

the behavioral sciences have helped make some Eastern psychological claims more comprehensible in Western conceptual terms.

The growing interest in Asian psychologies also appears to be part of a larger trend within Western intellectual culture. Within philosophy Asian systems command increasing attention and are now the focus of several journals. Even some physicists have become intrigued by possible convergences of Eastern and Western thought.<sup>6</sup>

Taken together, these data suggest that we may have underestimated the potential benefits of researching and understanding Asian psychologies. These benefits may include new perspectives on psychological functioning, potential, and pathology; awareness of Asian therapies and techniques (e.g. Morita therapy, meditation, and yoga); and greater empathy with Asian immigrant patients. In addition, the study of other paradigms and cultures often has the healthy effect of revealing one's own unsuspected ethnocentric assumptions and paradigmatic presuppositions. While several papers have reported on various aspects of Asian psychologies, e.g., meditation, as yet no major review or overview of the Asian psychologies themselves has appeared in a central psychological journal, and most psychologists remain unaware of recent advances in our understanding of these systems. This paper therefore aims to provide a necessarily brief overview and analysis of key concepts of two classical Asian psychologies, and their possible interface with Western theory and research.

Before doing so two concerns need to be addressed. The first is whether these systems, or at least parts of them, can really be regarded and investigated as psychologies. The second is whether advocating researching them necessarily means, as some critics have stated, accepting or advocating their correlative philosophies and world views.

The psychological, philosophical and religious divisions of Eastern systems are sometimes less separated than in the West, "due in part to the Oriental insistence on the wholeness of life and knowledge"<sup>7</sup> (p. 2). However, there are many Asian texts on mental functioning and numerous detailed discussions—in strictly psychological, nonreligious, and nonphilosophical terms—of clearly psychological topics such as motivation, emotion, thought, conditioning, consciousness, identity, perception, pathology, addiction, and more. Indeed, some investigators have argued that these systems are primarily psychologies. At the very least it appears that parts of several Asian traditions can be regarded as psychological in nature and can be investigated accordingly.

Moreover, the fact that these psychological systems come linked to corresponding philosophies should prove neither a disqualifier nor a surprise; all psychologies, including Western ones, are dependent on, and subsets of, philosophies and cosmologies. Indeed, "psychology always presupposes cosmology"<sup>8</sup> (p. 175). Psychologists often forget this and then "think they

## Two Asian Psychologies and Their Implications for Western Psychotherapists

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*In the past, mainstream Western mental health professionals tended to ignore or dismiss Asian psychologies. However, in recent years they have attracted increasing attention and growing evidence suggests that we may have underestimated their potential contributions.<sup>1</sup> This paper provides an introduction to two classical Asian psychologies and certain of their key concepts about human nature, pathology, and potential and psychotherapeutic techniques. Relevant Western research and theory are reviewed, and the implications of these Asian psychologies for, and areas of possible interface with, Western psychology, psychotherapy, and science are examined.*

In his review of international psychology Mark Rosenzweig<sup>1</sup> lamented that "in striking contrast to other disciplines, mental health professionals in the United States have tended to ignore or neglect psychology abroad" (pp. 877-78). This neglect has been especially marked for classical Asian psychologies, which have often been dismissed as only primitive superstitions. More recently Western researchers have begun to recognize that certain Asian psychologies may be sophisticated and worthy of study; and in addition a growing number of Westerners, including mental health professionals, have begun personal explorations of Asian disciplines.

In part, this growing interest in Asian systems reflects developments in the behavioral sciences. Experimental studies of, for example, meditation, biofeedback, and states of consciousness have made some of the Eastern claims more understandable. Likewise, theoretical studies have found aspects of some Asian psychologies to be comprehensible from the perspectives of several Western schools, including cognitive, interpersonal, developmental, behavior modification, existential, Jungian, transpersonal, Freudian, object relations, and self-control theories.<sup>2,3</sup>

In addition, increased understanding of the effects of allegiance to any model or theory suggests that our Western assumptions and beliefs may have resulted in a paradigm clash with Asian systems, thereby reducing our ability to appreciate their possible validity.<sup>4,5</sup> These various developments in

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can ignore philosophy, whereas in fact their empirical-analytical psychology rests on extensive systems of hidden metaphysics and arbitrary epistemic assumptions"<sup>9</sup> (p. 75). Personally, however, I can see no reason why one has to adopt, say, Buddhist philosophy and religion, in order to research Asian psychologies and therapies any more than one has to adopt, for example, philosophies of materialism and atheism in order to study behaviorism.

