper generalization. It revels in networking, communion and relationship.” (Heron 1992, p96). To Heron then, grounding means bringing the soul-self to meet the physical body-self. It is the bringing to earth of the divine within us, or ‘bringing heaven to earth’ within a personal being. This seems a particularly useful explanation and one that matches my own use of the term. As in my general approach to transcendence, my objective has been to identify a meaning for such terms that is both practical and applicable to any and all situations: meanings that enable mental transcendence and further breaking down of barriers and misunderstandings between disciplines.

Thus, in Chapter 4 I described my experience with the Alexander Technique and in Chapter 8 I reviewed the concept of Total Quality. In each case, albeit in very different contexts, the aim was to have a specific inner focus (in these cases on breathing or a personal concern regarding a product development) and, at the same time, an outer view: a clear awareness of how an individual (or part played in a product’s development) fits into the ‘overall scheme of things’. To get the most benefit from the Alexander Technique requires a connection with both inner and outer worlds. To get the best from Total Quality Management requires Being with specific activity as well as the marketing and user environment. Any ‘me: them’ or any ‘my world: rest of world’ divisions need to be transcended. In educational terms, this equates to the embedding of learning in

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<sup>498</sup> When teaching Reiki, when a student expresses concerns at feeling ‘too light headed’, I would advise them to open their eyes and look around the room and to ground themselves in the physical world around them. Grounding is thus, in my experience, keeping our feet firmly on the floor, at least metaphorically. To be grounded however, does not mean losing our connection with the divine, as I have discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of the Alexander technique. Bloom offers another view. He describes a man mentally and physically ‘broken’ by twenty-five years in concentration camps. Despite this, or maybe because of it, this individual had a presence:

It was as though the soul of this man was alive, rooted in God, shining with the divine presence, serene, unaffected by the perplexities, doubts, uncertainties, and fears, while his body was beyond control and reacted in a sort of automatic way to sound, to words, to gestures. (Bloom 1971 p28)

Here the idea is to be ‘rooted in God, or grounded in the divine; quite the opposite to the meaning often given.

practice; grounding of Beingness into whatever activity is being undertaken. Such is the way of the mystic.

Such a grounding helps one to clearly see and face fears. Often, in doing so one finds that:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
(Williamson 1992, p190)<sup>499</sup>

All too often it is fears that fill the mind, disabling one's ability to think in a transcendent fashion by blocking the channels to the knowledge and energy that would enable success. As I shall discuss further in Chapter 13, fear is indeed a major barrier which prevents many from achieving their innate potential. When trapped in feelings of insecurity and victim mentality one is unable to take the action that will lead to success. A key facet of nothingness is thus the absence of fear. From Nelson Mandela to many of the respondents in this research however, it is clear that as fears are faced, one's ability to see and respond to the unmanifest potential of the unknown is opened up. The model of the mind as a channel provides a simple metaphor for all of the above: to access the divine mind requires that the human mind be clear of fear and of limiting beliefs. Not least the belief that the human mind is restricted to rational thought. It seems reasonable to hypothesise that it is an unfamiliarity with transcendent modes of thoughts, and the reassurance and practical wisdom that comes from that, which fuels the fear of success.

From a transcendent perspective, one of the underlying problems humans often face in the modern age is the conditioned idea that the mind can be considered a computer, that it needs to be filled with information, that all this information can be rationally understood and, perhaps most importantly, that each of us is in control of our own lives. The superiority of the rational mind has been so much part of the collective human experience, in both the collective consciousness and in most human cultures, that the very idea of letting go of that control and surrendering into the Oneness has normally been rejected outright.

Compound this with the fear of success and it is not hard to see why much of humanity has become trapped in a cycle of fear, inaction and unhappiness. Such humans are so used to the chatter of the mind as it analyses, judges and worries about the past and the

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<sup>499</sup> Often erroneously attributed to Nelson Mandela.



future that when they do succeed in clearing a channel and experiencing transcendent modes of thought, this in itself can trigger also fear: of the unknown and of the power of the unmanifest potential, for example.<sup>500</sup> Transcendent experiences may indeed inspire, empower and reassure, but often it also brings to the fore feelings, for example, of lack of worth. To break this cycle requires that one be prepared to admit to feelings of inadequacy and to admit that positive things could replace the negative ones. The mystic thus lives the transcendence process by keeping an open mind: consistent with the ‘Nothingness’, as discussed in Chapter 10.

In this chapter I have expounded on how ‘the modern mystic’ applies a transcendent approach to life in an on-going and daily manner: by refusing to separate the spiritual from the mundane and being comfortable at both extremes of any spectrum of view or action. A transcendent way of perceiving oneself and of engaging with the world relies on awareness of and being in harmony with Bodymind and of trusting the inherent wisdom and ‘here and now truth’ that comes from transcendent modes of thought. Developing these states of mind may come through travelling or through play, but requires compassion for all. Together these features of a mystical focus to life are inherent to an inner evolutionary quest to reach potential, individually and collectively (as discussed in Chapter 9).

The process of reaching and maintaining such mystical states of mind is often, however, fraught. Suffering, fears and the often difficult task of changing old thought patterns that is required for acceptance are all part of the overall transcendence process. These are the subject of my next chapter.

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<sup>500</sup> C21 for example, as featured in Chapter 6, describes how she was initially scared of things she experienced in her lucid dreaming, but learnt to control her fear reaction.

# Chapter 12

## Transitions, suffering and acceptance

In *A Monk in the World*, Teasdale (2002) devotes a whole chapter to *Tough Grace*<sup>501</sup>: *A Contemplative Understanding of Suffering* (ibid pp157-172). Suffering, and one's correct response to it, he says, is a key element in the interspiritual approach to life. What makes his chapter particular powerful and motivational is that Teasdale writes it from a first-hand experience that few would relish: palate cancer.

I realized I could die from this cancer. This sober realization cleared away all my other preoccupations. It was isolating. I felt I was in a glass cage, that no one could hear me. I felt alone with my fears, and they ate away at my peace. I had to struggle against my worries. (Teasdale 2002, p160)

The following experience of my own, albeit less severe struggle and suffering, reflects similar dynamics to Teasdale's. Thus, I woke very early one morning feeling decidedly unwell, with aches, pains and the beginning of a sore throat. Throughout the morning I felt 'heavy' and unable to concentrate. I was undoubtedly suffering. But there was no obvious physical or emotional cause. Through a combination of healing techniques and visualisations, I eventually realised that I was suffering because I wanted to control a situation that did not need controlling. I wanted to make a decision on an event 5 days away which I really did not need to decide on. Despite all my pronouncements of wanting to live in the 'here and now' and take 'one day at a time', my mind was most uncomfortable with the lack of decision. Having seen what was happening however, I was able to reassure myself that I could, without letting anybody down, delay my decision. Then, having also forgiven myself, I felt liberated. I swallowed hard to accept the uncertainty and was able to throw myself more freely into the moment. By confronting my fear with a commitment to surrender to 'what is', the suffering subsided. Teasdale words had weight to this conclusion: "Perhaps more than in any other part of

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<sup>501</sup> A phrase also used by Ram Dass: see Chapter 5.

life, in confronting fear, our spirituality demonstrates its precious value ... Illness also deepens our humility.” (Teasdale 2002, p161). Teasdale also emphasises, on the same page, how humble acceptance is part of the same process. Whether one is facing death (as Teasdale was) or some other transition (in my case merely a state of modest uncertainty), so the inter-related nature of how suffering, transition and acceptance are inter-related becomes clear. In this chapter I explore these related processes and show how they—as my models of Chapter 7 suggest—are integral to the over-all process of transcendence. Tough times are ‘sent to try us’ and, when seen in that light, such times enable one to ‘tap into’ whatever inner resources are needed to help one through those times of trials and tribulations.

Whether it is physical or emotional suffering the value of transcendent experience at times of crisis is well reported. Mark Fox (2003) in *Religion, spirituality and the near-death experience*, for example, examines the particular example of NDE. Drawing on the work of Judith Cressy (1994), Fox draws out the similarities between NDE and mystical experiences. In so doing, the juxtaposition of crisis and insights in the unfolding process of transcendent experience is illustrated.<sup>502</sup>

Likewise Dass sees grace in the effects of his stroke, Teasdale amidst his cancer and Teilhard de Chardin in the trenches of the great war. A useful description of such suffering and the reaction of it to those most committed to a divine path, is given by Jean-Pierre DeCaussade, particularly in his section *Grace through Affliction* (DeCaussade 1966, pp32-34):

The working of this divine process being unknown to them, souls receive its blessing, its substance and its truth in all sorts of events which they imagine to be their ruin. There is no remedy for this darkness but to sink into it. God reveals himself in all things through faith. (DeCaussade 1966, p33)

It is not the aim of this research to debate the meaning of the words ‘faith’ or ‘grace’, since numerous tomes have already studied such issues in depth. To discuss such semantics would be to get caught up in the ‘language game’ (as discussed in Chapter 8). Again, I seek the gist of arguments made by, for example, DeCaussade, who asserts that benefits come to us and suffering diminishes when we accept it as part of our personal process of transcendence.

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<sup>502</sup> In so doing, the significance of an experience beyond words is highlighted, a feature of transcendence already given prominence in this discourse.

That benefit can come through life's trials is emphasised too in Buddhist philosophy. It is of course the case that each branch of Buddhism has its own focus and specific philosophy and practices. As Ferrer says:

To lump together these different awarenesses into one single spiritual liberation or referent reachable by all traditions may be profoundly distorting. Each spiritual shore is independent and needs to be reached by its appropriate raft. (Ferrer 2002, p148)

To identify common elements between faith (or other) paths is not to dismiss their individual uniqueness. Indeed, Ferrer is quick to add:

I should stress that my defence of many viable spiritual paths and goals does not preclude the possibility of equivalent or common elements among them. In other words, although the different mystical traditions enact and disclose different spiritual universes, two or more traditions may share certain elements in their paths and/or goals. (ibid)<sup>503</sup>

The transcendence paradigm is about both respecting the differences (between traditions) and, at the same time, highlighting their shared elements. As Ferrer explains:

The common ocean to which most spiritual traditions lead is not a pregiven spiritual ultimate, but the Ocean of Emancipation, a radical shift in perspective that involves the deconstruction of the Cartesian ego, the eradication of self-imposed suffering, and the rise of selfless perception, cognition, and action. (Ferrer 2002, p149)

In this paragraph Ferrer effectively summaries the key elements acknowledged by those within the transcendence movement as essential to Being, not least that any path trod or philosophy followed be based “not on a pregiven” but by a “radical shift in perspective”. That is, I would argue, by surrendering into a participatory reality.<sup>504</sup>

An example can be seen in the path followed by many Reiki practitioners which has, due to the Buddhist origins of Reiki, many Buddhist features.<sup>505</sup> Although Reiki has many

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<sup>503</sup> Ferrer also refers to the work of Vroom (1989) and his “multicentered view of religion” which display “a variety of independent but potentially overlapping focal points” (Ferrer 2002, pp148-149, referring to Vroom, H.M. (1989) *Religion and the truth: Philosophical reflections and perspectives*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans).

<sup>504</sup> Ferrer goes on to say “The entry into the Ocean of Emancipation, however, is not necessarily the zenith of spiritual development, but may rather be the starting point of genuine spiritual inquiry.” (ibid) This also aligns with attitudes within the transcendence movement: whilst the intent is to Be (immersed in Ferrer’s “Ocean of Emancipation”) this is not seen as a goal. Individual committed to the process of transcendence fully accept that theirs is a lifetime’s journey, with many more challenges along the way.

<sup>505</sup> Different authors suggest somewhat different Buddhist influences to Reiki. David Vennells, for example, refers to the time Usui (the founder of Reiki Healing) spent with a Zen Buddhist abbot and studied Sanskrit texts with him. See Vennells, D.F. (1999) *Reiki for Beginners*, St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1999, pp14-17.

lineages with a range of beliefs and practices, all, for example, include what are typically referred to as *The Principles of Reiki*.<sup>506</sup> One version often seen and present in many sources (for example Horan 1990) includes the premise that: “Just for today, I will live the attitude of gratitude.” (Horan 1990, p45) This is explained thus:

One of the fundamental concepts at the root of the major philosophical and religious systems in ancient times, was that of all-sufficiency. It was taught that to understand one’s self was to understand God, that by going deep within, one could transmute fear into love, ignorance into wisdom, and lack into abundance. (ibid)

Reiki healing, like other techniques that can be utilised to assist the transcendence process, do so by helping to transmute pain into learning and acceptance. In teaching the purpose of the Reiki Principles and meaning of ‘in an attitude of gratitude’ we need to be grateful not only for those things we seek, but also for all things: particularly the challenging things.<sup>507</sup>

Suffering is thus perhaps best seen as an integral part of life’s ebb and flow. Whilst accepting and enjoying the highs is easy, it is not so with the lows. It is through facing suffering and being willing to learn from it that one become more philosophical, more humble. Kübler-Ross, for example, in interviewing a dying patient who was coming to terms with not being able “to enjoy the fruits of his labor” says: “Mr J., whose twenty years of illness and suffering had made him somewhat of a philosopher.” (Kübler-Ross 1969, p138). Many of us, somehow, grow up with the notion that life is fair. In reality, it is often not. To accept such a reality is, I would suggest, an important purpose of suffering.

Often such a process is triggered by a recognition that attitudes inherited from parents or early teachers, opposes a personal, emerging world-view. Getting angry with one’s ‘elders and betters’ for being ‘misleading’ is typical of the transcendent path. When Hardy, for example, realised that his upbringing had distanced him from the working classes, he: “Became extremely angry with the way [he] had been brought up.” (Hay 2011, p63). Anger, like depression, is part of the grieving and transcendence process.

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<sup>506</sup> Key to usefulness of the Reiki Principles is that they are just that: guiding principles and not commandments or ‘hard and fast’ rules. The guidance given to those learning Reiki is to allow the Reiki itself to guide both the healing process and life events. The Principles are to enable a natural and spontaneous flow, not to impose a set of rigid constraints on behaviour.

<sup>507</sup> This interpretation of living ‘in an attitude of gratitude’ did not seem to emerge from the Reiki texts available at the time however: this being one of the reasons I wrote my own book on Reiki: *Reiki Without Rules* (Beasley 2007).

Within the transcendence movement it is accepted that we all suffer. It is part of being human. What sets those in these individuals apart is how they respond to the suffering. Typical conventional reactions are likely to be denial (that there is suffering: keeping a ‘stiff upper lip’ perhaps) or a reaction to the suffering with a campaign against the injustice of it. Those aligned to the paradigm of transcendence however, are more likely to be willing and able to face it head on and with gratitude. Toddy, for example, describes how, reflecting on earlier psychic attacks,<sup>508</sup> she was able to forgive and thank the perpetrator:

Further down the road of life I need to thank him, or my higher self, very much for the valuable lessons learned, for how many can know that they have looked into the face of evil!<sup>509</sup>

Suffering may come through any sort of attack (physical, emotional or psychic) illness, loss of a loved one, or any situation that brings on a feeling of helplessness or powerlessness. It includes those times of feeling that despite having done one’s best there is still a sense of failure. It includes the occasions when, faced with a barrier to overcome, all efforts have been made to climb it or move it, but without success. It encompasses all those times when, in a relationship, be it personal or otherwise, progress was blocked by a barrier of gulf due to cultural differences or personal preferences.

In analysing the experiences of my contributors it is clear that when faced with such boundaries those with a transcendent approach are willing to acknowledge that a barrier exists and look for ways to surpass it and for new perspectives to it. Likewise, in looking for ways to ‘bridge the divide’, they will be willing to change their own views, even, especially, long-held beliefs and expectations. There is also typically a willingness to change habits and practices and to accommodate individuals from different backgrounds, rather than to judge and blame.

In practice, my contributors, in pursuing the above approach to times of suffering will think nothing of having a good scream or cry or of going for a walk. Going to new places physically can help, they find, the mind to explore new places too. And, with the

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<sup>508</sup> The notion of ‘psychic attack’ is readily accepted within the transcendence movement and is now the subject of serious academic study. See, for example Palmer, T.J. (2012) *A revised epistemology for an understanding of spirit release therapy developed in accordance with the conceptual framework of F. W. H. Myers*, PhD Thesis, Bangor University, 2012.

<sup>509</sup> Included in an e-mail from this contributor dated 23.1.10.

right intent, new perspectives open up to us. Writing poetry, drawing a picture, dancing or participating in some other creative or expressive activity is found to release blocked emotions and to 'open' us to new insight. Such factors are discussed (with examples) in Chapter 13.

If an end to suffering at the personal level indicates both the hope and success of transcendence at the personal level, so a primary aim of the interfaith movement is to help bring an end to the suffering caused by wars and conflicts. From its earliest days its active members recognised that, irrespective of their specific faith, they could not stand by and preach their respective creeds whilst religious difference could be identified as fuelling violence and misery at local or international level. Furthermore, pioneers, such as Marcus Braybrooke, acknowledged that any work on ending suffering has to begin with a personal commitment to the process of peace.

A factor key to both this personal process and to Interfaith ministries is forgiveness. In *A Heart for the World* Marcus Braybrooke (2005) quotes Archbishop Desmond Tutu on the subject:

True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth ... People are not being asked to forget ... Forgiveness means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss which liberates the victim. (Braybrooke 2005, p51)<sup>510</sup>

This Nobel Peace Prize winner is asking us, for the sake of peace, to 'abandon our rights'. Such is the price that true proponents of transcendent ways are prepared to pay. Reconciliation in particular and the healing process are about facing suffering and perceived wrongs with unconditional love, even if this means letting go of otherwise powerful values and motives. That is, Being requires that we respond to the needs of the moment, not according to the prescribed rules or values.<sup>511</sup> Such an approach brings with it the necessary surrender and acceptance.

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<sup>510</sup> Quoting Tutu, D. (2000) *No Future Without Forgiveness*, New York & London: Image pp218-219.

<sup>511</sup> A popular idea within the transcendence movement is that 'responsibility' is not about being responsible to or for something or somebody, but is about our ability to respond to the needs of that moment. See, for example *Death and the Other, The Origin of Ethical Responsibility* by James Mensch, accessed from [http://stfx.academia.edu/httpwwwstfxcafeoplejmenesch/Papers/263521/Death\\_and\\_the\\_Other\\_The-Origin\\_of\\_Ethical\\_Responsibility](http://stfx.academia.edu/httpwwwstfxcafeoplejmenesch/Papers/263521/Death_and_the_Other_The-Origin_of_Ethical_Responsibility) on 21.8.11.

## Suffering and acceptance

Suffering may be concerned with having to cope with physical pain (Teasdale and Dass, for example), empathising with the pain and suffering of others (e.g. Braybrooke's peace campaigners) or, perhaps more typically within the transcendence movement, with the process of acceptance. The latter, as I have already suggested forms a necessary part of the process of transcendence. Whatever the cause, this suffering is something that is not just felt, but felt at a deep level. It is this depth of feeling, an inner connection with it which, I maintain, enables the transcendence process.

