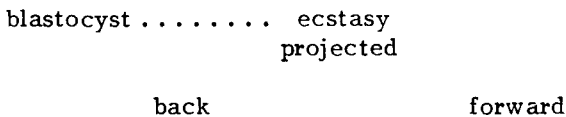


by regression to pre-natal life. Wasdell (1982) has suggested that a period of extreme constriction upon the earth's resources brings out not the infantile dynamics charted by Bion, but memories of struggles belonging to the time before birth. These theories are again pessimistic in the sense I am using. Is there an optimistic possibility too?

I want to argue that there is, and that the relevant transpersonal experience is that of ecstasy. Such experience has sometimes been seen as a reliving of a blissful state in the womb, where the foetus enjoys a floating paradise in the amniotic fluid. Recently Lake has suggested (1981) that its roots lie still earlier, at the stage of the blastocyst. Members of his primal groups have reported "going back to an astonishing sense of being perfectly self-subsistent, of radiant wholeness and blessedness . . .". Sceptics may question the "going back", but it is remarkable that myths of paradise appear that often refer to a past state of bliss, an Eden, as well as to a future one, a possible or even imminent Utopia. If ecstasy is a reliving of blastocystic bliss, then it is possible that, being in a sense a memory, it will be projected on to a fantasised past of the social group to which the individual belongs. Such may be the origin of the Greek myth of the Golden Age.



Eden

Utopia

Nigel Collingwood
ECSTASY AND INFANCY
 A reply to John Rowan's reply

I am grateful to John Rowan for putting me on to Ken Wilber's writings. If the latter is correct in the main lines of his impressive synthesis of psychology and mysticism, then my article on **Ecstasy and Politics** certainly

contains "the pre-trans fallacy". However, having read **The Spectrum of Consciousness** (referred to below as TSOC), **The Atman Project (TAP)**, **Up from Eden (UFE)** and **Eye to Eye (ETE)**, I would like to offer some reasons for thinking the question not yet finally resolved.

Whereas most people who try to relate the developmental stages of western psychology to those of a mainly eastern spirituality have tended to overlay one on the other in some way, Wilber sees them as one continuous series, "the Great Chain of Being". It is noticeable that for all his confident style, he sometimes introduces his model quite tentatively: "Let us then simply **assume** that the authentic mystic-sage represents the very highest stage of human development" (TAP p.3); "This model is offered hypothetically and experimentally, not dogmatically and conclusively" (ETE p.252). There is room for argument here.

Obviously an advantage of the model is the clarity which comes from precluding any reduction of the transpersonal to the prepersonal and vice versa. A possible disadvantage is that it commits its followers to a thoroughgoing evaluation of consciousness in terms of higher and lower. The closer a form of consciousness is to matter, the lower it is. Indeed, Wilber tells us that it was a remark of Piaget's on the material quality of the infant's state of fusion with the mother enabled him to arrive at his view of the pre-personal as ignorant (TAP p.x; see also ETE p.87 and UFE p.25). I take it that Piaget is there bringing out the fact that the infant's awareness at this stage is bodily and not conceptual. But this does not exclude the possibility that such awareness, and even earlier awareness before birth, has a quality analogous to what an adult, complete with language, would describe as, for example, "blissful". Indeed Wilber himself, writing of the two earlier phases of his scheme, speaks of "pleromatic paradise" (TAP p.8) and of the uroboric phase, "this prepersonal blissfulness" (ibid. p.10). Now clearly we need to make **some** distinction between such blissful experiences and those of adult mysticism. Wilber's way is to say that there is nothing in common at all, and to pour scorn on reductionist psychologists who either see early bliss as "really" mystical or see mysticism as "really" a return to infancy. I would tentatively suggest that another approach would be by means of a possible understanding of regression, and of pre-natal regression in particular. (Incidentally, apart from three charts in TSOC (pp.282-4), where Grof's work on Perinatal Matrices is mentioned, I have found no reference to pre-natal regression in these books: what is said of the time before birth refers to the involitional phase of the Hindu doctrine of the manifestation of Brahman). If we can regress to these early stages, we do not literally become fetuses and infants again, but rather we could be said to allow our adult organism to be pervaded by neurological patterns similar to those of the earlier period. We may still be able to perform the adult function of speech, and so to describe the feelings as they occur. But in so

far as our nervous system is much more developed than it was in infancy, the regressive experience can be expected to be much richer and more intense than the infant's original one, bearing a relationship to the latter somewhat like that of an orchestral transcription of a piece of music to its original version for the piano. Looking at it in this way no more makes mystical exploration pointless (with "no validity and no real meaning", in John Rowan's words) than study of the oak-tree is made pointless by the knowledge that the pattern of its development is somehow contained in the acorn.

Further, the possibility that prenatal regression can include experiences that you would expect Wilber to classify as transpersonal is strongly suggested by a case cited by Grof (1975, pp.112-4). A psychiatrist who under LSD felt himself to have the large head and small body of a foetus, then had quasimystical experiences of "being the universe". "On one level I was still a foetus experiencing the ultimate perfection and bliss of a good womb or a newborn fusing with a nourishing and life-giving breast. On another level, I became the entire universe; I was witnessing the spectacle of the macrocosm with countless pulsating and vibrating galaxies and **was** it at the same time" (ibid. p.113). Presumably Wilber would explain such an example either as a regression to "a paradise of innocence and ignorance" (TAP p.8), "the prepersonal fusion of 'infantile cosmic consciousness'" (ibid. p.x), or in terms of some kind of contamination of levels, as he does in the case of schizophrenia (see TAP pp.151-9).

Finally, another area where the "ignorance" of the prepersonal phase can be questioned is that of ESP. For Wilber the issue was clear when he wrote TSOC: "It is here (sc. at the Transpersonal Bands) that paranormal occurrences of ESP . . . are found (if indeed they exist" (p.266). Later he is more cautious: "Some texts suggest that certain paranormal events may more likely occur here" (sc. at level 5 of his seven-level model, i.e. beyond the rational level, see ETE p.250). However, David Boadella tells us (1979, pp.33-4) that some psychologists suggest that the symbiotic state of the first few weeks after birth is "a state where telepathy occurs naturally".

Thus, all in all, the question of a rigid separation of the prepersonal from the transpersonal does not yet appear to be closed.

References, apart from the books by Ken Wilber mentioned at the foot of John Rowan's article:

- Boadella David, **The Charge of Consciousness**, Abbotsbury Publications, Abbotsbury, 1979.
Grof, Stanislaus, **Realms of the Human Unconscious**, Souvenir, London, 1975.
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