Several of the most sophisticated Asian traditions display significant commonalities across cultures and centuries, and their religious, philosophical, and psychological divisions have therefore been referred to as aspects of, respectively, the perennial religion or wisdom,<sup>10</sup> the perennial philosophy and the perennial psychology.<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that they lack differences, inconsistencies and contradictions, both within and among themselves. These they certainly have and future researchers will need to catalogue them more precisely. It is to say, though, that the broad outlines of human nature, pathology, and potential described by the more sophisticated psychologies display significant convergence.

Foremost among these more sophisticated psychologies are Hindu and Buddhist psychologies. I will draw on these most deeply in the following discussion, particularly classical (Theravadin) Buddhism, since "of the great traditions it is Buddhism which puts its message most psychologically"<sup>12</sup> (p. 267). Although many of the concepts to be discussed are also common to other Asian systems, e.g., Taoist, Neoconfucian, and Sufi traditions, hereafter, "Asian psychologies" will refer specifically to the Hindu and Buddhist systems. I will first provide a broad overview, examine certain of their claims about human nature, pathology, and health, discuss their psychotherapeutic techniques and then survey relevant Western research.

Ken Wilber<sup>11</sup> has suggested that psychologies and therapies can be viewed as addressing three major levels of health and development: pathological, existential, and transpersonal (liberation, transcendence). Western psychologists have developed sophisticated maps of pathologies and techniques for alleviating them and recently have begun to focus more on existential issues.<sup>13,14</sup> However, as Gordon Allport remarked<sup>10</sup> (p. 161), as yet we have "on the psychology of liberation—nothing."

The reverse holds for Hindu and Buddhist psychologies. They focus primarily on the existential and transpersonal levels and contain detailed maps of states of consciousness, peak experiences, and developmental levels that appear to lie beyond traditional Western psychological descriptions. They also claim to possess technologies for inducing these states and conditions in their practitioners. However, Asian psychologies clearly lack the West's sophisticated understanding and detailed analyses of areas such as early development, psychodynamics, psychopathology, the unconscious and "divided consciousness," and appear to have very little to offer to those suffering severe psychological disturbances.<sup>15</sup>

### OVERVIEW OF KEY CONCEPTS

Let us now examine the model of human nature suggested by these two Asian psychologies under the headings of consciousness, identity, motivation, psychopathology, and mental health.

#### Consciousness

Around the turn of the century, William James<sup>16</sup> (p. 298) remarked that:

... our normal waking consciousness... is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness. . . . No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question.

Asian psychologies agree fully. They recognize a broad spectrum of states of consciousness and provide detailed descriptions of their phenomenology, residual effects on personality, techniques for attaining them, and developmental sequence of appearance. It is not just the existence of multiple states that is held to be important, but the fact the some of them may be associated with state specific properties and abilities less available in our usual state. Perceptual sensitivity and clarity, concentration, sense of identity, affective, cognitive, and perceptual processes—all are said to vary with the state of consciousness in apparently precise and predictable ways.<sup>17</sup>

Some of these states are held to be "functionally specific," and a few to be true "higher states."<sup>14</sup> Functionally specific states are those in which certain functions are said to be improved while others become less effective. For example, yogic *samadhi* states marked by deep calm and concentration may be conducive to introspective exploration but dysfunctional for social interaction. True higher states are defined as those which possess the capacities present in the usual condition, plus heightened or additional ones. Such states, it is said, may be accompanied by perceptions, insights, and affects outside the realm of day-to-day experience, some of which may facilitate psychological and religious maturation.

It follows that if higher states exist, then our usual state must be suboptimal, and this is exactly the claim of the Asian psychologies, which describe our usual state as hypnotic or dreamlike. All of us are aware of times when we daydream and become lost in fantasy and dialogue. The Asian psychologies claim that, for the untrained mind, these fantasies are significantly more subtle, pervasive, distorting, and befogging than we realize. Their extent and consequences are said to remain unrecognized because, like psychological defense mechanisms, they are partially self-masking and because the phenomenon is so prevalent in the population.

The result is an unrecognized, encompassing, and illusory distortion of perception and experience called *maya* which is said to remain unrecognized until we subject our perceptual-cognitive processes to careful trained introspection such as in meditation. Thus, our usual "normal" state is said to be dreamlike or a form of "consensus trance."<sup>18</sup> People who succeed in eradicating this dream are said to have awakened and this awakening, known in various cultures as liberation, satori, moksha, or enlightenment, is the aim of the Asian disciplines.