Whether embracing a broader and more interconnected mental view of reality (mental transcendence) or being willing to engage with whole-body / non-local consciousness (both as intellectual concepts and in practice) requires a considerable degree of acceptance. Firstly comes the acceptance that one's previous world view is limited and limiting. Secondly the willingness to, literally, 'expand our mind', which in turns means accepting that what was thought to be a true and fair description of reality is, not to put too fine a point on it, wrong. Accepting new epistemologies means admitting lacks in those previously employed. Even if explained in terms of 'being taught the conventional and prevailing view', it does not alter the fact that ideas that may have been held for decades can no longer be accepted as valid. They are relinquished. In the experience of many of my contributors this is often a painful process and one with a definite associated sense of suffering.<sup>512</sup>

I am discussing here not so much the state of acceptance, but acceptance as a phase in a process. As I have already identified (Chapter 7), in this respect the process of transcendence is very similar to the grieving process. In writing about her research amongst the dying, Kübler-Ross places much emphasis on acceptance. In her studies, Kübler-Ross's subjects were engaged in perhaps the ultimate acceptance: that they were dying, that their life (at least in this current human form) was about to end. Although a few remained in denial about this fact right up until the end, Kübler-Ross reports that most do eventually accept. However, she concludes: "Acceptance should not be mistaken for a happy stage. It is almost void of feelings. It is as if the pain had gone, the

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<sup>512</sup> One participant of the Wrekin Round Table described in Appendix 4 describes it thus: "Mentally, we have to go through this process of letting go some of our old ideas and to let go is painful, you've got to relinquish and so on. But having done that letting go process, then we become open to all experiences and it becomes a positive cycle." (from transcript of "Evolving Consciousness" Session of 31.10.10).



struggle is over.” (Kübler-Ross 1969, p100). This description bears a striking resemblance to the ideas of emptiness in Chapter 10: a ‘void of feeling’, the inner ‘struggle is over’. Acceptance, as a number of my contributors have noted, is often accompanied by this sense of emptiness. Not a vacuum or lack, nor a happy stage or state as such, but the mind freed of its previous turbulence and conflicts.<sup>513</sup>

That periods of transcendent thought often correspond with times of major physical struggle is well illustrated, not least by Nietzsche in his autobiographical *Ecce Homo* (1911):

In the midst of the agony of a headache which lasted three days, accompanied by violent nausea, I was possessed of most singular dialectical clearness, and in absolutely cold blood I then thought out things, for which, in my more healthy moments, I am not enough of a climber, not sufficiently subtle, not sufficiently cold. (Nietzsche 1911, p10)

If Nietzsche was in his normal attitude not able—‘not enough of a climber’—to achieve transcendent clearness, one wonders whether those who identify themselves at the peak of their chosen discourse or field might still have potentials for achieving even greater clarity. It has been a contention throughout this work that to understand the transcendence process and to fully appreciate its potential for changing the lives of human beings, it is particularly useful to take a broad definition of transcendence. Taking athletics as an example, we might consider Roger Bannister who first ran the mile in under 4 minutes<sup>514</sup> and Jim Hines who, on 14th October 1968, won the 100 metres at the 1968 Olympic Games. Both set times previously considered unobtainable. They, like other top athletes regularly transcend barriers, whether literally (in the case of high jumpers and pole-vaulters), by beating other competitors or ‘beating the clock’. In so doing, a range of physical, psychological and often painful barriers are faced and worked through. Few Olympic champions would argue that success brings with it both periods of tremendous highs as well as of suffering. Such experiences offer significant support to my contentions.

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<sup>513</sup> C4, for example, talks about the need for “peace and solitude” from which clarity and acceptance can emerge (C4, Q4.10 and others).

<sup>514</sup> Bannister’s time was 3.59.4, set on 6th May 1954 at the Iffley Road Track in Oxford. Hines set a new world record in a time of 9.95 seconds.

Phil Cousineau in *The Olympic odyssey: rekindling the true spirit of the great games* (Cousineau 2003),<sup>515</sup> writes:

Only in the latter [Poetry] can we find the deep roots of our ancient urge to play, to compete, and to excel; only there can we glimpse the birth of courage in an athlete, compassion in a coach, devotion in a fan ... To me, these inspired efforts echo what nineteenth-century scholar E. Lowes Dickinson described in *The Greek View of Life as the genius of ancient Greece philosophy* - the uncanny ability to make oneself "at home in the world," even in an increasingly rootless world such as ours. (Cousineau 2003, p3)

"At home in the World" immediately suggests Heidegger's Dwelling and Being, but here applied to Olympic athletes. Being at home (in the World) is not all about 'taking life easy', but about doing whatever is felt to be necessary. If that means suffering, so be it.<sup>516</sup>

But if suffering cannot be avoided, what other characteristics identify particular individuals as part of the emerging transcendent era, whilst others persist in their 'modern' idyll? This is the subject of my next chapter.

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<sup>515</sup> Interestingly this book is published by Quest Books, the imprint of the Theosophical Publishing House, the publishing arm of the Theosophical Society in America, adding further evidence to my claim of significant and on-going mutual acknowledgement and interaction between different disciplines, schools and philosophy.

<sup>516</sup> The 'London 2012' Olympics and Paralympics provided, I would suggest, many excellent examples of the practice of transcendence by ordinary people. Widely acknowledged as a tremendous success both socially and sportingly, it demonstrated the way in which courage, teamwork, "warmth, welcome and tolerance" exhibited by the volunteers and an openness and willingness to share by the spectators all worked together to create an 'inclusive' games which so many felt 'part of'. (Based on the speech by the Prime Minister, David Cameron after the London 2012 victory parade on 10.9.12.). The games themselves also demonstrated how such events encourage and enable the transcendence of divisions of race, nationality and disability. See, for example, the many comments on [www.guardian.co.uk/sport/london-2012-olympics-blog/2012/aug/12/has-olympics-changed-london-2012](http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/london-2012-olympics-blog/2012/aug/12/has-olympics-changed-london-2012), accessed 13.9.12.

# **Chapter 13**

## **Activities and factors that enable transcendence**

I have shown in the previous chapter that suffering and acceptance are an integral part of the transitional process that is transcendence. In this chapter I examine the factors and activities that have been found to enable this process. In a typical post-dualistic manner it comes as no surprise to find that both ‘nature’ and ‘nurture’ have their part to play. Later I will explore the extent to which one’s inherent nature makes each individual more (or less) apt to engage in the transcendence process. I begin by discussing how our environment can help or hinder transcendence, looking first at family background.

### **Upbringing**

Although an individual has little control of their parents or of the location of their early life, these factors inevitably influence one’s later life. Analysis of my biographic and personal account contributors (in Chapters 5 & 6) identifies a number of factors that might affect the ease with which an individual might, in later life at least, become interested in and then committed to the transcendence process. For example, for a number of the individuals featured in this study (that is, those whom I would consider within the transcendence movement), a happy and stable family life during childhood seemed to provide an invaluable platform for later mental explorations. For Teilhard de Chardin, for example: “It was a home full of life and happiness. The family was close-knit and lived a stable rural life punctuated by the rhythm of the seasons.” (King 1996, pp2-4). And for Maclean also:

My background was thoroughly stable and supportive, but beyond that it was normal enough. I had exceptionally fine, caring parents, who were loved and respected by all who knew them. (Maclean 1980, p7)

Such stability and care provide the self-confidence from which openness to new ideas flows more readily.

Both Teilhard de Chardin and Maclean also had the significant benefit of access to countryside and time spent in and with nature.<sup>517</sup> There can be little doubt that such connection to the natural world during formative years provides a positive framework from which to explore the wider and deeper aspects of life in all its breadth and glory. Both Nietzsche and Tillich valued ‘the open’:

Nietzsche said that no idea could be true unless it was thought in the open air. Many of my ideas were conceived in the open and much of my writing done among trees or by the sea. (Tillich 1936, p18)

Tillich is quick, however, to clarify that “Alternating regularly between the elements of town and country always has been and still is part of what I consider indispensable and inviolable in my life.” (Tillich 1936, pp18-19)

Coming, as it does, in *On the Boundary*, this should come as no surprise. Tillich misses no opportunity to illustrate how he himself has always found truth and inner peace through transcending any and all boundaries; in this case, between town and country. His is a stark reminder that however inspiring and connecting nature may be, it is but one facet of the world in which we dwell.

Thus an important point is made: whilst this chapter identifies factors which have been found to be enabling, that does not mean they will always be effective or will be useful for everybody. The nature of transcendence is that it follows no simple rules. Taken with one’s own unique and personal set of experiences and needs, this is not unexpected. In the evidence presented here I found no particular pre-requisites to transcendent states. I present, instead, trends in backgrounds and practices that often seem to correlate to a propensity for an interest in transcendence, rather than any set of ‘rules’ to be followed. Apparent contradictions often appear in the evidence. Whilst C5, for example, attends regular, formal, “Bible Studies”, C4 says “I don’t use any formal techniques”.<sup>518</sup> This should come as no surprise since ‘one man’s meat is another man’s poison’: we are all different. Why should one technique suit all?

Having said that, an intimate association with nature does seem to make it easier to allow in and accept transcendent experiences. This would seem logically and intuitively

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<sup>517</sup> Later in this chapter I review the importance of engagement with nature on an on-going basis, whether we were brought up with it or not. As with any conditioning, the more familiar and comfortable we are with it from childhood, the easier it will be to engage with in later life.

<sup>518</sup> In response to Q5.3.

reasonable given my contention that transcendence is itself natural. The well-known close association of Saint Francis with the natural world also supports this. But is it an essential factor? Is it possible to embrace the transcendent without such positive formative experiences of nature? One could imagine a strongly negative experience causing a conditioned reaction against the natural world, which is unlikely to assist later symbiosis with nature or related transcendence practice. No such experiences were reported by my sample of contributors however.

I can thus conclude that although there will almost certainly be exceptions. The evidence suggests that childhood associations with nature are extremely helpful on one's journey of transcendence. Certain less pleasant experiences of nature can have a similar effect. A heavy swell at sea or a precipitous mountain path can, for example, be frightening. Not only do such experiences bring us closer to the extremes and the enormity of the natural world, they also illustrate another component common to the transcendence process: challenging situations provide an opportunity to be courageous, the subject of my next section.<sup>519</sup>

## **Courage**

“Grant me ... the courage to change those things I can”

Since its publication in 1987, the hugely influential book by Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and do it anyway* has helped millions of individuals to face their worries, ride their fears and thus break through self-imposed limitations.<sup>520</sup> Although barely referenced in academic literature, this book is consistently in the top ten best-selling ‘Personal Development’ titles and, amongst holistic health practitioners and self-development teachers it is a key reference. In terms of a book that has had and continues to have an

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<sup>519</sup> Courage was also featured in Chapter 5, in the context of Teilhard de Chardin and Jung. The courage of theologians is also illustrated, for example, in Beasley-Murray, P. (2002) *Fearless for Truth: A Personal Portrait of the life of George Beasley-Murray*, Carlisle (UK) & Waynesboro (GA, USA): Paternoster Press.

<sup>520</sup> See, for example, the stories from appreciative readers on the Jeffers’ web site: [www.susanjeffers.com/home/stories.cfm](http://www.susanjeffers.com/home/stories.cfm), accessed 10.1.11.

impact, as academic work is now required to, this practical text from Jeffers is considered a 'classic' in its field.<sup>521</sup>

Whether a fear of the unknown, of dying or of our own shadow:

Whenever we take a chance and enter unfamiliar territory or put ourselves into the world in a new way, we experience fear. Very often this fear keeps us from moving ahead with our lives. The trick is TO FEEL THE FEAR AND DO IT ANYWAY. (Jeffers 1987, p6, author's capitalisation)

That is, to transcend those fears. As with any form of suffering, the way forward, Jeffers maintains, is through whatever seems to be standing in one's path. She explains:

I'm not promising that change is easy. It takes courage to mold your life the way you want it to be. There are all sorts of real and imagined obstacles that get in the way. They need not deter you. (Jeffers 1987, p6)

Whether the obstacles are physical or mental blocks, progress requires that they are faced head on. Such is the experience of many I have read or people I have worked with:

I remember a time in my life when I was frightened of just about everything - fearful that I would fail in all my attempts to fulfill my dreams. So I just stayed home, a victim of all my insecurities ... When I saw the commercial, I suddenly realized that I had stopped participating in the world. With this "enlightenment," I started pushing myself out there once again. I realized I had to shift from being afraid of making a mistake to being afraid of not making a mistake. If I am not making any mistakes, I can be sure I am not learning and growing. (Jeffers 1987, p130)<sup>522</sup>

As I have maintained throughout, transcendence, is far more usefully considered not as a 'once in a lifetime' conversion experience, but on-going lessons from life. Being able to participate in the process is thus more about personal education than a subject restricted to religion of theology or even to psychology. Jeffers, for example, began running classes in which she helped her students to re-educate themselves on how they responded to fear: "My experiment with taking the concept of fear out of the realm of therapy and placing it in the area of education was extremely successful." (Jeffers 1987, p6). Such classes were very much experiential, again emphasising that none of these

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<sup>521</sup> Amazon.co.uk describes it as "The phenomenal classic that has changed the lives of millions" and ranks it No 8 in "Psychology Textbooks", See [www.amazon.co.uk/Feel-Fear-Do-Anyway-phenomenal/dp/0099741008](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Feel-Fear-Do-Anyway-phenomenal/dp/0099741008), accessed 22.8.11.

<sup>522</sup> The advert Jeffers saw "was actually an Eastern Airlines commercial that used the slogan "Get into this world"" (ibid), thus adding weight to my contention that guidance on our journey comes not necessarily to commitment to any particular path, but through being open to guidance from life itself, in any form.

ideas work as mere concepts: fear has to be felt; one's innermost feelings embraced. This applies in all walks of life, as my next example illustrates.

In August 2011 the Euro-zone hit a crisis. In reporting this issue the newspapers bemoaned the lack of courage shown by the politicians. Rather than telling their electorate how things really are, they hesitated. As a result the crisis deepened. Here I suggest is a clear example of the need to apply the Serenity Prayer: "Political leaders must find the courage to tell the truth about the fix we are in, and the painful choices that must be made to deliver a sustainable future."<sup>523</sup>

Transcendence is not just about numinous experiences; it is about transcending fears (for example of losing the next election which was a likelihood for Chancellor Merkel of Germany at the time) and being willing to face, see and tell the truth.<sup>524</sup>

Times of major change at the national and international level have obviously occurred throughout human history and leaders are often faced with difficult decisions. One only has to think of Nelson Mandela or of Gandhi to acknowledge that the ability to connect to a higher level of awareness and of courageousness is often what is required to make major changes to a country's government. Surely it is realistic to consider the end of apartheid, for example, as a transcendent experience?

But Mandela in South Africa or Gandhi in India could not have done what they did without the courage of the ordinary people who supported them. Bringing an end to foreign or dictatorial rule requires thousands to transcend their fears. Such is the case in many countries around the Middle East now:

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<sup>523</sup> *Ignoring the painful truth is making things worse*, Telegraph View, 5th Aug 2011 (accessed from [www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/8684265/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/8684265/) on 7.6.11)

<sup>524</sup> Paradoxically the very existence of the Euro-zone is an excellent example of the transcendence process. In the mid-20th century, in the era of two World Wars, few would have imagined a Europe where France, Germany, Italy and others shared the same currency. And yet in 1957, *The Treaty of Rome*, agreed by the six national governments of the time, established the European Economic Community. Forty-two years later (1<sup>st</sup> Jan 1999) the Euro was introduced to world's financial markets with Euro notes and coins entering circulation three years later. That one currency could transcend the borders of fiercely nationalistic countries such as Germany and France must surely be considered as human transcendence *par excellence*. It is true that the process has a long way to go, but that does not deny the courage and determination shown by the European leaders along this route. Facing the challenges required for full European integration is likely to require further efforts in transcendence.

“I learned to say no, I am not a coward anymore,” said Ahmed Abdel Reheem, a 40-year-old electrician from Alexandria who gave up his monthly income of \$200 and camped out in the downtown square for weeks. “All I cared about before was making a living, but now people have started to care about each other. I feel like I have been born again.” (El-Naggar 2011)<sup>525</sup>

This ordinary Egyptian epitomises not only courage but a recognition that compassion is as, if not more, important as financial security to the transcendence process. Wealth, in the transcendent paradigm, has an altogether different focus. In my next section I explore what might be called the ‘heart’ focus of transcendence.

### **The meek shall inherit the earth**

Humility is a striking trait common to many, if not all, respected individuals within the transcendence movement; Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama being perhaps two of the most well-known. Many families and communities the world over, albeit to a lesser extent, also have their own favourite aunt or ‘character’ whom one knows will always listen compassionately and offer wise suggestions. There are undoubtedly a few people who have or have developed a ‘divine authority’ whereby this, I would say true humility, comes hand-in-hand with a depth of presence and truth that cannot be ignored. This is the meekness which Psalm 37:11 speaks of.<sup>526</sup>

The Christian idea of meekness is also neatly linked to a *Responsible Praxis in the Ecological Economy* by Calvin DeWitt. As President of the Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists (AESE), DeWitt demonstrates not just a firm commitment to transcending the theological: scientific divide but to promoting a meekness that reflect a calm and gentle ‘divine authority’. Referring to the work (both written and worldly) of the Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), DeWitt suggests that such work: “Puts us as individuals and society in grand spatial and temporal context.” (DeWitt 2002, p16)

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<sup>525</sup> Accessed from [www.nytimes.com/2011/02/20/weekinreview/20tahrir.html?page=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/20/weekinreview/20tahrir.html?page=1) on 8.8.11.

<sup>526</sup> The same gist is also expressed in Matthew 5:5: *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth*. This biblical quote also invites discussion on the meaning and significance of being ‘blessed’: such debate is however beyond the scope of the current work.



Meekness is seen by such commentators as an essential quality for our planet's wellbeing. DeWitt quotes the Rev. Clifford Bajema:<sup>527</sup>

“Stewardship of God's creation and charity with creation's goods is more important to the meek than a controlling and selfish ownership ... Yes, it is a good thing the meek will inherit the earth, for they will hug, indiscriminately, forests and pandas and wetlands and unborn children and senile septuagenarians! .” (DeWitt 2002, p16)

Unfortunately meekness, in the modern eras, is often associated with weakness; and such weakness seen as a negative trait. Furthermore, all too often weakness is closely associated with a victim mentality, which is far from the meekness and humility of a mystic.<sup>528</sup> Whilst humility is about accepting those things we cannot change, it is also about changing those things we can, with compassion and respect for the beliefs and feelings of others involved. Meekness is not weakness. Rather, it is about being sufficiently assured of a personal connection to divine reality and power to be able to stand up for oneself, when required. To do so means having transcended one's fears and feelings of insecurity, these being precisely the developments considered in this work as being an essential part of the broader transcendence process and of personal and collective evolution.

This was clearly illustrated in the review of biographies in Chapter 5, particularly in the context of both Sir Cliff Richard and Sir George Trevelyan; the latter being praised, for example, for his “non-egotistical simplicity” (Farrer 2002, p167). It is perhaps no coincidence that my examples should both be Knights of the Realm: Knights in the true sense of the original chivalric code and its noble intent towards those less fortunate. Despite their status and wealth, both of the above are known for their philanthropic work, illustrating another feature shared by many in the transcendence movement, on which I shall focus in the next section.

### **Transcending the profit motive: inclusiveness**

There is one way, perhaps more significant than many others discussed so far, that those in the transcendence movement illustrate their commitment to a more evolved way of thinking: they tend not to be driven by the profit motive. *The Autobiography of a Yogi*

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<sup>527</sup> A contemporary pastor in the Reformed tradition.

