

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

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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 our 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.

Outline

Summary

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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 need 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