To some extent this is an extension of Western psychology and psychiatry. Many researchers have argued that we are less aware of our own cognitive processes than we usually assume.<sup>19</sup> Asian psychologies agree but suggest that this awareness can be enhanced by meditative training, a claim now supported by studies of perceptual processing in advanced meditators.<sup>17,20</sup>

In addition, experimental observations reveal a broad range of usually unrecognized cognitive-perceptual distortion and automaticities, many of which appear similar to those described by Hindu and Buddhist psychologies. Considerable Western research has revealed that, contrary to many implicit assumptions in psychology, a major part—quite possibly *the* major part—of behavior is carried out mindlessly.<sup>21</sup> Mindlessness refers to the absence of conscious active information processing and constitutes an unrecognized and often deleterious unconscious automaticity of supposedly conscious cognition and behavior. Conversely mindfulness training, either through the practice of active distinction making or through meditation has been found to enhance both objective measures of cognitive performance and subjective measures of well-being, and interestingly, also longevity.<sup>22</sup>

There is, therefore, significant agreement between Western research and Asian observations on the unrecognized mindlessness of much of our usual cognitive processes. However the Asian claims go further in asserting that mindlessness affects us all more subtly, pervasively, and deleteriously than is usually recognized in Western psychology and in recommending therapies, primarily meditation, for treating it.

### Identity

Asian psychologies tend to espouse a view of our sense of self or identity that differs markedly from our everyday Western assumptions but has some similarities to the conclusions of several Western schools of psychology and philosophy. In line with their claims about the distorted nature of our usual state of consciousness, Buddhist and Hindu psychologies suggest that our usual sense of identity is also distorted.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, they state that this claim may be directly tested by anyone willing to minutely examine mental contents and processes by cultivating introspective sensitivity via meditative-yogic practices to develop "the keenness, subtlety, and quickness of cognitive

response required for such delicate mental microscopy"<sup>23</sup> (p. 7). This claim is consistent with the phenomenological focus of Asian psychologies, and their emphasis on direct personal experience, and testing of their theories and techniques.<sup>11</sup>

What has been reported by meditators, especially Buddhist meditators, across millennia, and more recently by Westerners (including psychologists),<sup>24,25</sup> trained in these meditative practices, is that under such microscopic examination, what was formerly assumed to be a relatively consistent, permanent self sense (self, self-construct, self-representation) is seen as, or (in phenomenological terminology) is deconstructed to, a continuously changing flux of thoughts, images, and emotions. This dissection of experience and identity into a ceaseless flux is of course similar to the reports of Western introspectionists such as the philosophers David Hume, Henri Bergson, and William James. Hume, for example, in a description that might be mistaken for that of a 2,000 year old Buddhist text, concluded that the self is "nothing but a bundle of collections of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux"<sup>26</sup> (p. 169). Various Western "Bundle theories" have been debated right up to the 1987 American Philosophical Association meeting.

Psychoanalytic object relations theory has also developed a view of the "self" or "self-representation" that overlaps the Buddhist picture. For both systems:

What we take to be our "self" and feel to be so present and real is actually an internalized image, a composite representation, constructed by a selective and imaginative "remembering" of past encounters with the object world. In fact, the self is viewed as being constructed anew from moment to moment. But both systems further agree that the self is not ordinarily experienced this way<sup>15</sup> (p. 33).

In summary, then, both Buddhist psychology and several schools of Western psychology and philosophy have reached conclusions about the nature of the "self" that differ significantly from usual assumptions. The usual sense of the self as continuous, consistent, and stable over time has been described as an illusory construction of imprecise awareness. Closer examination reveals this continuous self-sense to be selectively constructed from a flux of mental contents; a process that might be likened to the flicker fusion phenomenon.

Asian psychologies suggest that when such close examination is practiced over time, as in meditation, then the continued recognition of this illusory nature of the usual self-sense leads to corresponding shifts in identity. The formerly taken-for-granted sense of identity and ego boundaries is increasingly recognized as relative, arbitrary, and constructed rather than given. Rather, the self-sense is experienced as subject to greater voluntary control as

well as increasingly fluid and encompassing, eventually including a sense of identity with all people. As this process continues, awareness is said to identify less and less with any one thing, *fixedly or exclusively*, and in the absence of fixed identification with any one thing to the exclusion of another thing, the *me/not-me*, *self/not-self* boundaries and dichotomies become increasingly fluid and transparent—but, as will be discussed below, in ways apparently quite different from psychotic fusion of self- and object representations. Such persons are said to experience themselves as being both pure awareness (no-thing) and one with, or identified with, all people and the entire universe (*every-thing*). From this state of consciousness, the words of yogis proclaiming across the centuries that “we are one” apparently make experiential sense and the thought of harming “others” therefore makes no sense whatsoever. Rather, the natural expressions of this state are said to be love and compassion or *agape*.