<sup>528</sup> That “meekness is not weakness” is a well-established theological idea. See, for example, Houston, J.M. (1979) ‘The Serenity of Christ’ in Lewis, D.M. (1990) *With Heart, Mind & Strength: The Best of Crux, 1979-1989*, Vancouver: Regent College Publishing.

and other books by Yogananda are published by the *Self-Realization Fellowship*, the non-profit organisation that continues his work. The Brahma Kumaris too, as discussed in Chapter 3, funnels all its resources into ever more spiritual education for everyone. This stance is aptly explained by Theosophical Society's Eric McGough who says:

The Theosophical ethos is not about money/profits as such but rather about the spreading of the teachings ... As President of the English TS my stance is that the internet is the most exciting development in human evolution, which is bringing the human family together like nothing else ever has or could.<sup>529</sup>

The motive of those within the transcendence movement is just that: to enable the evolutionary consciousness of which I write. Fully aware of the power of the internet and of 'market forces' (for example) they will use the 'energy' of money fully and wisely, but profit for the sake of it is never allowed to dominate decision making. The events organised by the Wrekin Trust and the Alister Hardy Society (reported in Chapter 3) provide examples of this principle in action. Whilst designed to be financially viable, these gatherings were specifically arranged and costed in order to be accessible to low-waged individuals whom they would encourage to participate in such events. This is in stark contrast to many (though not all) conventional academic gatherings which are held in such prestigious venues that their exorbitant costs prohibit many (students for example) who would otherwise benefit.

Inclusiveness requires the transcendence of profit-motive, and of other human weaknesses, such as perceived status: within the transcendence movement each individual recognises that they always have something to learn and, conversely, that they may have something to offer others on their spiritual journey. Whilst emphasising uniqueness there is a focus on sharing as equals. This is aptly illustrated by the terminology typically used to describe events. The Wrekin Trust, for example, holds an annual 'Round Table' which one participant likened to King Arthur's round table of Camelot. Not only is the conference given this title and the running of the events emphasising total inclusion and the equal status of participants, but this is also demonstrated at the physical level: wherever and whenever it is practically feasible, all participants would sit in a circle. At the 2010 event, extra chairs would be added to the ever expanding circle to make space for new attendees.<sup>530</sup> Another important feature is

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<sup>529</sup> E-mail from Eric McGough sent: 3.8.10.

<sup>530</sup> A report on this event is given in Appendix 4.

that the gathering allows each participant the opportunity to introduce themselves and share their reasons for being present. At the start of each session, as new participants joined the conference, these too were invited to introduce themselves. This is in contrast to most conventional conferences where there is normally a definite ranking system: keynote speakers; organisers and speakers and ‘just attending’. Nobody at a ‘round table’ is anonymous (unless they wish to remain so) and everybody is welcomed as equal contributors.<sup>531</sup>

Inclusiveness here does not just imply that everybody, irrespective of race, belief or culture, is treated equally and is worthy of the same level of benefits of, say, education, but that everybody has something to offer the group or the process. The event is enhanced precisely because of the diversity of their backgrounds. A multicultural mix of attendees, in any situation, provides an ideal opportunity for recognition of a common humanity as well as a rainbow spectrum of traits and experiences. An example of this came for me, not at a ‘spiritual’ event, but at a residential training for postgraduate researchers.<sup>532</sup> Of the 13 participants only two were British, the remainder originating from countries as far removed as Jordan to China. Despite the huge cultural spread, or maybe because of it, the sense of community built up over the three days of training was strong, positive and memorable. The very fact that overseas students make up an increasing proportion of the population of many universities brings with it opportunities for transcendence; for experiencing a shared humanity.<sup>533</sup> Any event where inclusiveness is practised with awareness and compassion, I would argue, provides opportunities for personal growth through transcendence.

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<sup>531</sup> Such examples are by no means uncommon in the transcendence movement. The day after the above gathering I received my latest e-magazine from Spiritual Directors International. It began:

*Connections* offers a round-table where members of Spiritual Directors International from more than fifty countries tell stories about experiences as spiritual directors and seekers.

See: [www.sdiworld.org/connections2/connections.html](http://www.sdiworld.org/connections2/connections.html), accessed 1.11.10

<sup>532</sup> Bangor University ‘Grad School’, Trigonos, 25.10.10.

<sup>533</sup> In this case our shared challenge of doctorate research and common intent of sharing openly and supportively enabled an environment in which we were each respected as being different and are encouraged to develop this unique personality, for the benefit of ourselves and of the wider community.

Conversely, attitudes that highlight superiority or difference often become reasons (or rather, excuses) for exclusive behaviour and are still prevalent in modern society. In the groups and organisations that form the transcendence movement however, this attitude rarely exists. As I have already described in Chapter 2, inclusiveness is key.<sup>534</sup> This is primarily about the sense of belonging and the feeling of being welcomed and is independent of the formal structure adopted by the organisation concerned. Most groups have some formal membership scheme and most organisations a structure, but these are for functional (financial) and legal purposes. Flexible rules of belonging can still (in less welcoming groups) be applied rigidly; apparently strict rules can be applied liberally. It is the attitudes of the collective that determine how welcomed new members will be. An open attitude is undoubtedly representative of transcendent groups and enabling of transcendence for the groups' members.<sup>535</sup>

Formal organisational structure can however, in some cases, reflect an underlying inclusiveness. A good example of this is the long established and much respected Co-operative movement, with its shared ownership is very much an example of inclusiveness in practice. Ethical concerns are also paramount. Pressure from consumers and campaigning groups have however, in recent decades, brought ethical practices into most major grocery retail outlets.<sup>536</sup> In retail parks as in academic conferences (as for example the one on Climate Change described in Chapter 3) there is a general

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<sup>534</sup> Examples from my own involvement with community singing groups and other networks over the years have demonstrated this to me at the practical level. Whilst some required participation that was expected to be total and exclusive, groups within the transcendence movement, by contrast, demonstrate inclusiveness. With the SMN (see Chapter 6), for example, after lapsing from membership for seven or eight years, my return was as if I had not been away at all. Even time seems to be transcended.

<sup>535</sup> C8's example is not untypical. Having rejected Scottish Presbyterian he:

Undertook an exploration of the Christian experience in a variety of Churches. The only one I felt 'at home' in was The Quaker meeting. (Q5.5)

<sup>536</sup> In 1995 I was one of over two thousand individuals who bought shares in *The Creative Consumer Co-operative Ltd.* which established a small chain of shops which, through total commitment to fair-trade and organic principles, directly challenged mainstream consumerism.

In the long-term, *Out of the World* (the shops trading name) did not succeed. But the reason for its failure is in fact an example of rapid progress of many of the features that it put into practice and which parallel the rise of the transcendence. Mainstream supermarkets started to adopt their policies and fair-trade items are now common on the shelves of Tesco and Asda stores (for example) and these chains all have their own extensive organic range. In under twenty years, much has changed.

broadening of awareness of, and respect for, factors beyond individual self or profit motive.

Subjects as seemingly diverse as climate change and a weekly grocery shop all show, if examined in the right way, underlying shifts in the prevalent attitudes of society. It could be counter-argued that this merely reflects my own personal change in preference and that I have simply chosen those organisations that best resonate with me. This may indeed be true, but this, in fact, serves to illustrate my point: many such groups exist precisely because their members, other individuals like myself, have chosen to come together with ‘like-minds’ and ‘kindred-spirits’ rather than to feel they do not belong in ‘modern’ exclusive groups. As I identified in Chapter 3 a significant proportion of the organisations representing the transcendence movement have all been formed within the last thirty years.<sup>537</sup>

If inclusiveness and concerns for others are key features of transcendent thinking, so too is a sense of wonder. In the next section I demonstrate how members of the transcendence movement retain and embrace a childlike quality to their engagement with the world.

### **Childlike**

Geseke Clarke, writing about Sir George Trevelyan (founder of the Wrekin Trust) and an incident involving Christmas pudding and some visiting Germans, says “He was fun ... he brought light always” (Farrer 2002, p153). Likewise Hardy was once acknowledged as “maintaining a childlike curiosity about the world”.<sup>538</sup> Time and again in those I meet who are committed to the transcendence process I find this ‘wonder’ of life, this childlike nature and sense of fun; it is their essence lived out in their life. It is both joyous and engaging.

This total engagement in life was so much more evident at my choice of conferences reported in this thesis (Chapter 3) than in the more typical academic gatherings I have

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<sup>537</sup> As summarised in Appendix 5.

<sup>538</sup> These words (said of Sir Alister by Desmond Morris) was quoted by his niece Jane Winship in *De Numine* No 49, pp14-18.

attended over the years. Our Saturday afternoon at Llantarnam, for example, was devoted to the construction of a Group Mandala.<sup>539, 540</sup>

Not surprisingly, song and dance also featured in the gatherings I attended, from wide-ranging self-entertainment at Llantarnam to more structured activities elsewhere. At the CEP conference in Oxford, most participants allowed themselves to join in with Richard Golsworthy's *Biocentric Movement: The Sensing Body in Relationship*<sup>541</sup>. Such first-hand experiences, as recent teaching and learning theory emphasises, is essential in acquiring new skills and awareness. We cannot 'Be' in theory, only in practice.

A natural, childlike, joy of life is seen as both an enabler of mystical experiences and a way of thinking that helps us to accept them more easily. With a belief in magic or an openness to wonderful possibilities, as young children often are, then when unusual things occur, it seems to be far easier to assimilate them into one's world view. This contention was supported by a number of contributors. Rose, for example, in her interview which discussed her particularly powerful transcendent experience, says:

Now I know that some people go crazy if they have an experience like that, but I can see now that I was probably okay because of ('safe', if you like) because I was quite childlike, you know, when that happened. And you don't have a lot of rubbish in your head; you've not been conditioned.

If the ability to be childlike is a key ingredient, so too is the willingness to try new things and to express all emotions. The ability to cry is essential, even if it is unclear what one is crying about: the feeling associated with crying is often a mixture of gladness, of relief for example, and pain (of grief perhaps). A client of Eaton's for example writes of reading his book: "Only a few pages in I started to cry. I was reading about myself, I finished it, made my first appointment" (Eaton 2006, p121). The tears

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<sup>539</sup> Using a 6ft diameter base and process devised by Roger Coward, chairman of the All Wales Group, we each contributed our offering of a 'our place in the world', 'our higher self' and 'Oneness', being the outer and inner rings and centre of the mandala respectively. We were amazed and appreciative of the huge range of ways in which these ideas were presented, using soil and discarded spider skin to an origami crane and tea cup, for example. By opening to such a breadth of meanings, so we felt an ever deeper connection to each other and to the all prevailing Oneness of life.

<sup>540</sup> Besides their widespread use in religious practices, Mandalas were also used extensively by Jung. See, for example, Jung, C.G. (2009) *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, London: W. W. Norton & Co, 2009.

<sup>541</sup> At Hawkwood too, James d'Angelo led around fifty Wrekin Associates and friends in Buddhist, Chippewa (Native American) and Hindu chants: a tremendously effective way of uniting the group, on the first night, at a level above and beyond the rational.

were of relief that they were not alone, of a resonance; as many in the transcendence movement report. One contributor (C14, F40), for example, describes the fruits of her experience thus: “The universe is endless. We are not alone.” (C14, Q3.10). To feel this sense of belonging, even if physically on one’s own, is important. Eaton thus emphasises the need to do the things we enjoy doing, so that Bodymind feels rewarded and pleased, and the Emotional Brain can release old, painful, patterns: “Increasing the amount of time spent on rewarding pursuits is important in forming new cellular memories.” (Eaton 2006, p113)

Far from an indulgence, this approach is considered part of being fully present in the world, and recognises that happiness comes from an active participation in life. Leach equates this mode to mindfulness which he says:

Is a way of looking at life as if everything is novel. Each experience can be treated as something special. Mindfulness means having full awareness of everything around you and accepting nature in all its guises in a non-judgemental, patient, trusting, open, generous and, most importantly, grateful manner. (Leach 2010, p60)

Above all, transcendence requires a willingness to feel deeply, whether it be pleasure or pain. Steiner, for example, describes the traits of a ‘pupil’ on ‘the ascent to a supersensible state of consciousness’ (Steiner 1963, p228):

He must not be slow to enter with fullness of feeling into pleasure and pain, but must be able to do so without losing self-control and giving involuntary expression to it. What he has to suppress is not the pain – that is justified – but the involuntary weeping; not the horror at a base action, but the outburst of blind fury; not the caution in face of danger, but the giving way to panic – which does no good whatever. (Steiner 1963, p248)

Steiner is describing detachment in the Buddhist sense of the word: not as an avoidance of strong emotions, but the ability to feel both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ ends of the spectrum of feelings.<sup>542</sup> He explains that living at either extreme of emotional expression is unhealthy:

A man who cannot laugh has just as little control over his life as a man who without self-control is perpetually giving way to laughter. (Steiner 1963, p249)

In describing this Steiner also neatly provides an example of how transcendence involves the personal training to be above labels of emotionally ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ and thus beyond any such dualistic identity. To be aware of where we stand on such a spectrum

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<sup>542</sup> Detachment is a key tenant in most, if not all, forms of Buddhism. See, for example, Gyatso, G.K. (2005) *Mahamudra Tantra*, Ulverstone: Tharpa Publications, 2005, pp169-173.

requires an ability to step back from personal dramas and to ‘see ourselves as others see us’, i.e. to be self-aware. This is the topic of my next section.

## **Self-awareness**

A noticeable feature of individuals within the transcendence movement is their ability to see and, to some extent at least, accept their own faults. Indeed, a major part of commitment to the transcendence process is a willingness to work on one’s weaknesses.<sup>543</sup> Certainly there will be little blaming of others. Hand-in-hand with this comes making time for reflection. A good example of this came with a recent Reiki student. Faced with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, she began extensive and wide ranging reading and analysis of her condition, in particular the relationship between her physical symptoms and what was happening in her life at the time. The Reiki enabled her interest in and commitment to increased self-awareness which is, I would suggest, another key factor in, if not another description of the transcendence process.

This reflective practice is also increasingly called for within Education, as for example by Peter Reason: “The process of reflection draws attention to practice, which again informs reflection building a consciousness in the midst of action”. (Reason 1994, p54)

To link action, reflection and consciousness is to engage in mental transcendence, emphasising how the development of one’s mental model of the world requires both engagement with it and contemplative reflection in an iterative process.<sup>544</sup> Such reflection is also recommended within the SDI (see Chapter 3) in the context of stillness.<sup>545</sup> Contemplation is also a key ingredient in many religious practices. Well known within Buddhism, there is also a strong Christian tradition of contemplation. This is particularly well described in Martin Laird’s inspiring book *Into Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation* (Laird 2006), in which he describes the dangers and process of contemplation:

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<sup>543</sup> The same is true at an institutional level. Self-assessment is as powerful a technique within business management as it is in personal self-development. See: Beasley, K. (1994) *Self Assessment: a tool for Integrated Management*, Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes.

<sup>544</sup> That is, a combination of whole-body / non-local and mental transcendence, as described in Chapter 7.

<sup>545</sup> The very same issue of this resource also provides another key ingredient: the willingness to ‘Cultivate Compassion’ (Bernecker 2011, p1). Compassion as a factor in transcendence is discussed in Chapter 11,



If we think we are our thoughts and feelings, we go through life simply reacting to what is going on around us, with little awareness that we are even doing this or that life could be otherwise. When we try to pray, distractions will strike us as being especially ensnaring, even overwhelming. (Laird 2006, p77)

But with a commitment to personal growth and awareness such programmed thoughts and feeling can be transcended and minds ‘freed-up’.

Contemplation and reflection require an ability to work alone, to face one’s own issues. Sir George Trevelyan, in supporting the formation of groups around the country, recognised that: “Much of the work of the new awakening had to be done individually and constantly” (Farrer 2002, p152).

That said, Trevelyan was much respected for the opportunities he provided for bringing together those ‘on a path’. Time spent sharing and supporting kindred spirits is another important factor in being able to maintain momentum in one’s transcendence process. It is not a matter of solo work or group work being the most important, rather a post-dualistic ability to be conformable with both, able to learn from either and being sufficient in the presence to switch from one to the other as required.

But if ‘solo’ and ‘group’ activities can be equally enabling of the transcendence process, are there any particular activities or events that would assist in triggering transcendent experiences?

## **Practices and rites**

The focus within this chapter has been, intentionally, on factors concerned with the individual; their background, their ‘phase in life’ and, perhaps most critically, their attitude and intent. Each of these factors, I have demonstrated, are clearly linked to the likelihood or otherwise of transcendent experience. The question must however be asked: to what extent does the activity being undertaken affect the chances of an experience being transcendent?

It has long been thought that it is through regular practice of particular techniques or through the undertaking of precise rituals that religious experience is enabled. If only by (my) definition, this is indeed the case: by engaging in a specifically religious practice we cannot help but to have a religious experience. But how often are such religious experiences transcendent in the terms of this thesis? And are they a necessary requirement to reach a transcendent state? Given the numerous examples in this

research, as elsewhere, in which transcendent states have been obtained without engaging in specific religious or spiritual activity, they are clearly not the only route.

Whilst this might be a controversial statement in some quarters, it is wholly accepted within the transcendence movement and totally consistent with the underlying transcendent paradigm: transcendent states are inherently possible for anybody and at any time. They relate to the ability to open oneself to integrated mental thought and to whole-body / non-local consciousness. As I have already outlined in this chapter, such an ability appears to be primarily down to one's willingness and to one's state of mind.

Having said that, many of the accounts described by my contributors and discussed in Chapter 6 could be described as 'religious experiences' and a proportion of contributors do regularly engage in some religious or spiritual practice.<sup>546</sup> From this it can be concluded that such activities can be helpful. It is reasonable to conclude that, based on the depth and breadth of experience behind most, if not all spiritual practices and liturgies, they must contain an element that can assist the 'opening up' process that is part of transcendence.

The important word here is 'can'. Often they do not. Few, if any, religious ritual or spiritual practice work for everyone and even for those who value such practices, there will be times when they are ineffective at enabling a feeling of sacred presence. Whilst some commentators might argue that some practices and rites provide an inherently effective means of 'connecting' (i.e. of enabling a transcendent experience), the evidence suggests that this is not the case. The retort to this might typically be 'because you are not doing it 'right''. Proponents of each technique insist on very precise details to 'get it right'. But how can there be just one 'right' way when each expert insists on slightly different details? Interestingly Yogananda, in *The Autobiography of a Yogi*, says very little about the specifics of his chosen practice, Kriya Yoga. Instead he emphasises the limitless possibilities that can come in life, when one is open to them.

The clear message from my analysis is that it (enabling transcendence) is about finding the right approach and method for each person at the time. One contributor (C7, M48) says, for example: "There have been many techniques and activities that have assisted

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<sup>546</sup> 6 out of the 20 respondents to Questions 5.3 & 5.4 reported engaging in a specifically religious activity regularly (3 Christian, 1 Shamanic, 1 Pagan and 1 Buddhist, the range and ratio reflecting the background of the contributors). By contrast, 10 out of the 20 stated 'meditation' as an important spiritual activity and 6/20 listed walking in or being close to nature.

me to where I am today.” (C7, Q5.3). We are all different and our needs change continually. Why should one method apply to all?<sup>547</sup>

This research has been conducted in the context of a continual decline in attendance at conventional Christian services in the UK. The style of worship that had been effective for centuries seems no longer to resonate with the needs of many living in Britain today. This, itself, could be considered an indicator of the emerging new *Zeitgeist*: not in the sense of an increasingly secular mind-set, but of the growing need for a different form of liturgy: a more inclusive and experiential one perhaps. One might point to the increasing popularity of Pentecostalism as evidence of such a trend, but a detailed analysis of this point is beyond the scope of this study.

