

EPILOGUE

The exploration of the highest reaches of human nature and of its ultimate possibilities . . . has involved for me the continuous destruction of cherished axioms, the perpetual coping with seeming paradoxes, contradictions, and vaguenesses, and the occasional collapse around my ears of long-established, firmly believed in, and seemingly unassailable laws of psychology.

ABRAHAM MASLOW¹

We have only just begun. A newly recognized, centuries-old frontier is opening to us. But as yet, we know little of it and our technological expertise speaks little to this realm of consciousness, which is already proving to be far vaster than we had imagined.

The realms of the human psyche and their corresponding states of consciousness, identity, and experience extend far beyond what we had thought of as our limits. From a perspective that encompassed only a single, waking state of consciousness, we have moved toward a recognition of multiple states; from a single-layer model of the unconscious to multiple layers; from equating identity with ego to seeing ego as only one of many possible identifications; from an either-or exclusive view of psychological models that regarded one as right and others as wrong to a broader more encompassing position, which recognizes that all models and their corresponding perspectives are limited and relative; from viewing our Western psychological systems as the only ones worthy of serious consideration to the recognition that some non-Western psychologies are, in their own different ways, as sophisticated as our own; and from an automatic dismissal of the consciousness disciplines, mystical traditions, and great religions, to the recognition that some of them may represent sophisticated technologies for training individuals in the development of higher states of consciousness.

The study of consciousness has been a central concern of several Eastern cultures for millennia. By comparison, we are very recent newcomers. Our major concern has been materialistic, and we have in general

sought the answers to our questions and the solutions to our problems of life in the material environment. Now we may be witnessing a quickening and deepening of interest in nonmaterialistic realms of experience and consciousness. If this interest is in part reactive to an excessive concern with materialism, then perhaps it is part of a dialectical process and we might wonder what the synthesis will be.

One possibility seems to be a potential integration and synthesis resulting from parallel developments in a number of disciplines and areas of study that were formerly seen as quite unrelated. Quantum physics, consciousness, biofeedback, meditation research, and many others are becoming linked in an interconnecting network of concepts and findings. This points to the possibility of a broad, integrated synthesis and new guiding paradigms concerning who and what we are, the fundamental nature of the universe, and our relationship to it. *The possible dimensions and tenets of such paradigms have been the subject matter of this book.*

New models and perspectives offer new opportunities. All that we think and do, both individually and collectively, reflects our beliefs about the nature of ourselves and the reality we inhabit. The evidence for the existence of expanded ranges of experience, identity, and consciousness affords new visions of what we can be and may well call forth our individual and collective efforts to actualize them. The recognition that we are active cocreators of our sense of self and our perception of reality shifts us from perceiving ourselves as passive victims of psychodynamic and existential givens to active cocreators, veritable gods within our own universe.

This new perspective encourages us, even forces us, to return to a consideration of the basic questions from which psychology and philosophy originally sprang. Hilgard and Bower² emphasize the centrality of these questions as follows:

The really fascinating and absorbing questions of psychology were not "discovered" by modern psychologists, but rather have been matters of deep concern to philosophers for many centuries. And these are not trivial "academic" questions of only historical interest: on the contrary, they center upon the most vital motives and forces underlying Western thought and civilization: What am I to believe? What can I trust? How do we know? What kind of life is worth living? What is man's role and what is his destiny in this universe? What is Justice, the Good, the Truth? What government, if any, is worth having? What is the nature of man? Is man free? What is Mind and what is its relation to nature?

These are not sterile questions because the answers we give to them impinge in countless ways upon our daily lives, providing the motives for our personal and social conduct, the rational systems of legal and governmental control over our lives, and our modes of thinking about our personal identity and about the meaning of our lives. The serious thinkers of each generation have aimed at the systematic consideration and clarification of such questions

and have proposed answers to them . . . These and many other questions have provided the intellectual underpinnings of modern psychology.

In its initial strivings for experimental and conceptual rigor, modern psychology excluded such questions from consideration. But now we are finding that such an exclusion not only reduces the scope and significance of psychological inquiry but is actually impossible. For what we have discovered is that we cannot examine phenomena in isolation without introducing artificial distortions and dualities. Furthermore, we are not detached objective observers but active participants in the universe. We cannot measure without changing; the questions we ask and answers we receive are functions of our beliefs and models and ultimately of our consciousness: the subjective/objective dichotomy can no longer be maintained; we can no longer exclude ourselves from the investigation of reality, both because we are and because we create the reality we investigate.

What must we do to be adequate to these possibilities? Our first task is epistemological. As Ken Wilber pointed out in "Eye to Eye," transpersonal psychology is unique in encompassing, even requiring, knowledge from all three "eyes," or modes of acquisition of knowledge, i.e., sensation-empirical, conceptual, and contemplative-meditative. Each of these three modes of knowing yields only partially overlapping data, which cannot be reduced one to another without what is called category error. Traditionally, Western science and philosophy have used only the first two and have been guilty of category error in attempting to either ignore contemplative wisdom or reduce it to the other two realms. The recognition of this error opens the way to a balanced integration between modes and their appropriate application to the basic questions discussed above.

Each mode must be applied as skillfully, precisely, and appropriately as possible. The findings of one mode must be explored and tested and integrated with others. The insights into the fundamental nature of self and reality provided by contemplation and the theoretical interpretations and conclusions of the intellect must be grounded and tested by empirical research wherever possible. Empirical and conceptual rigor are essential if the field is to gain legitimacy and be clearly differentiated from superficial popularisms.

At the same time, we must remember the limitations inherent in empirical and conceptual knowledge. Experience, and particularly the experience of transpersonal realms, cannot ultimately be reduced to concepts but must be approached through the cultivation and practice of the contemplative mode.

The cultivation of the contemplative mode makes very different demands on its practitioner than do the others. In order to employ this mode adequately, we must make ourselves adequate for its use. Empirical ob-

servation comes relatively easily; skillful use of the intellect requires intellectual training, and deep contemplative ability requires a training of our whole being. The contemplative faculty is one of refined sensitivity to subtle, formerly subliminal experience, and, as such, is disrupted by any perturbations of emotion, intellect, personality, or lifestyle. In addition, the knowledge obtained through it may not necessarily be objective in that it may not be separable from the knower. In the transpersonal realms of experience, one must live and become that which one seeks to know. This is the difference between wisdom, what one is, and knowledge, what one has.

Nothing can be known without there being an appropriate "instrument" . . . the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known. . . . When the level of the knower is not adequate to the level . . . of the object of knowledge, the result is not factual error but something much more serious: an inadequate and impoverished view of reality.³

Thus we are led to the inescapable conclusion that, for deep understanding of the transpersonal realms, the first requirement is that we must work on ourselves. Attention, perceptual sensitivity, emotions, attachments, thinking, and even lifestyle, must be trained and disciplined by any individual who wishes to undertake a deep exploration of these realms. Only by commitment to a continuous, deepening discipline can we hope to explore the most fundamental aspects of transpersonal psychology, consciousness, and ourselves, and to use them to contribute to others rather than for egocentric purposes. We are the limiting factor in our exploration of this vast and timeless realm that is ultimately ourselves, and we have only just begun.

I have been as a little child playing on the seashore, every now and then finding a brighter pebble, while all around me the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered.

—SIR ISAAC NEWTON

Notes

1. Maslow, A. H., *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 2nd ed. New York: Van Nostrand, 1968, pp. 71–72.
2. Hilgard, E., & G. Bower. *Theories of learning*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.
3. Schumacher, E. F. *A guide for the perplexed*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 39, 42.