Similar unitive experiences have been reported in the West among contemplatives,<sup>27</sup> subjects in exceptionally deep hypnotic states,<sup>4</sup> patients in advanced therapy,<sup>13</sup> experimental psychedelic sessions<sup>28</sup> and as spontaneous peak experiences.<sup>5</sup> These experiences are under significant voluntary control only in contemplatives, either Eastern or Western, but interestingly, enduring positive aftereffects on personality have been reported for all these conditions and the approaches that induce them have therefore been collectively named “holotropic therapies,” i.e., growth towards wholeness or unity.<sup>28</sup> At the least it appears that the potential fluidity of ego boundaries in healthy normals may have been underestimated.<sup>11</sup>

Asian practitioners who manage to stabilize such states claim that they no longer automatically identify with mental contents and processes such as thoughts, images, and emotions. In our usual state if a thought such as “I’m scared” occurs, then the tendency is to automatically and unconsciously (i.e., mindlessly) assume it to be a valid statement about our condition, i.e. we identify our self with the thought. However, if the thought is observed with trained awareness then it is said to be recognized as what it is—merely a thought. The person is said to now experience himself or herself as pure awareness, an equanimous observer of this thought (and other thoughts, emotions, images, and sensations) who is aware of, but unidentifiable with, and hence transcendent to and undisturbed by, mental contents and processes.<sup>24</sup> Since it is these contents and processes rather than awareness per se that are conditioned, then the result is said to be an experience of being freed from, or transcendent to, conditioning. Conditioned thoughts and emotions still pass through the mind, but without identification with them, awareness is now experienced as unconditioned or liberated and universal.

Similar conclusions have also appeared in the West. Jung<sup>29</sup> (p. 291) argued that “the deeper layers of the psyche . . . become increasingly

collective until they are universalized” and William James<sup>30</sup> (p. 324) suggested that “there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness against which our individuality builds but accidental forces and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother sea.” “It is chiefly our ignorance of the psyche if these experiences appear ‘mystic,’” claimed Jung<sup>31</sup> (p. 535).

Since Western psychiatrists are most familiar with the disappearance of self-other boundaries during borderline and major psychoses, it is understandable that ego transcendence has frequently been dismissed as regressive psychopathology. Thus for example, Freud interpreted oceanic experiences as indicative of infantile helplessness, and the eminent psychiatrist Alexander saw meditation training as self-induced catatonia. Likewise, mystical experiences have sometimes been interpreted as neurotic regressions to union with the breast, and enlightenment dismissed as regression to intrauterine stages. Indeed, traditional psychoanalytic models may tend to discount all transpersonal experiences as defensive maneuverings or pathological regressions.<sup>5</sup>

However, in recent years closer examination of the Eastern descriptions and phenomenological studies of meditators have revealed the inappropriateness of such interpretations. Careful comparisons reveal major differences between pathological egoic dissolution or pre-egoic regression on the one hand and trans-egoic disidentification, on the other. Thus, for example, Wilber<sup>32</sup> (p. 78) points out that schizophrenic or infantile fusion “is pre-subject/object differentiation, which means the infant cannot distinguish subject from object. But the mystic union (*sahaj samadhi*) in trans-subject/object, which means that it transcends subject and object, while remaining perfectly aware of that conventional duality.” Wilber has provided sophisticated analyses of the various forms of this “pre-trans fallacy” as he calls it, and in light of these studies it is now apparent that “pre and trans can be seriously equated only by those whose intellectual inquiry goes no further than superficial impressions”<sup>32</sup> (p. 78).

Asian psychologies agree with existential and psychoanalytic claims about the impossibility of resolving all psychodynamic and existential conflicts. For Freud and the existentialists, these unresolved givens are to be accepted and borne with courage and authenticity.<sup>13,14</sup> However, the Asian psychologies go beyond the existential and psychodynamic claims to suggest that these conflicts can be transcended by shifting to states of consciousness in which one now no longer exclusively identifies with that which suffers, i.e., the egoic self-sense. From this perspective, the existentialists might be said to have rediscovered a millennia-old view, best known as the Buddha’s first noble truth but common to several Asian psychologies and philosophies; namely, that (for the untrained mind) suffering is an inescapable part of life.<sup>24</sup> However, the Asian systems claim to go further, and the Buddha, for example, in the remaining three noble truths, which are discussed below, pointed to a fundamental cause of suffering and a means for escaping it.