In observing rituals and practices over many years, I have concluded that they may be ineffective because much of the ritual and practices has become superficial.<sup>548</sup> Many in the congregation are merely ‘going through the motions’ having lost touch with the original meaning and significance of the actions we perform. Such a view confirms my earlier conclusions from this chapter: that it is one’s mental state, one’s attitude towards a practice that determines whether or not an effective transcendence is triggered.

Key to this is how one views the beliefs and concepts surrounding our practice. I have shown that my two facets of transcendence mutually support and enable each other. Theory and practice are found to support each other: clinging rigidly to one belief or to one taught method of practice, prevents mental transcendence. Conversely and more productively, a willingness to challenge beliefs and broaden understanding of a particular practice (and relate it to other experiences), aids mental transcendence. In transcending mentally so experience of whole-body / non-local consciousness is enabled which, in turn, helps minds to open to even more profound possibilities and new ways of thinking and living. This is very much in keeping with the ‘real-world’ approach to

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<sup>547</sup> That would be like saying ‘one size fits all’ when clearly a T-shirt that would fit an extra-large person would dwarf a petite person. Just as some people enjoy and are moved by Beethoven, others get a deep satisfaction from Meatloaf. Occasionally a Christian liturgy will move me, whilst doing Reiki often provides a beneficial improvement to my own state of mind.

<sup>548</sup> I use the following terminology here: by ‘ritual’ I embrace any religious/spiritual event which follows a predefined pattern or liturgy. Whilst a ‘ritual’ will involve many individuals, by ‘practice’ I mean regular following of a personal technique, embracing meditation, prayer, Yoga and such practices.

teaching and learning within practical and vocational education (PVE). That is, there is no substitute for full mind & body engagement.<sup>549</sup>

Any discussion on the value and benefit of any given ritual or technique needs, I would argue, to be seen in the above light. Furthermore, to be of value, any such discussion needs to relate to one individual and to their personal beliefs and attitudes. It does not help to generalise a situation which is ultimately a personal one. Skills teaching (be it technical or life skills) requires knowledge not only of related abstract concepts but also the ability to apply them 'here and now'. As Claxton says: "Displays of knowledge do not guarantee that concomitant expertise has been developed". (Claxton et al 2010, p16). In the case of Ram Dass for example (see Chapter 5), his understanding of his spiritual practices were radically changed after his stroke. Given a new and more challenging situation, he had to develop and deepen his understanding. This begs the question: does mental understanding of a given rite or practice help or hinder one's immersion into it? Transcendence requires that one allows subsequent numinous experience to update one's beliefs, both generally and in relation to our practices. Equally, transcendent experiences often provide reassurance that the right path is being followed. C1 (F26) provides a striking example of how the transcendence process can work: "It made me feel more sure that I had made the correct choice, and validated my feeling that we would get married." (C1, Q3.10)

Clearly my contributors gain much benefit from their respective practices through engaging with them fully. My observation of many rites and practices generally however is that they are just 'going through the motions', not only for the participants but, perhaps even more so, for the leaders of the rites and for the teachers of the techniques. If the leader is merely performing actions 'by rote', it is most unlikely he or she will be truly present. As I have shown, an important factor in led activities is the extent to which those leading the activity or event are truly present and/or have presence. Analysis of the 'ratings' that contributors gave to the leaders of group events that they referred to, clearly shows that these successful leaders were considered charismatic and serene or peaceful, that they inspired trust and were felt to be compassionate and sensitive.<sup>550</sup> All of these reported characteristics suggest that my contributors resonated with the leaders,

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<sup>549</sup> See, for example Claxton, G. et al (2010) *Bodies of knowledge*, London: Edge Foundation, 2010.

<sup>550</sup> Details of this analysis is included in Chapter 6 and summarised in Appendix 9e.

that they felt comfortable with them; both indicative of leaders who were ‘present’ in their activity and with their group.

Conversely there is undoubtedly a risk that ‘familiarity breeds contempt’ and that group leaders who are not with their practice or audience provide no ‘enabling presence’. This is, I would suggest, a good reason for having a range of techniques from which we can choose (so that one’s practise can be varied) and for an on-going awareness as to our openness to an ‘of the moment’ experience.

Much of this discussion presupposes that one need to understand how the transcendence process works in order to benefit from it. After all, how many of the growing technological age understand the details of the software or electronic circuitry that drives all the equipment most of us now rely upon? We learn just what we need to know to allow the equipment to do what we want it to do. Why should understanding the inner workings of a spiritual practice be any different? As I emphasised at the beginning of this thesis, I am not concerned with the mechanism (the inner workings of the mind) because to get too caught up in such details can hinder rather than help the transcendence process. This then is key factor: as I have already concluded in Chapters 9 and 10, transcendence requires a willingness to surrender into the experience as a mystic, to be comfortable in the nothingness. That is, to have, and feel the benefit of, an empty mind. This is not possible if one becomes attached to the ‘meaning’ surrounding a practice. Awareness of the possible significance of an action within a ritual or practice is not the same as believing that such features actually create a transcendent effect.<sup>551</sup>

As an example of the above, I refer now to my own teaching of ‘Second Degree Reiki’. Key to this subject is the passing on to students of the ‘Reiki Symbols’: tools used to assist in distance and emotional healing. The mental (or physical) drawing of specific symbols is said to enable a (transcendent) connection. In a similar way, symbols or chants in other traditions are used to help focus the mind to assist prayer or healing. In teaching Reiki students to use these symbols I liken them to a key: they are used to unlock the door to higher consciousness. Once the door is open, one can let go of the key. Once a transcendent channel is open, one can stop using the symbol or chant: it has

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<sup>551</sup> Similar arguments can be applied to conventional approaches to health. David Aldridge, for example, recommends awareness of both medical and transcendent factors, in a pluralistic approach to wellbeing. See: Aldridge, D. (2000) *Spirituality, Healing and Medicine: return to the Silence*, London: Jessica-Kingsley.

served its function. It can, I have found, if used after this point, actually detract from the transcendent experience and process by keeping the mind in its controlling, non-transcendent mode.<sup>552</sup>

The above discussions have referred primarily to techniques and activities that may be considered ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’. There are two other, equally importantly, groups of practices that are often mentioned as enabling of transcendence, which I shall now consider.

### **Nature and the Arts as enablers of transcendence**

A particularly striking example of these practices is the activity of walking, which is often mentioned by my contributors as a pastime that enables Being, particularly walks in nature.<sup>553</sup> Heidegger found the same. In *Why do I stay in the Provinces?* (1934) and *The Pathway* (1948) he shares his experiences of connecting into authentic Being through walking or just being (Being) in the mountains: “Always and everywhere the call [*Zuspruch*] of the pathway is the same” (Heidegger 1948, p70). Sheehan adds the footnote that:

The German *Zuspruch* can mean address, appeal, etc. The choice of “call” is as much an interpretation as a translation. The message, appeal, or address which the pathway (Greek, *he hodos*) sends to man is a summons, hence a call, into his essential self-absence. (Sheehan 1981, p72)

The ‘call of the hills’ is an idea found in many art forms, perhaps brought to public prominence by the character Maria:

*I go to the hills  
When my heart is lonely  
I know I will hear  
What I've heard before  
My heart will be blessed,  
With the sound of music  
And I'll sing once more.*  
Rodgers and Hammerstein, *The Sound of Music*

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<sup>552</sup> Further discussion on the Reiki Symbols can be found in Beasley 2007 pp110-114.

<sup>553</sup> Whilst many benefit from walking in nature, others find that photography enables a strong connection to the transcendent realm. See, for example: Scott, K. (2004) *Photographing Changing Light: A Guide for Landscape Photographers*, Lewes: Photographers’ Institute Press, 2004.

Art, generally, is often used to assist the personal self-development process. Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way: A Course in Discovering and Recovering your Creative Self*, is much respected in this role, see: Cameron, J. (1994), London: Pan Books.

Maria, like Heidegger, is energised by mountains. Whether their presence inspires us to sing, write philosophical masterpieces or to put worries into perspective, few would argue that walking, or being on the mountains, or in nature are invaluable aids to Being.

The real story of Maria von Trapp, that itself inspired the musical, also highlights another often quoted activity for greater Beingness: singing, or music generally. Few would doubt the power of music to move us. If I were to suggest a piece of music that summed up the gist of this thesis it would be Brahms' Piano Quintet in F minor, Op 34. Critic Stephen Pritchard, in reviewing a recording of it, writes:

Bringing a refined delicacy to these elegiac pieces that Brahms described as "lullabies of my sorrow".<sup>554</sup>

At the start of my third year of these studies I was present at a particularly moving performance of this work.<sup>555</sup> I found that engaging with this performance emotionally, mentally and energetically, enabled me to feel and accept a little bit more of the depth and reality of 'the agony and ecstasy' of being human. I left the concert a little bit lighter and brighter, having connected with the performers, the composer and, in so doing, a shared sense of humanity.<sup>556</sup> Such art and our engagement with it must surely rate as excellent examples of transcendent experiences.

In this thesis I have frequently illustrated my hypotheses with references from musicals or popular songs, specifically to stress the correlation between transcendence and music.

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<sup>554</sup> Schubert Ensemble, William Howard (piano), Champs Hill Records, reviewed in *The Observer*, 19 September 2010. See [www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/sep/19/brahms-schubert-ensemble-review](http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/sep/19/brahms-schubert-ensemble-review), accessed 8.11.10.

<sup>555</sup> 7.11.10 at the Ucheldre Centre, Holyhead. The work was performed by a quintet who had performed together over many decades and who knew each other very well. Their performance reflected both a deep understanding of Brahms' music, of each other and of the 'agony and ecstasy' of life. Having never heard this piece before I was moved to tears on a number of times during the performance, amazed at how well it captured the essence of the 'transcendent experience and suffering' of my study. At the start of the third movement, the Scherzo, for example, I could imagine Brahms (or myself) starting a new day, confidently striding forward. But within a minute doubts have arisen and the piece suggest a heaviness of spirit. And yet a beauty and a natural flow remain, briefly, until a frenetic questioning disturbs the peace. Throughout this amazing quintet one can hear the paradox of despair amongst joy; of melodic and chaotic intermingling.

<sup>556</sup> The following day, after reflecting on the experience over-night, I was feeling angry: that I had not been brought up to appreciate the 'agony and ecstasy' of being human; that I had been protected from the reality of suffering. This is typical of the highs and lows of transcendent experiences as discussed in my model in Chapter 7.

This is a conscious decision to emphasise that the insights identified as key to the transcendence movement are already present in popular culture; lending further evidence to my contention that the shift is across humanity. Since William James there has been a recognition that music is often an enabler of religious or transcendent experience. These surely equate to Heidegger's immersion in feelings that constitute Being (as discussed in Chapter 8).<sup>557</sup>

The key to obtaining such a depth of experience seems to be one's willingness to fully enter into the same 'space' as the music. Or, to enable transcendent experiences, *T'Aint What You Do It's the Way You Do It*.<sup>558</sup> On analysis of all the 'factors' discussed in this chapter, such an attitude would seem to apply generally. Thus, if there is one common feature in the likelihood of obtaining transcendence it is, as I shall conclude this chapter by discussing, one's intent.

## **Intention**

It is concluded from this analysis and reflection that reaching transcendent states is not so much a matter of engaging in certain practices nor of going to particular places, it is far more about one's intent and willingness to surrender into something beyond oneself. The transcendence movement could thus, perhaps more realistically, be considered an undercurrent within all walks of life. This is the conclusion of Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson whose work reflects many of the themes of this thesis, not least in the cross-disciplinary nature of their collaboration:

Paul's background as a macrosociologist concerned with the evolution of culture was not an obvious fit with Sherry's perspective as a psychologist focusing on the qualities of inner experience. (Ray & Anderson 2000, preface pxiv)

In describing "the convergence of social movements and consciousness" (ibid) the combining of two very different perspectives is essential and a clear example of mental transcendence demonstrated within academic research. In *The Cultural Creatives: How*

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<sup>557</sup> Long before formally researching the topic of transcendence, I would, whenever feeling 'disconnected' choose to listen to certain pieces of music that inspire and enable me to 'rise above' negative thoughts. Such pieces of music are reflected in my choice of quotes. How music so inspires is beyond the scope of this thesis. Since different pieces of music affect different people differently, any intrinsic effect seems questionable, but the 'right' piece of music at the 'right' time unquestionably has the potential to bring about transcendence.

<sup>558</sup> As sung, amongst others by Ella Fitzgerald, written by Young & Oliver, first recorded in 1939.



*50 Million People Are Changing the World* (Ray & Anderson 2000) they describe the current state of human chaos and how some, the ‘Cultural Creatives’, are choosing a more positive, and above all creative, alternative:

There is nothing inevitable about the kind of life we have now in Modern society, and nothing inevitable about the kind of future that lies before us. Cultural Creatives are quite clear that they do not want to live in an alienated, disconnected world. Their guiding images refer again and again to a sense of wholeness. (Ray & Anderson 2000, p341)

In reviewing the progress of this alternative vision and the fulfilled lives and successful businesses of ‘Cultural Creatives’ they describe a wonderfully broad range of people, activities and personal philosophies, concluding that:

The appearance of the Cultural Creatives, we suggest, represents a promise that a creative vision of the future is growing. It is a resurgence of hope, of imagination, of willingness to act for the sake of a better civilization. The work toward a reintegration of, and design for, a new culture can have great power in our collective imagination. What we want and what we choose can shape our future. (Ray & Anderson 2000, p341)

It is hope and a willingness to work with the “great power in our collective imagination” that is manifest in the transcendence movement. Thus, as Ray & Anderson indicate, the transcendence process underlies the evolutionary developments amongst individuals and communities everywhere. It is the being aware of it and working consciously with it, that makes for a deep and meaningful experience with it.

As I have highlighted throughout, transcendence is not about mere words or concepts. As with the uncertain situations in 2011 in the UK (as presented in Chapter 1), the general public despair of the hypocrisy they see in those who ‘should know better’: the bankers who refuse to give modest loans to small business whilst giving themselves huge bonuses, the politicians who submit fraudulent expenses and collaborate with the media whilst urging us all to act responsibly. At all levels of society the ‘modern’ emphasis on individuality and financial wealth has become untenable. New values and ways of thinking and behaving are urgently required. Transcendence, with its basis in evolutionary consciousness, offers a practical and increasingly proven approach to bringing about a more equitable and caring society that embraces the needs of both personal and the collective.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> An increasing number of commentators are endorsing such an approach, which is (as I have demonstrated) primarily about engagement with and commitment to life at both a physical and

In Part Four I have shown that the nature and dynamic of the transcendence process is wholly consistent with the emerging theories on evolutionary consciousness and is helping human-kind to embrace and benefit from access to the ‘nothingness of unlimited potential’. Furthermore, this process integrates the practices and approach to life of mystics throughout the ages into today’s daily life. An essential feature of this, is the willingness to suffer as fears are faced and conditioning relinquished. Whilst many techniques and activities can assist in this process, engaging with ‘nature’ or ‘music’ are seen to be particularly helpful. An intent to immerse oneself into the transcendence process, with courage and a sense of wonder, is found to be more important than the choice of activity.

Taken with the models presented in Part 3 and the first-hand accounts quoted in Part 2, I have demonstrated a consistent set of theories that describe the natural, emergent, quality in humans that I call transcendence. This I now summarise in my conclusions.<sup>560</sup>

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spiritual level. Such commitment is highlighted, for example by Tim Miles. See: Miles, T.R. (1972) *Religious Experience*, London: Macmillan.

<sup>560</sup> I would also argue that these hypotheses provide a suitable framework for the theory and practice of transcendence to be incorporated into aspects of Higher Education. Some features of this were the subject of my research for my PGCertHE, as previously cited.

# Chapter 14

## Conclusions

In Part One I set the scene for this research by describing my approach that sought to examine transcendence from the perspective of personal wellbeing and self-development. My methodological approach is ‘action research’ and ‘participative’, since any subject concerned with the experiential nature of transcendence must, to retain any degree of authenticity, embrace first-hand experience. In Chapter 1, in addition to these features I set out the context of my research from both an individual and collective perspective. With the many pressing global issues facing the human race (including financial uncertainty and climate-change), new perspectives are urgently required.<sup>561</sup> The very transition to new perspectives and new attitudes of thought is what I have explicated here as ‘transcendence’. And it is through making sense of its nature and dynamics that I have identified what may appear to be radical and positive solutions to many of the problems currently facing humanity. I introduced the transcendence movement as an idea that embraces those many varied individuals and groups within Western society, who share a range of traits and commitments of action associated with transcending thought. Following this I compared and contrasted such traits and characteristics to those that underpin other related and established movements (e.g. HPM and NRM), and expounded a difference in terms of the manner in which those within the transcendence movement are within it from a natural inclination to transcend; that is to say, as I have argued, transcendence is a natural, instinctive, inherent function within each human-being that some—those members of the movement—have realised and embraced.

Part One concludes with a definition of my main terms. Key to my inclusive and interdisciplinary approach is the application of common usage rather than discipline-specific terminology. This immediately positions my investigation in the day-to-day

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<sup>561</sup> Einstein is often quoted as saying “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”. See for example: [www.rarre.org/documents/einstein/Collected%20Quotes%20from%20Albert%20Einstein-2.pdf](http://www.rarre.org/documents/einstein/Collected%20Quotes%20from%20Albert%20Einstein-2.pdf), accessed 31.10.11.

lives of ordinary people. Equally important is my acknowledgement of transcendence as a spectrum of experiences and states of mind, from the modest to the profound, and my decision to detach the notion of transcendence from being specifically religious or spiritual. Following this I introduced an original and decisive feature of my thesis: the contention that transcendence can usefully be considered as comprising two distinct dimensions or facets: mental transcendence and whole-body / non-local transcendence. Whereas the former equates, for example, to the Integral theory of Wilber, the latter is consistent with the 'numinous' of Otto and of the 'mystical'. It is, I argue, the interplay between two facets of transcendence that enable a longer term shift in the way we think. Furthermore, I emphasise that rather than being unique and separate events, transcendent experiences can best be considered as part of an on-going transcendence process with both short-term effects (for example the feeling of bliss) and, as Hardy and the RERC identify, important 'fruits' to the lives of the reporting individuals.

Throughout this work I utilise the holographic principle wherein situations and development at one level of reality reflect and are reflected in others levels. Thus, the trends so far examined for individuals are also found to apply to and within groups. This is the subject of Chapter 3, where the transcendence movement is seen as demonstrating the practice of transcendence in a range of forward thinking (and 'forward acting') organisations.

Transcendence, as discussed, is thus a process in which one engages or a praxis to which one commits. In Part Two I present a wide range of examples of transcendent practices and attitudes, highlighting that the process can be seen to be present in certain organisations and in the lives of a significant number of individuals. The perspectives presented include (in Chapter 4) my own transcendent experiences which illustrate the range and breadth of situations which might enable such experiences and the manners in which they have been found to be of benefit; and (in Chapter 5) I compare my experiences with those of published, biographical, accounts. Far from being unique, my own experiences were found to be shared, to a similar, lesser and in some cases greater degree, by a range of authors, from established spiritual teachers (Yogananda, Dass) to otherwise ordinary individuals who found themselves on their journey, for example, Leach and Finn.