### Motivation

Asian psychologies tend to see motives as hierarchically organized in a manner analogous to the models suggested by Abraham Maslow and Ken Wilber.<sup>32</sup> (Maslow's model has been widely researched, but to date the evidence on its validity remains inconclusive [Wahb & Bridwell, 1976]). Wilber's model is more sophisticated and explicitly builds on and integrates a wide range of developmental theories, including Maslow's.) This is most apparent within the Hindu yogic system which agrees that motives with a clear physiological and survival basis such as hunger and thirst are most powerful and predominant. When these "prepotent" needs are fulfilled, then less powerful "postpotent" needs such as sexual and power strivings, for example, may emerge as effective motivators in their turn and after them "higher" motives such as the pull toward self-transcendence. Self-transcendence, lying beyond even self-actualization, was the highest motive recognized by Maslow<sup>33</sup> but some Asian psychologies suggest that a still higher order human motive may be selfless service,<sup>34</sup> and this is discussed in more detail below.

The question of the nature of the fundamental human motive (if such there be) has repeatedly split Western psychology. The extremes are perhaps represented by Freudian and Rogerian perspectives. For Freud all higher order motives are distortions of, and therefore reducible to, libido and for Rogers<sup>35</sup> (p. 184) "the basic actualizing tendency is the only motive which is postulated." They therefore tend to collapse or elevate all motives into lower or higher order drives respectively. Yogic psychology tends to be "elevationist" since it regards the pull to self-transcendence as fundamental and other drives as "substitute gratifications"<sup>32</sup> that, because they are dependent on the possession of material objects or social position, provide only temporary, partial, and environmentally dependent satisfaction.

These limitations of "substitute gratifications" are closely tied to a motivational factor that is given great emphasis in many Asian psychologies, namely craving or attachment. Craving most closely corresponds to our Western concept of addiction and is regarded as a major cause of psychopathology and suffering. Indeed, in his second noble truth, the Buddha stated that all suffering is ultimately rooted in craving. Logically enough, the Buddha's third and fourth truths state that suffering can be escaped by extinguishing craving.<sup>24</sup>

Asian psychologies extend the concept of addiction beyond the range with which we usually associate it in the West, i.e., addiction to drugs and food. Rather, they point out that addiction can occur to practically anything, including material possessions, relationships, the prevailing status quo, as well as to internal phenomena such as self image, affects, and beliefs. The condemnation of addiction to people or relationships does not imply, as some Western psychologists have mistakenly believed, that Asian psychologies or

philosophies necessarily argue against intimacy, love, and relationships although it is true that at times they may recommend periods of solitude in order to focus on inner work. Rather the Asian concern is more with pathological emotional attachments such as we see most clearly in overly dependent patients or in the newly popular syndrome of "women who love too much."<sup>36</sup> Addiction is also said to create its mirror image, aversion, which is the desire to escape from or attack unpleasant stimuli. Whereas addiction demands experiencing and possessing a stimulus, aversion demands avoiding or destroying it. Addiction to something is said to automatically breed aversion, and hence anger and defensiveness, towards those people or things that threaten our possession of it. Addiction and aversion are therefore viewed as the two major problematic and pathogenic motives. From this perspective, psychological suffering constitutes a feedback signal indicating the existence of addictions and aversions and the need to relinquish them.

### Psychopathology

As previously mentioned, the major focus of Hindu and Buddhist psychologies is on the existential and transpersonal levels and they have remarkably little to say or offer with regard to severe psychopathology which they tend to regard merely as an exacerbation of "the psychopathology of everyday life." Psychoses and severe neurotic reactions, for example, go largely unanalyzed and one searches in vain for descriptions of psychodynamics and defense mechanisms. Rather, their focus is much more on "normal pathology" and they tend to agree with Maslow<sup>33</sup> (p. 16) that "what we call 'normal' in psychology is really a psychopathology of the average, so undramatic and so widely spread that we don't even notice it."