In Chapter 6, with the inclusions of accounts and analysis of transcendent experiences gathered specifically for this project, the scope and significance of transcendence is highlighted as belonging to a spectrum of individuals from across a variety of faiths and cultural backgrounds. The lack of a common trigger or process between these accounts is identified and seen as unproblematic and indicative of the inherent nature of transcendence: which is to say, it is something that can happen to anybody at any time.

Having provided a range of examples of the transcendence processes in the lives of many individuals and groups, in Part Three I developed a series of models (Chapter 7) which are useful in providing a theoretical framework to describe transcendence and for us to make sense of its interrelated features and parts. I related these models to established scholarly models and concepts, and in my analysis I concluded there is a strong consistency between the theory underlying the models and the personal experiences examined. In Chapter 8 the proposed models, and the gist of transcendence so far described, are compared with appropriate philosophical theories. A significant correlation between features identified and those of Heidegger's Being was concluded.

In Part Four I examined some of the most significant of the identified features of transcendence to substantiate my investigation into the nature and dynamic of the transcendence process. In Chapter 9 I described an evolutionary imperative which is seen by those within the transcendence movement as providing an inner incentive to develop one's level of consciousness. This evolutionary consciousness, at the level of the human species, is seen reflected in (and is reflected by) the self-development of numerous individuals.<sup>562</sup>

Key to both the theory and practice of transcendence is the idea of nothingness (as described in Chapter 10); not as an emptiness or lack of, but as an infinite unmanifest potential from which anything is possible. Stillness and silence in transcendence practice are seen as important facilitators in achieving an empty mind; this corresponds to the 'clear channel' (described by the channel model previously developed) required to enter the more profound levels of transcendent consciousness.

In Chapter 11 other key features of transcendence practice are discussed and found to equate to the attitudes and ways of a present-day mystic. Far from cutting themselves off

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<sup>562</sup> Again, as one would expect when applying the holographic principle.

from the world as mystics in the past have often done, the current-day mystic seeks to live in a transcendent state within normal society. Such a *Monk in the World*, as Teasdale describes it, becomes engaged neither in dualistic debate nor materialistic attachment, but instead applies the principles of love and compassion that are considered to be at the heart of all faith traditions.

If the above intent may be easy to say, it is far from easy to live in practice. I thus conclude that individuals typically have conditioned ways of thinking that often lead to some extent of selfishness. To overcome such tendencies it is necessary for faults to be admitted and for a range of alternative view-points (those that exist in the world around) to be faced. This, as I discuss in Chapter 12, is the often painful, transitional phase of acceptance; not dissimilar to the grieving process described by Kübler-Ross. Feeling pain is unavoidable as one relinquishes modern ways of thinking and opens to transcendent modes of thought.

If a recognition of an evolutionary process, of nothingness and of suffering are essential elements to transcendence, then many other factors are found to be valuable aids to it. In Chapter 13 it is concluded that whilst there are no techniques or activities that are guaranteed to invoke a transcendent experience, even for those already well along the path of transcendence, there are many factors that do seem to be of help on a regular basis to those ready to engage with the process. These include being courageous, engaging with nature or the arts and allowing plenty of quiet time for contemplation and reflection. Above all is the conscious willingness to immerse oneself into the activity of the moment; to surrender into the present.

It is thus concluded that transcendence can be seen to be concerned with transmuting an ego-centric self into a Beingness with every aspect of life on a day-to-day basis. Adopting such a way of life involves entering fully into whatever transcendent experiences comes one's way and being willing and able to relinquish limiting beliefs and habits, no matter how painful that may be. It is impossible to quantify how many individuals around the world are now practicing such transcendence, but in this thesis I have presented strong evidence that the process is real and that the shift is taking place, just as foremost thinkers of previous generations have predicted.

Given the huge scope of my topic, it is inevitable that I have had insufficient time to examine or space to write about certain features of transcendence. A number of these I

have however identified as critical issues if humanity, individually and collectively, is to make the best use of the opportunities currently presented by evolutionary consciousness. Further and urgent work is essential, I would argue, on the topic of acceptance. Most importantly, why is it so difficult? In my conversations with other seekers, time and again their experience endorses my own: the need to let go of old beliefs may be acknowledged and there may be a desire to be free of them and yet the old mental blocks still seem to remain; even if every technique known is utilised to enable the process. The old adage that ‘old habits die hard’ has much truth to it. But why? What can neuroscience tell us about the mechanisms in the mind and body that lead to the ‘hard-wiring’ of some attitudes and ways of thinking? And, more importantly, is there any alternative to the long periods of ‘feeling the pain’ and suffering that is seen, eventually, to bring freedom from such conditioning?

These questions require the close working together of those already well advanced on the transcendence process with neuroscientists and psychotherapists. Indeed, the work of Damasio and Eaton and the concept of ‘Body Mind’ provide an excellent starting point for such investigations. An important aspect of such future work would be to study the range of symptoms often accompanying transcendent experiences: feeling ‘flushed’, have very unsettled stomachs, for example. Metaphysically, these often make sense, but such physical characteristic need to inform the scientific debate as to physiological process that accompanies the metaphysical ones described in my models of Chapter 7. To my contributors, these symptoms are all too real and represent the physical pain and suffering of the acceptance and thus transcendence process. Whilst many of the factors described in Chapter 13 (meditation, walks in nature, etc.) are undoubtedly beneficial to certain people some of the time, any physical mechanism that underlies them provides only part of the story. The other dimension to the process concerns faith, trust, hope, grace and, above all love. Only by embracing these characteristics in an integrated and holistic model can science hope to fully understand the process and help those engaged with it.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> My call for further work in such areas is not meant to imply a total lack of research in such area, rather a need for it to receive more emphasis and support. The work of Alan Wallace, for example, provides an excellent model of research that transcends the conventional scientific-spiritual divide.

My research findings could have significant practical application to such societal upheavals as the current global financial uncertainty, UK riots, media scandals and global warming, to name just a few. If conventional wisdom seems impotent against such upheavals, I would argue that this is because it fails to identify a key, underlying cause: a lack of depth and inner meaning in how much of society is organised and driven. It is clear from my study of the evolutionary imperative (Chapter 9) that humanity is being driven, deep down, by something far stronger than the current global mantra of 'financial growth'. To recognise this inner drive and to work with the associated evolutionary consciousness, as discussed throughout this thesis, would be, I suggest, to provide the 'missing dimension' to the problems and thus its solution.<sup>564</sup>

Despite the extensive support for my hypotheses from across academic disciplines, developments in the direction of transcendence are as necessary in Higher Education as elsewhere. I would recommend, for example, that more be done to encourage and enable teaching and learning practices that endorse and promote transcendence in our ways of thinking. Action Research, Experiential Learning, Emotional Intelligence and Reflective Practice, which have all developed strongly in recent years, are particularly relevant and valuable, for example.<sup>565</sup> It is essential that a deep understanding as to the need for and application of these approaches and related epistemology is integrated into teaching and learning programmes for all subjects and at all levels. Far more use could also be made of the works of Heidegger and Teilhard de Chardin (for example) that I have found to underpin transcendence and its related processes.

Despite these outstanding concerns however, it is my conclusion that the evidence from current practice and the theories from across disciplines, strongly support my contentions as to the nature and the dynamics of transcendence. Regardless of criticisms and doubts from certain commentators, to those who have felt whole-body / non-local

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<sup>564</sup> Again, this is not to suggest that work with such a focus is non-existent. However, it is currently confined to private or charitably funded activities, or to a few pockets of activity within the mainstream. Whilst indicative of a 'move in the right direction', far more needs to be done. Paton, G. (2011) 'How silence in class can help results and behaviour', *Daily Telegraph*, Oct 22nd 2011, p3 represents a typical example of the encouraging projects.

<sup>565</sup> As I have demonstrated in my own teaching practice (see my PGCertHE portfolio, as previously mentioned), the transference of experiential teaching of such soft-skills is not just desirable but a reality.



transcendence, there is unquestionably a level of consciousness above and beyond the rational level to which many in the modern world have become attached.

Thus transcending thought is not about one hypothesis that can be logically deduced or experimentally proven. Rather, it is a whole emergent ontology. A transcendent way of thinking and behaving that represents an underlying shift in the way we view ourselves, each other and life in general. As such, it cannot be found by examining one narrow segment of one academic discipline. To accommodate this feature and to more accurately identify the reality of the transcendence movement it has been necessary to look more diversely and widely than is perhaps the tendency within a doctorate thesis. The emerging transcendent perspective on reality, in which an increasing number are now choosing to live, is to be found in all things. Furthermore, it is found to be available to those who allow their inner quest for truth and love to guide their lives. The holographic principle, which has been an integral part of this study from the beginning, would assert that, if one views the world with an open mind, then this transcendent quality, this inner essence is everywhere.

In this, as in any critical study, I have had to allow the evidence to present itself and to attempt to define, describe and analyse the data so gathered. In so doing, it is concluded that one can only be specific about the nature and dynamics of transcendence in each, specific situation, for each individual. As a lived praxis and on-going experience, attempts to label, categorise or describe in words alone diminish the depth, breadth, inner and outer significance of transcendence. I thus hope that my attempts to so describe transcendence do it at least some justice.

A transcendent reality has been found to shine forth from life itself, in particular to and from those who themselves experience it fully. I will conclude this thesis with one quote amongst hundreds (or perhaps thousands) with which this research has provided me. Like so many other quotes it summarises if not the many hypotheses of this thesis, then its gist. John Hick in *The New Frontier of Religion and Science* (2006) describes what happens when a transcendent state is attained:

Instead of I being here and the room around me and the garden seen through the window there, I was part of one indivisible whole; and, more importantly, that whole, not limited to what I could see, the totality of all reality, was 'good', 'friendly', 'benign', so that there could not possibly be anything to be anxious about or afraid of. (Hick 2006, p188)

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Glossary

This list provides a brief summary of the terms used. An explanation for the choice of key definitions is given in Chapter 2. Unless otherwise stated, quotes are from The Chambers English Dictionary (1990). Non-quoted definitions are my own wording.

**Acceptance:** bringing one's inner and outer perceptions of reality into alignment.

**AHS:** Alister Hardy Society

**Being** (with a capital B): Embracing the Heidegger, Buddhist and Taoist senses of the term. i.e. to be living in a transcendent state, to be 'in the flow', immersed in the world but not attached to it in any material or emotional way.

**Consciousness:** "the waking state of the mind: the knowledge which the mind has of anything: awareness: thought"; includes, but is not restricted to, rational consciousness.

**Divine:** Of God. Imbued with a depth of beauty, love and truth. Often used to distinguish something from being conventionally human.

**Dualism:** where everything has to be categorised as 'either A or B', 'one or the other' (black or white with no room for greys or other colours).

**Evolutionary Consciousness:** A transcendent and evolving consciousness consistent with the notion of an evolutionary imperative towards divine consciousness.

**Faith:** "trust or confidence" (in a general sense, not necessarily implying any particular religious belief).

**Feeling:** "resonance with being, the capacity by which we participate in and are co-present with our world" (Heron 1992, p1).

**God:** used in the broadest, rather than specifically Christian, sense of the word, and thus interchangeable with 'the Divine'.

**Holistic:** (Following from the CED definition below): Whole: embracing the physical, mental and spiritual, yet more than their sum.

**Holism:** “the theory that a complex entity, system, etc., is more than merely the sum of its parts.”

**Holographic:** ‘as above, so below’; the macrocosm reflects the microcosm in all things. Also embracing ‘body, mind and soul’ as interconnected aspects of one’s Being.

**Inner** (as opposed to ‘outer’): thoughts, feelings and mental processes that are perceived as being within the mind rather than as being external to us.

**Integrate:** (and thus ‘integral’ and ‘integrated’): “to make up as a whole: to make entire: to combine, amalgamate.”

**Interfaith:** the working together of different faith groups for a common purpose.

**Interspiritual** (or ‘global spirituality’): “a consensus on the practical values, practices, and insights found in all traditions of spirituality” (Teasdale 1999, p74).

**Mental transcendence:** integrated rational thought.

**Modern Age:** that period of human history between the Enlightenment of the 18th century and the present day.

**Modernism:** characteristics associated with the Modern Age, particularly rationalism and dualism.

**Mystic:** “one who seeks or attains direct intercourse with God”.

**Mystical:** that which is mysterious, “sacredly obscure”, magical. Not necessarily inconsistent with being ‘ordinary’ or ‘normal’.

**Normal:** “ordinary”, the spectrum of things generally accepted across human societies (as opposed to the “most frequent value”).

**Non-local (and whole-body) transcendence:** a mode or level of consciousness, different to the normal, which transcends the separation between ‘self’ and ‘other’.

**Oneness:** the totality of all that is.

**Ordinary:** that which, in at least some human societies, happens on a day-to-day basis.

**Outer** (as opposed to ‘inner’): things perceived with the bodily senses; things outside of ourselves which are sensed as being external to us.

**Post-dualism:** where contradictions, paradoxes and both/neither states are accepted as equally valid to either/or possibilities.

**Post-rationalism:** an acceptance that rational consciousness is but one facet of human consciousness.

**Rationalism:** the pre-eminence of logical, rational, thought (i.e. rational consciousness) with an associated denial of any other forms of consciousness.

**Religious Experience:** An experience within a religious context, e.g. in a formal place of worship. May not be 'transcendent' in the terms of this thesis.

**SDI:** Spiritual Directors International

**SMN:** Scientific and Medical Network

**Soul:** One's higher self; divine spark; the divine aspect of a human; the element of humans that lives on after death (in whatever form); one's true, inner, non-local, self which is also an integral part of the Oneness of life.

**Spirit:** An energetic as opposed to a material presence, which could be one of many forms. Spirits may be: divine or not; related to a human who has died, or not; malevolent or benign. i.e. a much broader term than 'soul'.

**Spiritual:** Having soul. Equivalent to 'divine'. Not necessarily religious.

**Spiritual Experience:** An experience within a spiritual context, e.g. whilst undertaking a spiritual activity such as meditation. May not be 'transcendent' in the terms of this thesis.

**Suffer:** "v.t. to undergo: to endure: to be affected by. v.i. to feel pain or punishment: to sustain loss: to be injured: to die: to be executed or martyred: to be the object of an action."

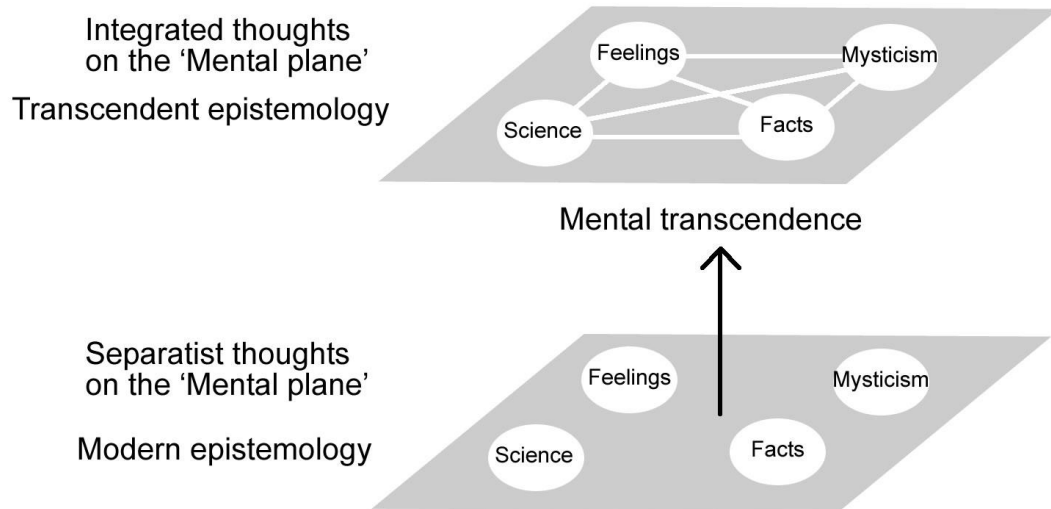
**Transcendent:** surpassing usual limits; and more specifically, 'transcendent states of consciousness' which means 'beyond the range of normal perception'.

**Transcendence movement:** those individuals and groups actively seeking the transcendent or mystical in their lives and activities.

**Whole-body (and non-local) transcendence:** a mode or level of consciousness, different to the normal, which is felt rather than thought.

## Appendix 2

### Mental Transcendence



Metaphysical model of  
transcendence on the 'Mental plane'

## Appendix 3

### Summary of, language & modes of thought

#### a) Shifts in epistemology

MODERN	TRANSITIONAL	TRANSCENDENT
rationalistic	deconstructionistic	transcending the rational and intuitive
materialistic	individualistic	integrated
dualistic	chaotic	post-dualistic; holistic

#### b) Levels of consciousness and their descriptive language

RATIONAL	MENTAL TRANSCENDENCE	WHOLE-BODY / NON-LOCAL TRANSCENDENCE <sup>566</sup>
is	might be	could be considered as
all	most	typically
must	may	may be conceived as
the fact	one factor	a possible explanation

#### c) Features of different modes of thoughts

RATIONAL	TRANSCENDENCE
Take everything seen and heard literally	Tune into the 'gist' of each moment.  Focus on 'here and now' reality.
Decisions made on analysis of 'hard evidence'	Reflect on evidence and gist, then allow a decision to come

<sup>566</sup> Assuming one wants to describe things at all. In an whole-body / non-local transcendent state, it is more usual to just feel the sense of connection with all things rather than to engage in semantics. The point of this tables is to illustrate the 'blurring' of definition and detachment from the need for precision in general descriptions. To some extent these traits might be considered as 'hedging', a key feature of critical thinking.

## Appendix 4

### Conferences within the transcendence movement

*'Round Tables': A report on conferences attended 2010-11*

Founded in 1971 by Sir George Lowthian Trevelyan Bt. (1906-1996), The Wrekin Trust, according to its publicity leaflet, is:

An educational charity concerned with the spiritual nature of humanity and the universe, and part of a world-wide movement towards personal and planetary transformation.<sup>567</sup>

Its 2010 'Round Table', which I attended along with around fifty other associates, had as its title *Evolutionary Consciousness*. Since the Wrekin Trust is an educational charity, it was perhaps not surprising that many attendees are either currently or were previously involved in some way in education. These factors, together with the depth and rigour to the discussions clearly placed the event as an academic conference. At the same time, with each day beginning with a meditation and most sessions including a significant experiential content with the intent of enabling a deeper (spiritual) connection, this was an inspirational gathering. Whilst these two contrasting features might appear to be contradictory (one having a left-brain, rational, focus and the other a right-brain intuitive one), in practice there was no conflict, at least not in the programme structure nor overall success of the event. Initially I found some challenge in being able to both listen and take-in ideas as an objective researcher and to engage at the deeper levels of communion that the meeting made possible. To some extent this was decided by the specific activity: listening to the factual elements of the weekend or engaging, without conscious focus, at other times.

More importantly and interestingly, the event provided an excellent opportunity to practice doing both: i.e. to fully engage in the present, without having to make a choice of which mode of thinking to apply. This is precisely a transcendent state of mind, beyond distinctions such as 'rational, observer' or 'fully engaged'. It is possible, this event helped me to appreciate, to do and be both.