The roots of this pathology, both individual and social, are usually said, particularly in Theravadin Buddhism, to include ignorance, craving (attachment/addiction), and aversion.<sup>24</sup> Ignorance here refers not to factual knowledge of the world, but rather to ignorance or misunderstanding of one's psyche and true nature. If one's mind and true nature go misunderstood, then one's self-concept must necessarily be erroneous and from this erroneous self-concept are said to arise pathology-inducing beliefs and behaviors, especially attachment and aversion. The mind ruled by attachment and aversion is said to be a slave of every situation and environment in which it finds itself, and to be constantly involved in a never-ending search to get what it wants and avoid what it fears. However, as will be discussed below, from the Asian perspective psychological health and happiness are said to be dependent, not so much on the satisfaction of these cravings, as on their extinction.

### Mental Health

Since the Asian psychologies focus on the transpersonal level, their ideal of health is one of enlightenment or liberation, rather than only egoic adjustment to, or compromise with, psychodynamic and existential givens. Logically enough, the means for attaining health include the reduction of the pathogenic factors of attachment, aversion, and ignorance.

However, mental health is also defined in positive terms and part of the training in Asian disciplines consists of cultivating and strengthening specific healthy qualities. Thus, for example, Buddhist psychology speaks of "the seven factors of enlightenment" that must be cultivated to requisite levels before enlightenment can occur.<sup>24</sup> These seven factors—effort, rapture (delight in the awareness and exploration of experience), investigation, calm, concentration, equanimity, and mindfulness—may be divided into the categories of three arousing, three calming, and one balancing factor. Effort, rapture, and exploration are qualities which tend to arouse the mind; calm, equanimity, and concentration tend to quiet it. The factor of mindfulness, which might be regarded as a refinement of the psychoanalytic "observing ego," is the quality of precise awareness of the nature of the stimuli being observed and is said to cultivate awareness and balance the arousing and calming factors.

This model allows an interesting comparison between Eastern and Western psychotherapies. Western approaches have almost universally emphasized the arousing factors of effort and exploration, while possible potentiating effects of the mental stability conferred by calm, equanimity, and concentration have been less appreciated. By contrast, certain Asian practices appear to overemphasize the calming factors, resulting in euphoric states of calm and concentration without sufficient attention to the activating, exploring side.<sup>5</sup> Buddhist psychology emphasizes that it is the cultivation and balancing of both sides of this dichotomy that results in true wisdom and liberation.<sup>24</sup>

It is obvious that the predominant motives of a person freed of greed and aversion would be quite different from those that drive most of us. Indeed, the enlightened individual is said to be compelled not at all by the "physical foursome" of money, power, prestige, and sensuality, or indeed by egocentric desires in general. In the words of the sixth-century Zen patriarch Sengtsan,<sup>37</sup> "For the unified mind in accord with the Way, all self-centered striving ceases."

For such a person it is said that the major remaining motives are compassion and selfless service, the desire to act in a manner that will most effectively contribute to the well-being of others.<sup>34</sup> "Fools think only of their own interest, while the sage is concerned with the benefit of others. What a world of difference between them"<sup>38</sup> (p. 195). This concern with compas-

sion and service runs counter to a common Western assumption that the ultimate goal of all Asian disciplines is withdrawal from society and solitary awakening. Some traditions do emphasize this but for most such withdrawal is regarded as a temporary phase to be followed by a return to society to share one's learning. This is an example of what the historian Arnold Toynbee<sup>39</sup> called "the cycle of withdrawal and return" which he claimed marked the lives of many of humankind's major contributors.

This Eastern claim for a correlation between psychological maturity or well-being and an orientation towards service finds support in both Western theory and research. For example, Adler's "social interest," Erikson's "generativity" and the Harvard sociologist Sorokin's "creative altruism" are said to be essential expressions of successful adult development, while Maslow<sup>40</sup> (p. 280) claimed that "self-actualizing people are, without one single exception, involved in a cause outside their own skin."

These claims are consistent with a significant body of Western research that points to correlations between psychological well-being and service orientation.<sup>34,41</sup> This research suggests that "the synergistic fusing of personal interests and prosocial cooperation is most expressed by individuals with such characteristics as identity, self-actualization, and principled moral reasoning"<sup>41</sup> (p. 771). Here Eastern psychologies and Western research are in agreement and lend support to what seems to be a growing feeling that Western psychology may have underestimated the significance of service and altruistic motivation in general and especially as a means to, and an expression of, psychological maturation.<sup>34</sup>

### GROWTH TECHNIQUES

Asian psychologies aim at bringing perceptual, cognitive, and affective processes under greater voluntary control. Mental training is therefore regarded as a *sine qua non*, and yet as one of the most demanding tasks a human being can undertake, often requiring decades of intense training. In the words of Ramana Maharshi, one of this century's most respected Hindu teachers, "No one succeeds without effort. Mind control is not your birthright. Those who succeed owe their liberation to perseverance"<sup>42</sup> (p. 9). The Swiss existential psychiatrist Medard Boss<sup>43</sup> (p. 188), who was one of the first Westerners to examine Asian practices, tended to agree and suggested that, compared with the extent of yogic self-exploration, "even the best Western training analysis is not much more than an introductory course."

Though they aim for similar goals, Asian approaches may focus on different perceptual, cognitive, and affective processes. However, all of them employ training in ethics and controlling attention.

Asian psychologies do not view ethical training as a moralistic system to be enforced by external rules but rather as a mind-training discipline constituting both a necessary means and goal of any advanced psychological

maturation. All unethical behavior is said to both stem from and further reinforce attachment, aversion, delusion, and associated unhealthy factors. Ethical behavior, conversely, is said to countercondition these unhealthy forces and to cultivate healthy mental factors such as kindness, compassion, calm, and love. The end goal is an automatic all-encompassing ethicality<sup>44</sup> and this goal is similar to the highest (seventh) level of moral development posited by Lawrence Kohlberg,<sup>32</sup> a level explicitly grounded in transcendent experience. Given the dangers of moralizing and the efforts to be value free it is not surprising that the use of ethicality as a therapeutic technique has rarely been attempted in Western therapy although preliminary studies have reported positive results<sup>45</sup> and the idea probably warrants further study.

Attentional training, primarily through the practice of meditation, is also an inherent part of Asian systems, which agree with William James that for most of us voluntary attention cannot be sustained.<sup>46</sup> The untrained mind is said to be highly distractible, a slave to addictions and aversions, captured by any attractive or unpleasant stimuli, and overwhelmed by automatic reactions such as anger, desire, and fear. Developing attentional control is held to be necessary in order to overcome this attentional lability and thereby reduce unhealthy mind states, cultivate healthy ones, and explore the workings of mind in depth. This view is common to both Asian and Western contemplatives<sup>47</sup> and is again in agreement with William James<sup>48</sup> (p. 133), who claimed that:

The faculty of bringing back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgement, character, and will. No one is *compos sui* if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence. . . . It is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about.

Eastern psychologies claim to provide these practical directions.

In addition to these general principles, individual practices focus on specific mental processes and qualities. For example, bhakti yoga focuses on the cultivation of love through contemplation of loved objects such as a teacher, saint, or God; whereas karma yoga emphasizes the relinquishment of addictions and egocentric motivation through selfless service to others, while jnana yoga works with the intellect to pare away false self-concepts and determine the precise nature of identity. Meditative and contemplative practices constitute perhaps the major therapeutic tools of the Asian psychologies, and depending upon how they are used, may be employed to further any one or more of these growth strategies.

#### THE QUESTION OF VALIDITY

Although the pictures of human nature painted by Asian psychologies show many parallels and extensions of Western ideas, they also show major

differences. What data can be found to support their claims? As yet support is limited, and confined for the most part to laboratory and clinical findings and theoretical positions that are congruent with, rather than direct tests and validations of, Asian claims. Supportive fields of research include studies of states of consciousness, state-dependent learning, lucid dreaming, meditation, biofeedback, and phenomenology.

After a long period of ambivalence, consciousness is again becoming a respectable topic in Western psychology and research on states of consciousness has produced several findings consistent with Asian claims. Studies of certain states, whether experimentally induced as by hypnosis or drugs or occurring spontaneously as in Maslow's "peak experiences," suggest parallels with transcendent states described by Eastern psychologies. Also consistent with Eastern claims are the findings that such states are more likely to occur in the psychologically healthy and may produce psychologically beneficial effects.<sup>13,33</sup> This echoes Jung's<sup>47</sup> (p. 377) claim that "the approach to the numinous is the real therapy and in as much as you attain to the numinous experience you are released from the curse of pathology."

A related point of East-West convergence is the recent finding that unitive states may be the object of a basic human striving, a point long claimed by Asian psychologies. Both laboratory studies<sup>48</sup> and clinical observations have led to "a growing awareness of the force and validity of another striving, that for unity, symbiosis, fusion".<sup>49</sup> Indeed for Erich Fromm<sup>50</sup> the basic human problem was "how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union, how to transcend one's individual life and find at-onement."