A contrast has to be made between this event and conventional academic conferences, where there is rarely any activity that requires anything other than concentrated rational

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<sup>567</sup> It also operates as 'The Wrekin Forum' of 'Associates' of the Wrekin Trust. See [www.wrekintrust.org/forum.shtml](http://www.wrekintrust.org/forum.shtml), accessed 22.11.10.



attention. Typical two to three day events of national and international academic bodies may include an ice-breaker wine reception, and it is accepted that break and meal times enable networking and sharing of ideas. However, it is rare at any such event for any session to include any experiential element, let alone active engagement with the whole-body / non-local facet of consciousness. Those within the transcendence movement, by contrast, place considerable emphasis on the inclusion of meditative and/or other experiential learning and sharing activities within conference programmes. To illustrate this, I will now describe the opening, Friday evening, experiential session of *The Wrekin Trust Round Table 2010*.

Having all introduced ourselves, the floor was given over to James d'Angelo who had brought with him a collection of bells and percussion instruments.<sup>568</sup> He then proceeded to demonstrate three chants with musical accompaniment and invited us to take a drum, rattle, tuning fork or other instruments to join in. Many were already familiar with the Tibetan *Om Mani Padme Hum* and willingly participated. Most also attempted and soon picked up a Native American rhythm. As the session ended, faces previous showing the weariness of long journeys and hard weeks were smiling peacefully.

Activities such as the chanting and percussion performance were, at this event, integral to the programme, providing opportunities for higher level connection to ensure that intellectual debates were held in a spirit of mutual respect, the highest truth and the greatest good.

With a room of around fifty people sitting in a circle, committed to open dialogue, empathic sharing and to personal and collective growth, the participants agreed that the inclusion of such experiences enabled the build-up of a powerful, supportive and loving energy. Indeed, on arrival, one late comer commented that such an energy was tangible in its strength. Attendees were present not just to share intellectually, but to enjoy and be fed by a shared presence.

I felt this 'shared presence' not just with fellow members of the Wrekin Trust, but with members of the CEP: the *Consciousness and Experiential Psychology* section of the *British Psychological Society* (BPS). Formed in 1997, its conference in 2010 (St. Anne's College, Oxford, 10-12th Sept) was its 13<sup>th</sup>. Entitled *Nature and Human Nature*, it

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<sup>568</sup> D'Angelo runs workshops on 'The Healing Power of the Human Voice'. See: [www.soundspirit.co.uk](http://www.soundspirit.co.uk), accessed 8.11.10.

explored the questions ‘What does it mean to be human?’ and ‘What is our relationship with nature?’ A common theme, not surprisingly for the CEP, was the more specific question ‘what is the nature of human consciousness?’

What emerged in the three-day conference was a consistent picture of a consciousness that is evolving and that has a dimension or level to it that has previously been largely denied by science; a so-called ‘3<sup>rd</sup> Wave’ or ‘reflective consciousness.’ Interestingly, as Matthijs Cornelisen described, Indian psychology has always emphasised a non-local consciousness over one based on the physical brain. Such an approach provides an easy merging of traditional, spiritual wisdom with emerging psychology.<sup>569</sup>

It is the nature of academic study that each researcher will be seeking for a greater understanding of their specialised subject from their perspective. This is, I would suggest, a good example of how one’s life’s experiences contribute to a personal journey of growth or, taking my broad definition of transcendence, of an individual’s process of transcendence. Thus, each speaker at the CEP conference seemed to be describing their own novel approach to the subject of consciousness as they sought a personal understanding and acceptance of its multi-faceted nature. Whatever their specific topic, their papers seemed to me to explore, in some way, the topic of ‘bringing together’ the old convention of this being a physical world, with the emerging paradigm of humans being but a part of a single, all embracing, field of consciousness.

One speaker who inspired this insight, was Bryony Pierce<sup>570</sup> in her presentation entitled *Panabstractism*. Pierce proposes that:

There are abstract relations throughout the physical world, and that viewing consciousness as arising out [of] these abstract relations, rather than out of physical stuff, might help us bridge the explanatory gap by avoiding the traditional mental/physical dichotomy.<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> The Cornelisen presentation was entitled: *Concepts of Mind and Consciousness in the Indian Tradition*. For a conference report see [www.imprint.co.uk/pdf/17\\_11-12ConferenceReport\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.imprint.co.uk/pdf/17_11-12ConferenceReport_FINAL.pdf), accessed 29.1.11.

<sup>570</sup> Pierce is a PhD student at the University of Bristol. Her provisional thesis title is ‘The role of consciousness in action’. She is a member of the CONTACT research group, a Collaborative Research Project (2007-2009) under the ESF Programme *Consciousness in a Natural and Cultural Context*, co-funded by the European Science Foundation and by three national funding agencies: the CNR (Italy), the AHRC (UK), and the NWO (The Netherlands).

<sup>571</sup> Personal e-mail from Pierce dated 13.12.10

This focus on the abstract rather than the mind-brain nature of consciousness, does indeed help us to transcend body-mind dualities. Abstract ideas can be seen far more easily as ‘bursts of thought’, allowing consciousness to be related to energies, impulses, even feelings, rather than dependent on physical processes.

Pierce, in passing, suggested that subatomic physics might aid philosophy in addressing such issues. Whilst Pierce was somewhat sceptical, the idea that quantum mechanics might offer an explanation rang true to me: my own life has been characterised by a few ‘leaps of faith’, apparent changes in direction which seemed to ‘come from nowhere’ and taking me into a different phase of life: exactly as electrons will suddenly leap to another quantum level within their atom. In both cases, the apparently sudden leap is not really so abrupt: there has been, beneath the surface, a gradual build-up of potential that enabled the leap to occur.

Just as striking as her formal talk, were informal discussions with Pierce. Whilst keen to talk about her academic research she was equally happy discussing other important facets to her life. She freely admitted, for example, the importance of walking and of nature to her; and that all of her theories were no more than that: theories. This ability to not take oneself or work too seriously or literally is characteristic of those within the transcendence movement.

Such a balanced perspective between work, rest and play is also illustrated by the CEP conference programme, itself being well endowed with experiential sessions. In addition to workshops by keynote speakers David Abram and Cornelisen prior to the conference proper (on *Falling Awake: The Ecology of Mind on a Breathing Planet* and *Modes of Being and Knowing* respectively), my own workshop (on *Human Nature: a healing experience*) was joined by Richard Golsworthy’s *Biocentric Movement: The Sensing Body in Relationship*. Both, although optional sessions, were attended by a high proportion of the delegates and were well received.

Likewise, discussions over dinner can often be as illuminating as formal presentations. During one such exchange of life experiences with a regular attendee at CEP events, he and I agreed that what we have learnt in life is to trust our own experiences rather than what others tell us. Coming within a conference that generally agreed to an emerging ‘One-ness’ of humanity, this may seem paradoxical, but as we become more united, so

we are perhaps more able to trust our own experiences. Such is the transcendence process.

This importance of focus on both the individual and the collective together was particularly powerfully illustrated in September 2010 when twelve members and associates of the Alister Hardy Society 'All Wales Group' came together at Llantarnam Abbey (near Cwmbran in South Wales).

In addition to the Group Mandala (described in Chapter 13), this weekend featured a walking meditation around Llantarnam's labyrinth, a volunteers' entertainment evening, an introduction to (particularly) Tibetan Buddhist mandalas and visualisation, a Oneness Ceremony, a 'freestyle' mandala experience (led by myself),<sup>572</sup> and circle dancing: a rich diversity of tradition and of experience. This was very much a case of each participant's inputs being important and equally valued as part of the collective experience whilst, at the same time and in the true spirit of transcending inclusiveness, being respected as unique and meaningful to that individual.

In the sense that we were able to engage fully in such depth of being, this was a true retreat. In the sense that we were fully aware of and accepting of each other's differences, this was also a superb example of how, when all participants are willing, a disparate group can find an harmonious and joyous way of celebrating both diversity of uniqueness and a shared humanity and place within the Oneness: a true example of transcendence.

Without doubt, the hosts for this event, the sisters of Llantarnam Abbey, contributed hugely to the success of the weekend.<sup>573</sup> Not only did they provide us with physical nourishment in the form of extremely tasty and nutritious meals (using produce from their estate) but their calm, gentle and peaceful presence encouraged and enabled our own deeper reflections. Whilst most conference will attempt to satisfy physical as well as mental needs, the truly holistic and integrated nature of this AHS gathering exemplifies transcendence in action.

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<sup>572</sup> Whilst mandalas, in specific traditions, are often very prescribed, my own use of them in workshops is to enable and encourage individual expression and experience, hence 'freestyle'.

<sup>573</sup> The Abbey is home to a community of Sisters of St Joseph.

At perhaps the other end of the spectrum of ‘conferences within the transcendence movement’, was the *Climate Change and Human Behaviour - Postgraduate Conference* of 21<sup>st</sup> Sept 2010. Whilst far more of a traditional academic conference in format, its subject matter identified it as belonging to the transcendence movement. Organised by the ‘Understanding Risk Group’ of Cardiff University's School of Psychology, this interdisciplinary conference exemplified not only the need for, but also the practice of mental transcendence in academic research. Driven by the current scepticism and apparent reduced concern amongst public and politicians alike, for a concerted commitment to actions of mitigation against and adaptation to climate change, its aim was to bring together UK researchers active in some facet of the human dimension to climate change. Attended by over thirty postgraduates and with speakers from thirteen different universities, its subject areas spanned ‘social & environmental psychology’ and sociology through to my own theological and evolutionary inputs.

Typical of the conclusions reached in this one-day gathering was the need for the challenging issues to be addressed from both individual and societal perspectives. As at the AHS gathering, the event sought a coalescence of personal and collective views. This is an example of what I call mental transcendence: the need and practice of rising above questions of ‘either-or’ to embrace both sides of an apparent dichotomy, dielectric or duality. The need for such transcendence was aptly illustrated by Sarah Hards of the University of York in her presentation *Pathways to action on climate change: how “climate-friendly” practices evolve in individual lives*. In it she explains how, according to ‘Social Practice Theory’, much of an individual’s behaviour and thus attitudes result from ‘shared social practice’. For example, how driving a car, even to take the children to a nearby school, has become the social norm. However, in talking about a personal ‘lived experience’, one may, individually, have ‘transformative moments’ which can alter personal attitudes to a life-changing extent. A close encounter with a wild animal, for example, can dramatically alter a person’s view of the natural world. This is precisely a ‘transcendent experience’ as discussed in this discourse.

Follow-up discussion with Hards emphasised the current need to relate such personal changes to the necessity, now perceived by many in the Climate Change arena, to change the ‘collective consciousness’. This Jungian concept, it was agreed, is both relevant and useful here: through social networking and sharing of such profound experiences, a shift in the perspective of the general population may be possible. We

need to enable such a collective broadening of awareness of and respect towards those beyond our personal, individual, selves. Such a process itself requires a bringing together of the language and approaches of ‘societal’ and ‘personal’ study.

A key part of developing such ‘expert knowledge’ requires, according to Tiago Ribeiro Duarte (Cardiff University) an immersion within it, for example, through shared community action. In his talk *Scepticism in climate change and policy-making: identifying appropriate sources of advice for policy-making*, Duarte warns of ‘expert sceptics’ and questions what sort of expertise policy makers should listen to. Whilst not arguing for ‘direct access to truth’ or intuitive wisdom, as those more advanced on the transcendence path might, the Duarte message is consistent with that from many educationalists: the most useful expert knowledge comes from being active within the task and experience for which knowledge is sought.

Whilst this Climate Change conference contained no workshop sessions and thus included no directly experiential content, the role of experience in helping individuals to accept the need for adaptive behaviour was mentioned by a number of speakers including Duarte, Hards and myself. Whilst the lack of experiential session was, for me, a disappointment, the positive and enthusiastic sharing between disciplines and networking amongst this diverse range of research can only help to bring about ‘joined up thinking’ which, as many speakers emphasised, is essential in broadening awareness of the challenges ahead for humanity.

It was, for example, fully accepted in this forum that a global temperature rise of at least two degree, quite likely four degrees Centigrade, will happen within the next twenty years. The results on coastal communities the world over is likely to be catastrophic and the suffering for individuals concerned immense, unless action is taken within the next few years.<sup>574</sup> That the environment and its changes are becoming an integral part of sociological research are illustrated by the new ‘Climate Change Study Group’ of the British Sociological Association.<sup>575</sup> Likewise, the existence of the ‘Climate Justice Movement’ demonstrates the mental transcendence required to accept that ‘the

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<sup>574</sup> Whilst suffering was not a theme explored in this conference, risk, with which it is very closely associated, was a key issue in many papers.

<sup>575</sup> See: [www.britsoc.co.uk/specialisms/climate.htm](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/specialisms/climate.htm), accessed 2.2.11.

environment' is worthy of having 'rights'.<sup>576</sup> Both of these developments represent, I contend, striking examples of the transcendence movement.

Being the few conferences that I was able to attend personally during one summer, the above represent but the tip of the proverbial iceberg in terms of the number of events around the world that have some direct relevance to my subject. At the start of the following year an internet search with the terms "Evolution, Consciousness, Conference, 2011", yielded "about 485,000 results".<sup>577</sup> Even allowing for duplicates and typical irrelevant search results, this is a staggering figure. Examining the first few 'hits' identifies many major conferences during 2011 with topics pertinent to this thesis. Stockholm University, for example, in May hosted *Towards a Science of Consciousness: Brain, Mind and Reality*. In December the Foundation for Conscious Evolution ran: *Women Rising in Consciousness: A Symposium for Women*, the conference information stating: *Women are on the precipice of shifting the consciousness of this planet*.<sup>578</sup> (Although beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss in detail, it could be argued that a shift from patriarchal to matriarchal focus goes hand in hand with the transcendence process). Each with its own focus, numerous events around the globe are exploring the growing acceptance that our consciousness is changing, evolving.

It has to be concluded that the trend towards acceptance of thought processes 'beyond the rational' is very real. Equally important, many of the ideas identified herein as indicative of an on-going transcendence process can be seen in conferences outside of specifically transcendent subject areas. An example comes from Bangor University's own postgraduate conference *Beyond Boundaries* held in January 2011. The winner of the Best Paper Award, Wulf Livingstone, described the changing focus and methodology as his research progressed. Faced with a discrepancy between what he was reading and the reality he saw and heard 'on the ground' he was forced to step outside

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<sup>576</sup> See for example Jethro Pettit 'Climate Justice: A New Social Movement for Atmospheric Rights', *IDS Bulletin* Volume 35, Issue 3, pages 102–106, July 2004 (IDS is the Institute of Development Studies), available from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2004.tb00142.x/abstract>, accessed 2.2.11.

<sup>577</sup> Google search on 24.1.11.

<sup>578</sup> See: [www.barbaramarxhubbard.com/con/node/136](http://www.barbaramarxhubbard.com/con/node/136), accessed 24.1.11.

his comfort zones and explore theories beyond those acknowledged in his subject area (social workers' attitude to alcohol use in their clients).

Livingstone's presentation, like the working title of his thesis, dramatically illustrates a fundamentally transcendent theme: *Not from a book; the acquisition of knowledge about alcohol by social workers and its use in practice.*<sup>579</sup> It is perhaps paradoxical, in a typically transcendent manner, that a PhD thesis should include such a quote. 'Not from a book' encapsulates so much of the essence of my subject: transcendence, whether in research or in general is, I have argued, about each individual living their own life with depth and inner purpose. Whilst what one reads will inevitably be of influence and may usefully assist, one's personal truth is seen to emerge largely from one's own lived experiences. The transcendence process, as I have described it and as Livingstone very aptly illustrates, is nothing less than the unfolding of life.

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<sup>579</sup> Livingstone's paper was entitled *Random Control Trial to Biographical Narratives – Design and Methodological Transition*. 'Beyond Boundaries 2011' Conference was held on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> January 2011.



## Appendix 5

### The Transcendence Movement: Summary of organisations

#### a) Organisations included in my study of Chapter 3

ORGANISATION	FOUNDED BY	FOUNDED DATE	WHERE ACTIVE	ACTIVE INVOLVE-MENT <sup>580</sup>
<b>The Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience (AHS)</b> <sup>581</sup>	Sir Alister Hardy	1969	UK	300 <sup>582</sup>
<b>Bahá'í Faith</b>	Bahá'u'lláh	1817-1892	Global	5 million
<b>Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University</b>	Dada Lekhraj	1936	Global	2-5 million students and visitors each year <sup>583</sup>
<b>Compassion in World Farming</b>	Peter and Anna Roberts	1967	UK & Branches in Asia & Africa.	25,000 plus
<b>Quakers (Religious Society of Friends)</b>	George Fox 1624-1691	1640s	Global	(no global figure available)
<b>Scientific and Medical Network</b>	George Blaker, Sir Kelvin Spencer	1973	UK based, members in 30 countries	1300 members
<b>Spiritual Directors International</b>	Mercy Center, Burlingame, California	1989	Global	6600 members (21.2.08)
<b>Theosophical Society</b>	H.P. Blavatsky	1875	Global	(no global figure available)

<sup>580</sup> As of July 2009, unless otherwise stated. Obtained from publicity literature at the time or from the web sites referred to in Chapter 6.

<sup>581</sup> Since 2012 the Society has used this expanded and more explanatory name and is thus, more correctly shorted to AHSSSE. In this thesis I use the abbreviation in use at the start of my studies, i.e. AHS.

<sup>582</sup> E-mail from the AHSSSE Membership Secretary 7.3.13.

<sup>583</sup> They attend the main Brahma Kumaris centre, the Madhuban complex in India.

<b>The Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health</b>	HRH The Prince of Wales	1993-2010	UK	(not a membership organisation)
<b>World Wildlife Fund</b>	Conservation-ists	1961	Global	5 million supporters
<b>The Wrekin Trust</b>	Sir George Trevelyan Bt.	1971	UK	Based around 45 groups and 'Local Connectors'

**b) Other organisations considered part of the transcendence movement**

(In no particular order and not intended to be an exhaustive list)

<b>Organisation Name</b>	<b>Approx. year formed</b>	<b>Web address</b>	<b>Based</b>	<b>Focus<sup>584</sup></b>
<b>Christians Awakening to a New Awareness (CANA)</b>	1991	www.christiansawakening.org	UK	Christian exploration "free from the boundaries that most religious frameworks"
<b>One Spirit Interfaith Foundation (OSIF)</b>	2002, 2004 (charity)	www.interfaithfoundation.org/	UK	Network of "ordained Interfaith Ministers and Spiritual Counsellors"
<b>Spiritual Companions Network (SCN)</b>	2006 (courses) 2012 (charity)	www.spiritualcompanions.org/	UK	"Support[ing] well-being and personal development" ... "for spiritually competent people"
<b>Community of The Mystic Heart</b>	2010	www.orderofsannyasa.org/	Global/ Internet	"a circle of interspiritual mystics and contemplatives"
<b>Exploring the Extraordinary (EtE)</b>	2009	www.facebook.com/groups/etenetwork/ EXPLORINGTHE EXTRAORDINARY @jiscmail.ac.uk	International (based at York University)	"A network for those actively engaged/ interested in research into 'extraordinary' experiences"

<sup>584</sup> Quoted, unless otherwise specified, from the organisation's web-site.