Another point of convergence is "lucid dreaming" in which subjects are aware that they are dreaming and can, within certain limits, consciously control their dream experience. For 1,200 years Tibetan Buddhists have cultivated lucid dreaming as a means for training and understanding the mind. However as Globus<sup>51</sup> notes, in the West lucid dreaming was largely ignored or even declared impossible until the work of LaBerge<sup>52</sup> at Stanford University conclusively demonstrated its existence, mapped its phenomenology and psychophysiology, and noted significant similarities between the phenomenological reports of Western research subject and ancient Tibetan accounts.

Similarly laboratory studies tend to support some Eastern claims for state dependency. Both ancient Asian practices and recent Western research suggest that information or insights acquired in one state of consciousness may be limited to that state and show only partial transfer to other states.<sup>4</sup>

A significant body of research now suggests that meditation may evoke a range of psychological and physiological effects consistent with certain Eastern claims.<sup>6,25</sup> Initial studies, especially those produced by the TM organization, often lacked adequate controls (e.g., for expectation and simple relaxation effects) and were often privately published. Fortunately, medita-

tion research has become significantly more sophisticated<sup>3</sup> and the literature now contains several hundred studies in refereed journals. Meditation processes have also been made more comprehensible from a Western conceptual framework by recent cognitive,<sup>17</sup> self-control,<sup>3</sup> object relations,<sup>15</sup> and developmental<sup>27</sup> interpretations.

Empirical studies suggest that several relaxation and clinical effects appear to be common to a variety of rest/relaxation procedures,<sup>3</sup> whereas certain metabolic and perceptual responses may be unique to meditation.<sup>25</sup> Rorschach tests reveal a range of unique patterns including, just as traditional meditative literature claims, at the most advanced meditative levels, responses that show "no evidence of sexual aggressive drive conflicts"<sup>17</sup> (p. 214). Likewise, tachistoscopic studies of advanced meditators have revealed greater speed and subtlety of perceptual processing than was formerly thought possible.<sup>20</sup> On the negative side Western clinicians have found that meditation practice may occasionally induce psychological complications including anxiety, depersonalization, and in individuals with a history of schizophrenia, psychosis.<sup>25</sup> These complications are rarely mentioned in Asian literature. The overall therapeutic picture may therefore be similar to Western psychotherapies in that while the majority may benefit a minority may regress.

One longstanding question is to what extent the experience and stages of meditation are common to different traditions and cultures. Recently researchers have begun to apply developmental psychology models to this question. Several careful studies, for example Wilber's,<sup>27,32</sup> have concluded that specific stages of meditation can be identified cross culturally although debate on their universality continues. Comparisons of Asian stages with those of traditional Western contemplatives are also beginning to yield fascinating parallels<sup>27</sup> but unfortunately space does not allow elaboration of them here.

Two other areas of East-West convergence may be biofeedback and phenomenology. Although claims for its effectiveness were initially greatly exaggerated, biofeedback has at least confirmed the yogic claims of the possibility of voluntary regulation of the autonomic nervous system, a feat Western psychologists formerly thought impossible. Given the strong emphasis on phenomenology in Buddhist and Hindu systems, it is perhaps not surprising that some Western phenomenologists have commented on similarities between certain of their findings and those of their Eastern counterparts. Thus, for example, Martin Heidegger, speaking of this century's foremost Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki said, "If I understand (him) correctly, this is what I have been trying to say in all of my writings"<sup>53</sup> (p. xi).

A more dubious convergence is that between Eastern disciplines and contemporary physics whose apparent parallels have excited considerable

popular interest and it has been claimed that physics is now validating ancient Asian wisdom.<sup>6</sup> However, the validity and limits of extrapolating from the ontological realms of physics to those of the Eastern disciplines are controversial.<sup>34</sup> In summary, therefore, though data in several fields of research appear consistent with Eastern claims, the support offered by contemporary physics, contrary to popular thinking, remains moot.

#### SUMMARY

It appears that, although Hindu and Buddhist psychologies differ in significant ways from traditional Western models, certain of their claims seem compatible with a growing range of Western theory and research and in certain areas may extend Western concepts. Their claims regarding, for example, the nature of identity, motivation, and states of consciousness, the causes of pathology and suffering, the nature and potentials of psychological health, and the possibilities for mind training hold implications for both psychiatric theory and therapeutic application. However, the extent to which their individual claims will stand the test of experimental research remains to be seen. But, at the very least it is clear that Asian psychologies warrant careful study and research.

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