<b>Organisation Name</b>	<b>Approx. year formed</b>	<b>Web address</b>	<b>Based</b>	<b>Focus<sup>584</sup></b>
<b>White Eagle Lodge</b>	1936	<a href="http://www.whiteagle.org/">www.whiteagle.org/</a>	Global	“To bring to ordinary people the vision of the spiritual life in which we live, and which gives us life.”
<b>British Association for the Study of Spirituality (BASS)</b>	2009	<a href="http://www.bassspirituality.org.uk">www.bassspirituality.org.uk</a>	UK with international membership	“To encourage the further study of spirituality in its practice and theoretical aspects”
<b>Consciousness and Experiential Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society (CEP BPS)</b>	1997	<a href="http://cep.bps.org.uk">http://cep.bps.org.uk</a>	UK with international membership	“To advance our under-standing of consciousness, to bring scientific research on consciousness closer to other traditions of inquiry into the nature of mind, and to explore how this research can be used to improve the quality of life.”
<b>World Institute for Scientific Exploration (WISE)</b>	2011	<a href="http://institutefor-scientificexploration.org/">http://institutefor-scientificexploration.org/</a>	Global	“investigating scientific anomalies, consciousness, alternative and traditional medicine therapies, alternative energy, alternative scientific hypotheses ...”
<b>The Peaceful Schools Movement</b>	2007	<a href="http://www.spiritualengland.org.uk">www.spiritualengland.org.uk</a>	UK	“Spiritual England - Opening the doors to support, inspiration and spiritual growth for everyone”

## Appendix 6

### Invitation to Contribute to a Unique Research Project

# Transcending Thought

Do you have strange, weird or indescribably experiences that didn't seem 'of this world'?

Do you experience states of mind 'above and beyond' a normal (rational or emotional) thinking state?

Have you found that, over time, such experiences have changed how you live or your perspective on life?

Whether you've had two, twenty or even more such experiences (some people might call them religious experiences, mystic experience, or spiritual experiences; I would describe them as 'transcendent experiences'), then you are by no means alone. This research project aims to collect accounts of such experiences to help our understanding of them. I am particularly interested in how multiple experiences over a period of many years might be affecting the way we think. Do transcendent experiences, for example, make us more open and receptive, more able to cope with life? I welcome your contributions.

*To submit your experience to this project, please request a pro-forma questionnaire by visiting [www.algarveowl.com/research/](http://www.algarveowl.com/research/), e-mailing [keith.beasley@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:keith.beasley@bangor.ac.uk) or by writing to: Keith Beasley, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Bangor University, College Road, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 2DG*

**All contributions to this project will be strictly confidential.**

## Appendix 7

### Multiple Transcendent Experiences (Questionnaire)

(including what might be regarded as religious, mystical, spiritual and paranormal experiences)

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. Please remember to sign and date this form before returning it. Submission by e-mail is considered as providing a digital signature. All information will be kept confidential: details are required only for anonymous analysis and to indicate that accounts of experiences are genuine.

On receipt of a completed questionnaire you will be sent an acknowledgement. You will receive no further correspondence unless you have agreed (below) to further contact.

For background information on the research to which this information contributes, and on the researcher, please see the attached information sheet. For progress on (and eventually results of) this research, please visit [www.algarveowl.com/research/](http://www.algarveowl.com/research/)

*When entering text, allow boxes to expand as required, or complete on a separate sheet.*

*If you have any additional comments to make, please use input box 5.6 on the last page of this questionnaire.*

#### 1. PERSONAL DETAILS

Name:		Title:	
Address:		Country:	
Postcode:		Phone:	
		E-mail:	
Date of Birth:		Male / Female	
Religious background:		Nationality:	
Occupation:		Academic/Vocational Qualifications:	
Would you be happy for me to contact you to discuss your experiences in more detail? <i>(please delete as applicable)</i>			<b>YES      NO</b>
It would be really helpful if your account, in an anonymous form, could be held on a database and extracts usable in resulting published papers, books or web-pages. Please indicate if you are happy about this. Your account would also make a positive contribution to the database and research activities of the Religious Experiences Research Centre in Lampeter, Wales (RERC – see <a href="http://www.lamp.ac.uk/aht/">www.lamp.ac.uk/aht/</a> ) . Confidentiality would again be strictly maintained. Do you give your consent for this?		Project database <b>YES      NO</b> Quotations OK? <b>YES      NO</b>  RERC Database, related research & quotations. <b>YES      NO</b>	

## **Appendix 7 continued**

(page 2 of 7)

### **Multiple Transcendent Experiences**

#### **Background Information Sheet**

Information submitted in this questionnaire will be used by post-graduate researcher Keith Beasley as part of his studies in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bangor University in Wales. Keith is a mature student originating from Northamptonshire, UK. A graduate of Bangor (1979) he worked for many years in the electronics industry before taking up Reiki healing, which he still teaches. More recently he ran retreats in the mountains of the Algarve in Portugal. He now lives in North Wales where he feels very much at home; particularly when walking or singing!

The data you provide will form a vital part of Keith's assessment of the importance of transcendent experiences in how we develop over time to cope (or not!) with life's challenges. Begun at the end of 2008, his research project aims to collect accounts of a broad range of transcendent experiences from a wide selection of individuals.

The resulting thesis will bring together analysis of these accounts with a review of literature and theories on transcendence from across academic disciplines. It will also review organisations that might be considered as forming a grass-roots transcendence movement, and from a consideration of common elements between these parts of the study, determine if there is any convincing evidence of an evolution of consciousness.

Thank you for contributing to this important work which will significantly help our understanding of the role of transcendent experiences in our lives.

If you have any question on this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at the e-mail or postal address given below.

*Keith Beasley*

*keith.beasley@bangor.ac.uk*

*School of Theology and Religious Studies  
Bangor University  
College Road  
Bangor  
Gwynedd  
LL57 2DG*

**You will now be asked to describe the following aspects of your experiences:**

Section 2: An over-view of your experiences: their quantity and frequency

Section 3: A description of your first experience

Section 4: A description of a recent experience

Section 5: Your thoughts on the long-term effects of your experiences

## **2. ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES**

**How frequently have you had and do you have transcendent experiences?**  
Please put a X in whichever boxes most accurately describe your multiple experiences.  
i.e. how many in each 12 month period?

<b>Number of Experiences</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2 or 3</b>	<b>4 to 6</b>	<b>7 or more</b>
<b>During the last 12 months</b>					
<b>In period 12-24 months ago</b>					
<b>In 12 months following your first experience</b>					

Please add any comments on the frequency or regularity of your experiences:

## **3. INITIAL EXPERIENCE**

**Please write about your first (or first significant) transcendent experience**

3.1 Date of Experience:

3.3 Location of Experience:

3.2 Age at time of experience:

3.4 How would you describe your state of mind immediately prior to your experience?  
*Each choice is a variable between two extremes. Please mark 1 to 5 to indicate which is most relevant and comment on any specific feelings.*

<b>Depressed/Sad</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Happy/joyous</b>
<b>Confused</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Clear minded</b>
<b>Angry</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Calm/Peaceful</b>
<b>Unwell</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Healthy</b>

<b>3.5 What was your experience? How did it feel?</b>																																				
<b>3.6 Were you engaged in any of these sorts of activities immediately prior to the Experience?</b> <i>Delete as applicable and if Yes, please state what activity.</i>																																				
Mundane/Ordinary	<b>Yes No :</b>																																			
Religious	<b>Yes No :</b>																																			
Spiritual/Therapeutic	<b>Yes No :</b>																																			
Creative/Artistic/Musical	<b>Yes No :</b>																																			
In nature	<b>Yes No :</b>																																			
<b>3.7 If you answered Yes to any of the above, was the activity as part of a formal class or organised group?</b>	<b>Yes No</b> <i>Delete as applicable. If Yes, what sort of group/class?</i>																																			
<b>3.8 Which of these best describe the activity you were engaged in immediately prior to your Experience?</b> <i>Each choice is a variable between two extremes. Please mark 1 to 5 to indicate which is most relevant.</i>																																				
<table style="margin: auto; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>Very structured, precise</b></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="text-align: left;"><b>Very informal, free-flowing</b></td> </tr> </table>		<b>Very structured, precise</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Very informal, free-flowing</b>																												
<b>Very structured, precise</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Very informal, free-flowing</b>																														
<b>3.9 If you were in a group situation, which of these best describe the person or persons leading the activity?</b> <i>Each choice is a variable between two extremes. Please mark 1 to 5 to indicate which is most relevant, or N/A if Not Applicable (e.g. if your activity had no actual leader).</i>																																				
<table style="margin: auto; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>Charismatic</b></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="text-align: left;"><b>No personality</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>Serene / Peaceful</b></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="text-align: left;"><b>Stressed / Hassled</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>Inspired Trust</b></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="text-align: left;"><b>‘Dodgy’</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>Compassionate</b></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="text-align: left;"><b>Uncaring</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>Sensitive</b></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> <td style="text-align: left;"><b>Insensitive</b></td> </tr> </table>		<b>Charismatic</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>No personality</b>	<b>Serene / Peaceful</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Stressed / Hassled</b>	<b>Inspired Trust</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>‘Dodgy’</b>	<b>Compassionate</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Uncaring</b>	<b>Sensitive</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Insensitive</b>
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<b>Sensitive</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Insensitive</b>																														
<b>3.10 Please say something about the immediate ‘fruits of the Experience’</b> (e.g. what, if anything, did it prompt you to do or think? Did it influence any decision you were making at the time?)																																				



<b>4. RECENT EXPERIENCE</b> <b>Please write about your latest (or typical) transcendent experience:</b>																													
4.1 Date of Experience:	4.3 Location of Experience:																												
4.2 Age at time of experience:																													
4.4 How would you describe your state of mind immediately prior to your experience? <i>Each choice is a variable between two extremes. Please mark 1 to 5 to indicate which is most relevant and comment on any specific feelings.</i>																													
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Creative/Artistic/Musical	Yes No :																												
In nature	Yes No :																												
4.7 If you answered Yes to any of the above, was the activity as part of a formal class or organised group?	Yes No <i>Delete as applicable.</i> <i>If Yes, what sort of group/class?</i>																												

**4.8 Which of these best describe the activity you were engaged in immediately prior to your Experience?** *Each choice is a variable between two extremes. Please mark 1 to 5 to indicate which is most relevant.*

<b>Very structured, precise</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Very informal, free-flowing</b>
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**4.9 If you were in a group situation, which of these best describe the person or persons leading the activity?** *Each choice is a variable between two extremes. Please mark 1 to 5 to indicate which is most relevant, or N/A if Not Applicable (e.g. if your activity had no actual leader).*

<b>Charismatic</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>No personality</b>
<b>Serene / Peaceful</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Stressed / Hassled</b>
<b>Inspired Trust</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>‘Dodgy’</b>
<b>Compassionate</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Uncaring</b>
<b>Sensitive</b>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Insensitive</b>

**4.10 Please say something about the immediate ‘fruits of the Experience’** (e.g. what, if anything, did it prompt you to do or think? Did it influence any decision you were making at the time?)

## **5. LONG TERMS EFFECTS OF YOUR EXPERIENCES**

**5.1 On reflection, do you consider that your experiences have caused you to change your beliefs, the way you live your life or your ability to cope with life?**

**5.2 Would you say that you are on a ‘Spiritual journey’ or a conscious path of personal, self, development?**

**Yes / No**

**5.3 If Yes, does the path/journey involve any particular technique or activity?** *Please list any that you practice regularly, indicating how regularly.*

<p><b>5.4 Also list techniques &amp; activities (not practiced regularly) that you feel are important to you.</b></p>	
<p><b>5.5 Please add any other background or comments you feel are relevant to your responses above:</b></p>	
<p><b>5.6 Finally, please tell me where and how you came across the ‘invitation to contribute’ to this research:</b></p> <p><b>Thank you.</b></p>	
<p><b>I consent to the above information being used for academic research.</b></p>	<p><b>Your signature:</b></p>
<p><b>Date:</b></p>	

*Please send your completed questionnaire, preferably as a WORD (.doc ) file attachment by e-mail to [keith.beasley@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:keith.beasley@bangor.ac.uk) or by post to:*

*Keith Beasley  
School of Theology and Religious Studies  
Bangor University  
College Road  
Bangor  
Gwynedd  
LL57 2DG*

## Appendix 8

### Summary of contributors via the questionnaire

‘-’ indicates that no answer was given.

Ref	Location	M /F	Age	Nationality	Religion	Occupation
1	US (TX)	F	28	-	-	Medical research
2	UK (PE)	F	39	English	Pagan	Pagan; author
3	UK (YO)	F	34	British	Pagan	Research Student
4	UK (NN)	M	56	British	Methodist Sunday School, but nothing in adulthood	Retired from ‘Business employee’
5	UK(LL)	M	31	British	None	Student
6	US (FL)	F	39	Italian/Polish/American	Roman Catholic	Buyer
7	UK (IP)	M	48	British	Mystic schools	Business Management
8	UK (LU)	M	63	English	Brought up Christian	Self-employed Training Consultant / Storyteller
9	UK (HG)	M	75	British	Church of England	Retired physicist
10	UK(LL)	F	67	British	Wiccan	Citizens Advice Bureau Manager
11	UK (LL)	F	26	Russian	Christian - Russian Orthodox	Student
12	UK (LE)	M	54	English	Mormon	Motorcycle Technician
13	UK (LE)	F	56	British	Church of England /Spiritualist	Housewife
14	UK (LL)	F	40	Welsh	-	Student, yoga teacher
15	UK (LL)	M	19	British	Christian	Student
16	UK (LL)	F	63	British	Roman Catholic	Retired (needle-worker)
17	US (UT)	F	69	American	Everything except Islam.	Currently teach classes to court-referred clients
18	UK (KT)	M	43	British	None	Professor/Physicist
19	UK (PE)	F	62	British	Roman Catholic	Company Director
20	UK(LL)	F	66	British	Church of England	Teacher/healer (retired)
21	UK (LL)	F	22	British	None	Postgraduate student/barmaid
22	US (TE)	F	52	Irish, Swedish, German	Raised Catholic	Tissue Technician; Funeral Director/Embalmer

## **Appendix 9**

### **Questionnaire statistics**

#### **a) Questionnaire respondents, by age and gender**

Male: 8                      Females: 16

Aged 29 or younger: 4

Aged between 30 and 44: 6

Aged between 45 and 59: 5

Aged 60 or over: 7

(Total 22)

#### **b) Questionnaire respondents, by location and nationality**

(As declared by contributors on their questionnaire)

North Wales: 8 (All English, Welsh or British, except one Russian)

Other UK: 10 (All English or British)

US: 4 (various nationalities)

(Total 22)

#### **c) Questionnaire respondents, by religion**

(But see comments in Chapter 6)

Roman Catholic: 4

Church of England: 3

Other Christian: 4

Pagan/Wicca: 3

Other: 3

“None”: 3

(Total 21, one respondent did not identify)

**d) Questionnaire responses, by ‘enabling activity’**

Mundane/Ordinary: 16

Religious: 8

Spiritual/Therapeutic: 11

Creative/Artistic/Musical: 7

In nature: 7

Note that some respondents answered ‘yes’ to more than one category.

**e) Questionnaire responses, by traits of group leaders**

	<b>Charismatic</b>	<b>Peaceful</b>	<b>Inspired Trust</b>	<b>Compas- sionate</b>	<b>Sensitive</b>
Mean	1.91	2.09	1.55	1.64	2.09
Standard Deviation	1.04	0.70	0.69	0.67	1.04
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.70	0.47	0.46	0.45	0.70

In each case, the characteristic was rated on a scale of 1 (high degree of this trait) to 5 (high degree of opposing trait)

## Appendix 10

### Methods used to contribute, by contributor

Ref	Questionnaire	Own material and/or e-mail exchange	Face-to- face Interview
1	Y		
2	Y		
3	Y		
4	Y		
5	Y		
6	Y		
7	Y		
8	Y		
9	Y		
10	Y		
11	Y		
12	Y		
13	Y		
14	Y		
15	Y		
16	Y		
17	Y		
18	Y	Y*	
19	Y	Y*	
20	Y	Y	Y
21	Y		Y
22	Y	Y	
23			Y
24			Y
25		Y	
26		Y	
27		Y	
28		Y	
29		Y	
30		Y	
31		Y	
32		Y	
33		Y	
34		Y	

Notes

\* These contributors also feature as biographical authors in the Chapter 5.

## Appendix 11

### Locations at which the ‘invitation to contribute’ were posted.

Location	Format	Target Group	Area
Facebook group: Reiki	Internet Group	healers, reiki	International
Facebook group: Taize	Internet Group	seekers, singers	International
Facebook group: Integral Medicine	Internet Group	seekers, healers	International
SMN: Network Review (Dec 09)	Journal listing	scientists	UK mainly
BU Notice Boards: Main Arts x6	Noticeboard	students	Bangor
BU Post-grads Newsletter	Newsletter	students	Bangor
BU SU Society: Islamic Society	Local group	students, Muslims	Bangor
My Reiki students (x100)	Direct mailing	reiki, healing	UK mainly
Exploring the Extraordinary	Internet List	students	UK mainly
Dimensions Health store	Noticeboard	anybody, seekers	Bangor
Upper Bangor Launderette	Noticeboard	anybody	Bangor
BU Sch. Psychology, Brigantia	Noticeboard	students, psychologists	Bangor
The Grove (x15)	Direct mailing	seekers, Pagans	North Wales
SDI Membership Moments	e-newsletter	spiritual directors	International
BU Sch Sociology	Noticeboard	students, sociologist	Bangor
BU ADU	Noticeboard	students, education	Bangor
BU Forestry	Noticeboard	students, nature	Bangor
BU Intranet Forum	Internet Group	students	Bangor
Contacts in the Algarve (x40)	Direct mailing	ex-pats, performers	Algarve
Bangor Community Choir (x60)	Direct mailing	singers	North Wales
Theosophical Society, North Wales	Direct mailing	TS members	North Wales
BU Notice Board: Sch. Healthcare	Noticeboard	health, students	Bangor
Bangor Cathedral	Noticeboard	visitors to Bangor, Christians	Bangor



## Appendix 12

### Diagrammatic representations of transcendence related models

Figure 1 The 'channel' model of the human mind

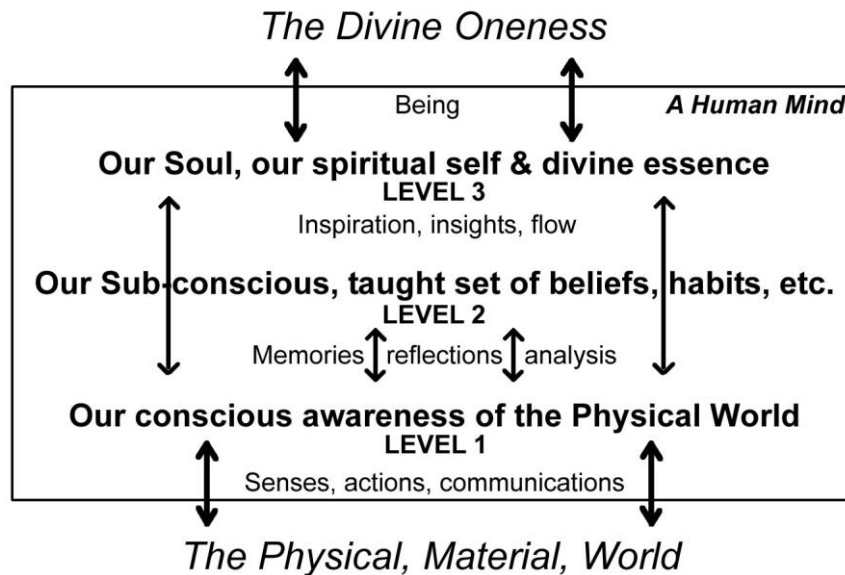
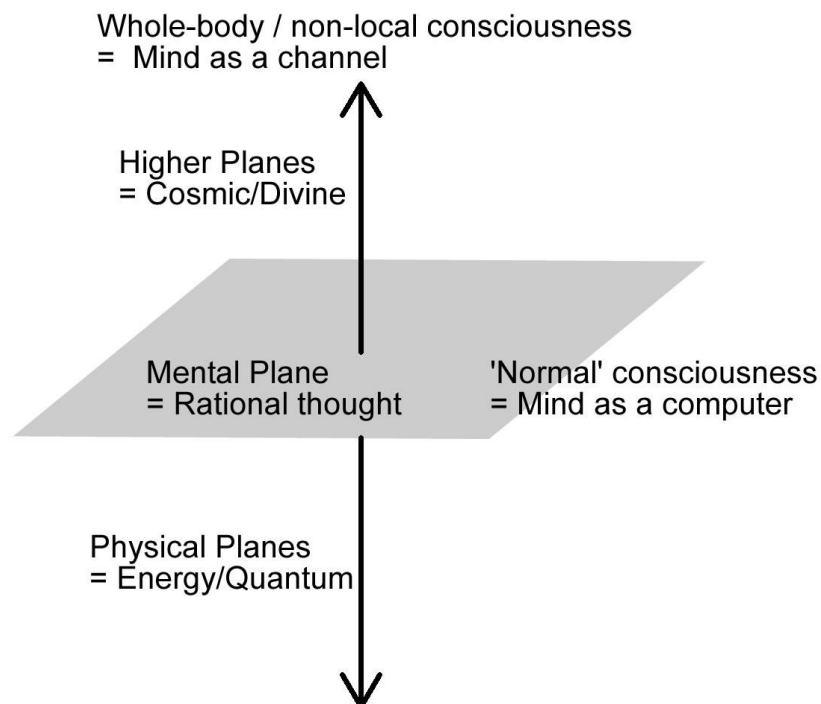
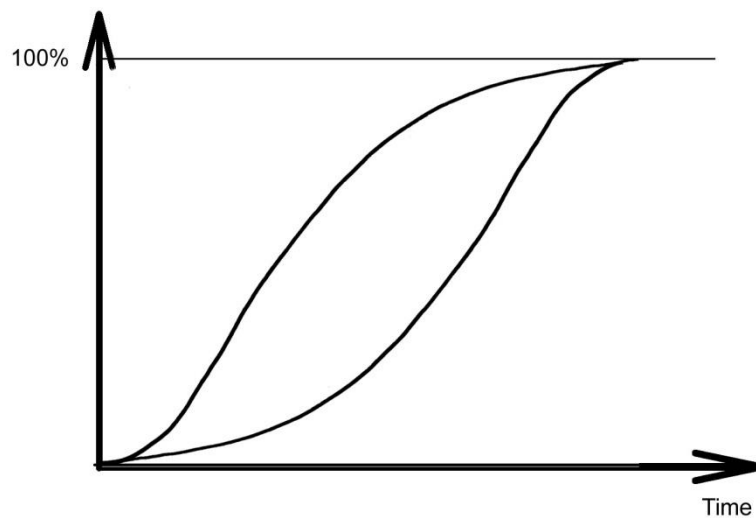


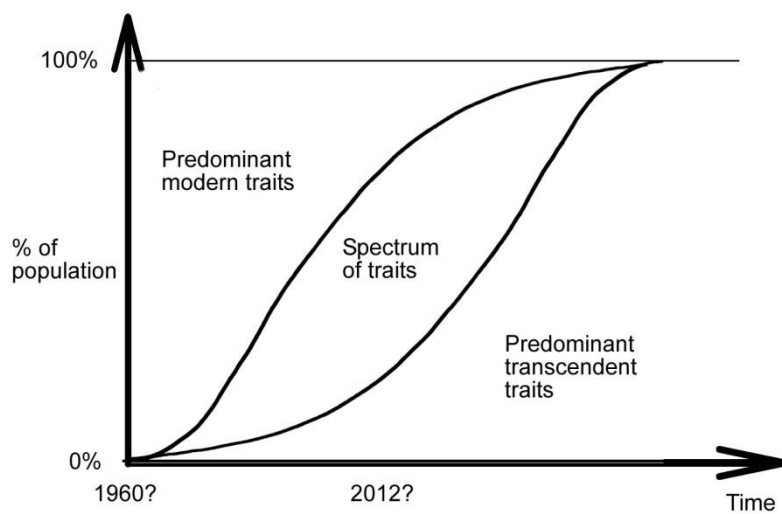
Figure 2 The 'two-facet' model of transcendence



**Figure 3**      The generic ‘tripartite’ transition model

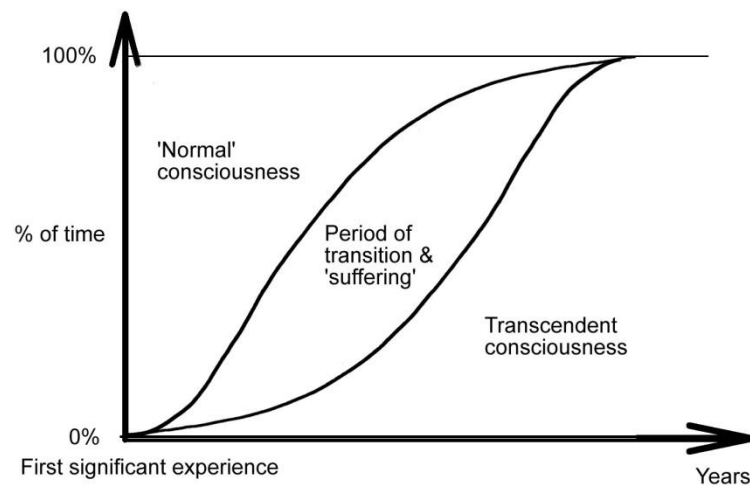


**Figure 4**      The ‘tripartite’ model applied to evolution of consciousness<sup>585</sup>

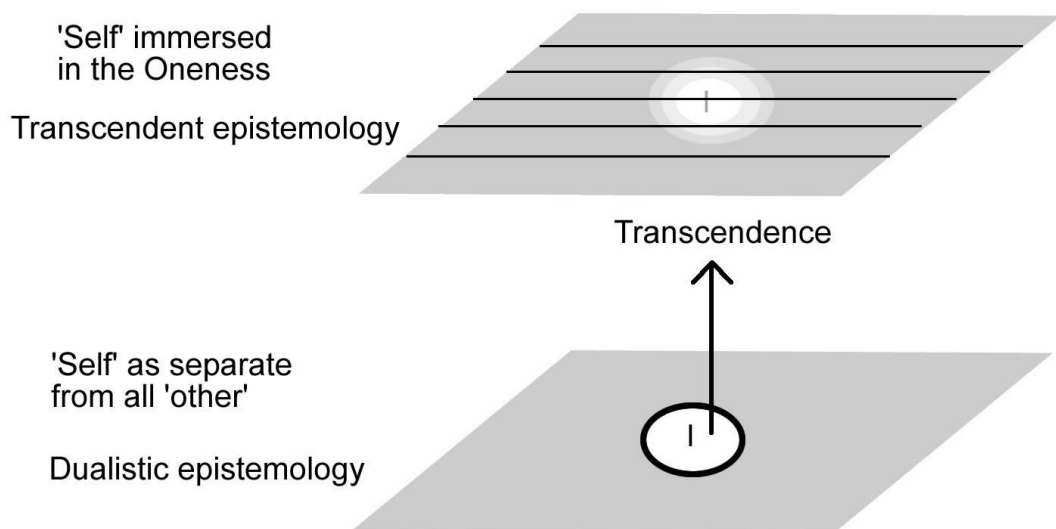


<sup>585</sup> As explained in Chapters 7 and 9, the dates included in this figure are for illustrative purposes only since the boundaries indicated are almost impossible to define or measure with any precision. Whilst a mid-point of 2012 has been given for the transition, it has been beyond the scope of the current study to assess the significant material now available on the significance (or otherwise) of the year 2012 to humanity. Nicolya Christi for example (in *2012: A Clarion Call: Your Soul's Purpose in Conscious Evolution*, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2011) is one of many who see 2012 as pivotal and our role as co-creators essential.

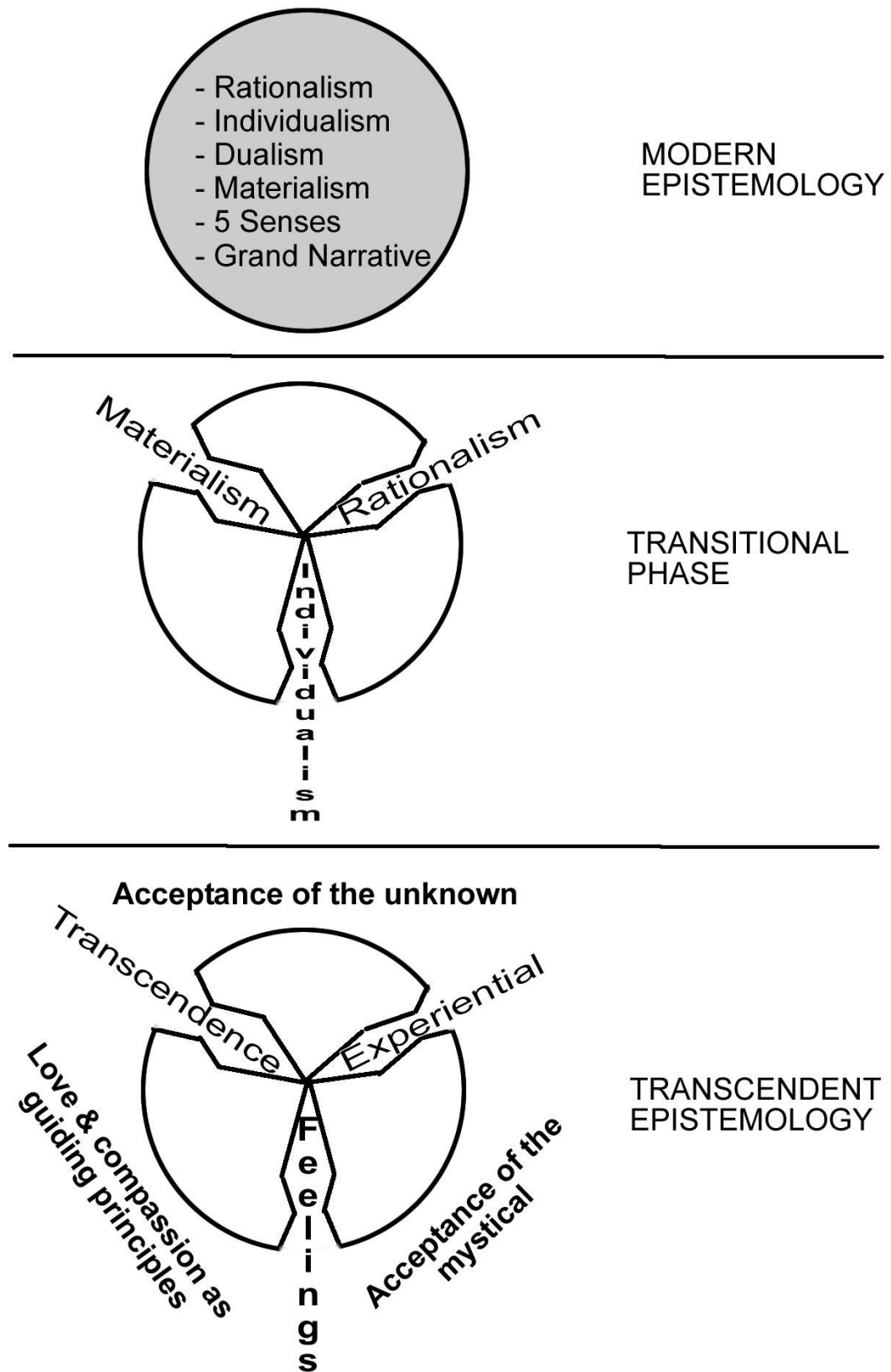
**Figure 5**      The 'tripartite' model applied to personal self-development



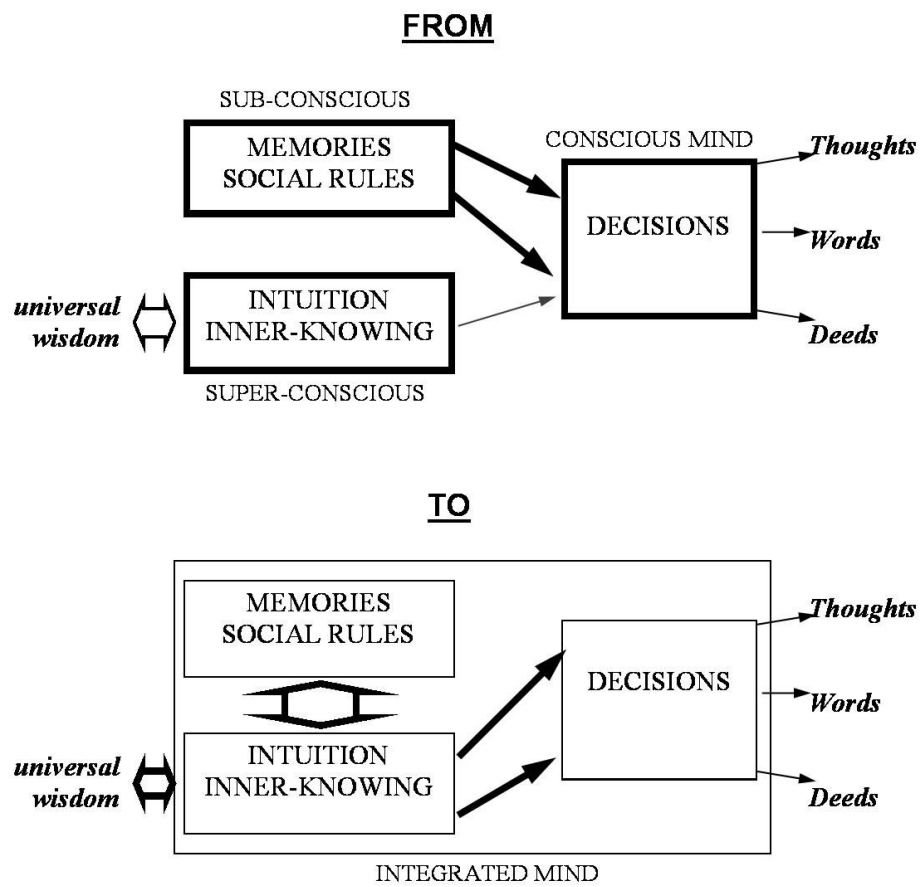
**Figure 6**      The transcending self



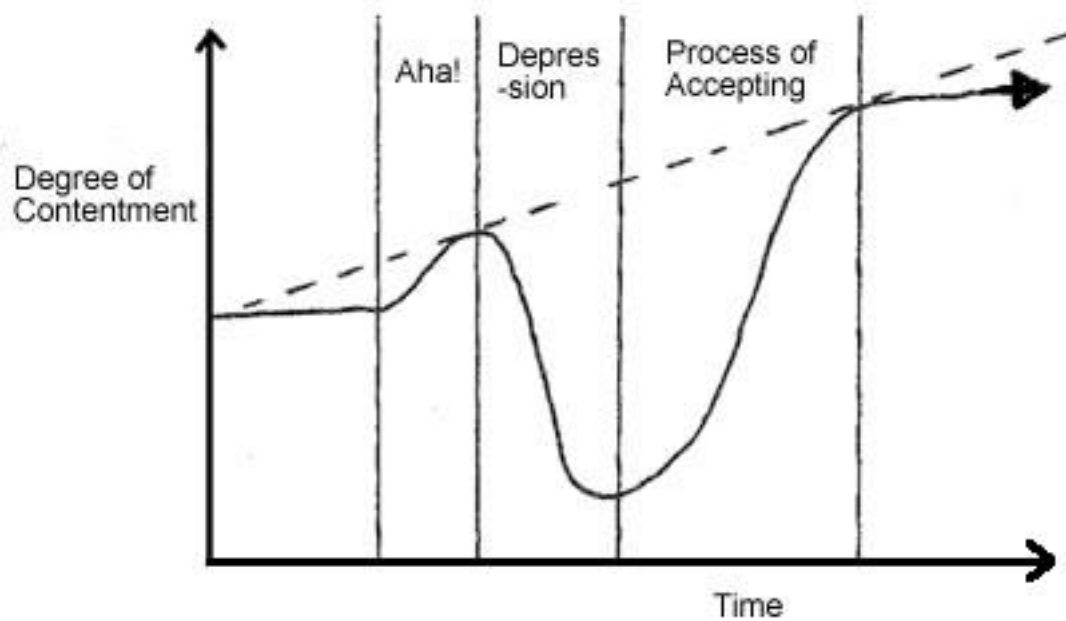
**Figure 7      Evolution of Epistemology**



**Figure 8      Mental Rewiring**



**Figure 9      The transcendence process**



**Figure 10      The transcendence process: summary of key features**

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Aha!</u>	<u>Depression</u>	<u>Process of Accepting</u> <sup>586</sup>
<b>What is happening</b>	Realisation of a new truth	Ego reacts to this realisation	Acceptance & assimilation of new truth
<b>Typical emotions</b>	Elation, laughter, joy	Irritation, anger	Depression, resignation, emptiness, fear (of change)
<b>Symptoms</b>	Light headedness	Cold/flu like, feverish	Hard to swallow, stomach cramp
<b>How to respond</b>	Enjoy the moment	Acknowledge & release the emotion. Allow the mind time & space to process. Healing, meditation and visualisations	
<b>Useful activities</b>	Take a new step forward	Weeding, clearing of junk	Getting on with routine things
<b>Typical duration</b>	May only be minutes	Few hours or few days	Can be many days or even weeks

<sup>586</sup> It is only at the end of this process that 'acceptance' has been fully accomplished. Only then will the mind be at peace with itself and whatever new insights triggered the process.

## Appendix 13

### Summary: Perspectives within the transcendence movement

#### *1. The Broad Context*

##### **Human beings are evolving in their level of consciousness / ways of thinking**

A wide range of disciplines and wisdoms agree it is possible

It is happening now at a conscious level, which has not been the case in the past

This is seen in the 'transcendence movement' of aware organisations

And in the individuals committed to the transcendence process

It is available to all; is inherent to one's beingness; it's natural

There is a cycle of allowing, experiencing and reflection

The emerging transcendence is a natural progression from the modern era

The extreme trends seen in modernism are signs of a 'grieving and growing'

#### *2. The Detailed Context*

##### **Transcendence takes one beyond the barriers of dualism and rationalism**

It involves feeling; being compassionate; loving

It is about whole-body / non-local consciousness and 'knowing'

It is about being part of an integrated and holistic whole

To be happy and to feel fulfilled one needs to embrace it and work with it

Humanity's future (though perhaps not that of our planet) depends upon it

#### *3. The Experience*

##### **It requires surrendering into; accepting of one's insignificance**

It is the transition, the dissolving of sense of separateness, that is painful

This involves the pain & suffering associated with facing fears and of changing

It requires letting go of 'baggage', allowing minds to become clear channels

Truth, joy, come from/through the emptiness

Humans are becoming more mystical and more whole, as we develop

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