

# SRI AUROBINDO AND TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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*ABSTRACT:* This article provides an overview of Sri Aurobindo's psychological thought and system of Integral Yoga Psychology (IYP). Relevant biographical and historical background is introduced, and his influence on the development of transpersonal psychology reviewed. Using Sri Aurobindo's cosmology of consciousness as a framework for transpersonal experience, IYP's model of planes of consciousness and parts of the being is explained and illustrated with quotations from Sri Aurobindo's writings. Emphasis is placed on the psychic being (soul) and overhead planes of consciousness, as these are central to IYP's psycho-spiritual method of transforming the ego. Finally, implications for transpersonal development and transpersonal therapy are formulated, and some clinical applications given.

## INTRODUCTION

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), the noted Indian spiritual teacher, is a seminal thinker whose writings have immense value for transpersonal psychology. In addition to interpreting the “perennial philosophy” to the West in an experientially authoritative and intellectually accurate fashion, he also made original contributions to transpersonal psychology. While several important transpersonal thinkers have been influenced by Sri Aurobindo's work (including Murphy, Wilber, Cortright, and others), this journal has never undertaken a comprehensive presentation of his psychological system. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to explain Sri Aurobindo's contributions to transpersonal psychology and provide readers with an overview to use in approaching his complex writings directly. Due to limited space, this article will be more theoretical than clinical, although clinical applications will be indicated in several places.

### *Biographical and Historical Background*

Born Aurobindo Ghose in Calcutta, on August 15, 1872, Aurobindo was educated in England and graduated at the top of his class at Cambridge, where he studied classics and imbibed both Christianity and the paradigm of Western rationalism. Aurobindo returned to his homeland in the 1890s with the aim of fostering Indian nationalism, and as a young man helped lead the first movement for Indian independence, which was put down by the British and later resuscitated by Gandhi. In 1910, after serving a yearlong prison sentence for sedition, Aurobindo moved to Pondicherry, then in the French territory of India, where he dedicated the rest of his life to his spiritual practice and teaching.

By the early 1920s, Aurobindo had gained recognition in India as an accomplished yogi, prompting the appellation of “Sri” Aurobindo (*Sri* is

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a Sanskrit term of respect given to important spiritual figures). In 1926, he founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, a small spiritual community, in conjunction with Mirra Alfassa (1878–1973), his French collaborator and co-teacher. Within the Ashram, Alfassa came to be called “the Mother,” in accordance with how female spiritual figures are honored in India. As the Mother, she administered all of the daily functions of the Ashram and personally guided residents in their *sadhana* (spiritual discipline). Sri Aurobindo always considered the Mother to be his spiritual peer, and contrary to some popular misconceptions, they were never married and had no romantic liaison. At the end of her life, the Mother also founded Auroville (located a few miles north of Pondicherry), an international community that seeks to evolve a new spiritually and materially sustainable lifestyle for the 21<sup>st</sup> millennium.

By the time of Sri Aurobindo’s passing in 1950, his reputation had grown international. Pearl Buck and others nominated him for the Nobel Prize in literature in 1950, and many think he would have won it had he lived. Since his passing, India has made stamps and coins in Sri Aurobindo’s honor, schoolbooks remember him as a founding father of the Indian nation, his bust sits permanently in the Indian Parliament, and he has become recognized as one of the leading Indian spiritual figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Heehs, 1989, for biographical details).

Culturally and philosophically, Sri Aurobindo’s key contributions to the ancient tradition of Indian yoga were to emphasize the spiritual possibilities of matter and embodied life on earth, and to counterbalance male images of the Divine (e.g., as Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma) with a renewed appreciation for the Divine as Mother (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957; Aurobindo, 1999). Sri Aurobindo thus belongs to the resurgence of the feminine principle that is felt elsewhere in modern religious and spiritual discourse, and the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother upholds the core values of modern feminism. Psychodynamically, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are especially interesting because they represent one of the rare instances in cultural history where both paternal and maternal role models are figured simultaneously in the role of spiritual teacher, and the distribution of authority between them is equal and symmetrically reciprocated. That fact alone should warrant further study of their work by transpersonal psychologists.

### *Influence on Transpersonal Psychology*

Sri Aurobindo’s ideas have already influenced the development of transpersonal psychology in many ways. Spiegelberg, who helped found the American Academy of Asian Studies, was an Aurobindo enthusiast and introduced Michael Murphy to the writings of Sri Aurobindo. Murphy actually studied in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the late 1950s, and his project at Esalen was in part inspired by this experience, as was his later work on transpersonal experiences of the body (Murphy, 1992; Taylor, 1999). At the same time, Chaudhuri, whom Sri Aurobindo handpicked to represent his Integral Yoga in the United States, was friendly with many of the leading figures of the West Coast renaissance in the 1950s and 1960s, and founded the Asian Institute of Integral Studies, which later became the California Institute of Integral Studies (Chaudhuri, 1965). Parsons,

who is currently documenting Murphy's work at Esalen, has also written insightfully on the subject of spiritual psychology with reference to Aurobindo (Parsons, 1999, and personal communication, 2004). Cortright, too, uses many of Sri Aurobindo's ideas in his transpersonal approach to psychotherapy and T-groups, and recently led a conference on transpersonal/yoga psychology in Auroville (Cortright, 1997, 2001; Cortright, Kahn, & Hess, 2003; and personal communication, 2005).

In addition, Wilber cites Sri Aurobindo often and ranks him as one of the pioneers of integral studies. Although Wilber feels Sri Aurobindo never fully assimilated the intersubjective (cultural) and interobjective (social) differentiations of modernity (Wilber, 2000, pp. 74–85), one may disagree as Sri Aurobindo's life and work suggest otherwise. Biographical evidence shows that he successfully blended Asian and Western values in his personal life (Heehs, 1989), thus demonstrating assimilation of the cultural relativity proposed by modernism, and his works on socio-cultural and geo-political evolution, *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*, are all about the developments in and differentiations among the three value spheres of art, ethics (morals), and science that Wilber considers central to modernity (Aurobindo, 1970c; Wilber, 2000, pp. 59–73). Furthermore, one has only to read accounts of Sri Aurobindo's support of the Allies in World War II, or his parting reflections on the cold war and the United Nations, to see that he grasped the fundamental issues of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as lucidly as any (Nirodbaran, 1972; Aurobindo, 1970c, pp. 556–571). Indeed, it is precisely because of Sri Aurobindo's modernism that contemporary Aurobindonian thinkers are so concerned about the pressing interpersonal, cultural, social, and political issues of our times (Lithman, 2003).

In India, Sri Aurobindo's work has had more impact through yoga than psychology, probably because yoga has such a long history in Indian culture. Nonetheless, several authors have published important presentations of Sri Aurobindo's psychological thought, many of them under the auspices of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. Sen was the first to write on the subject and coined the term "integral psychology" to characterize Sri Aurobindo's approach (Sen, 1986). Dalal has written several excellent collections of essays that compare Sri Aurobindo's ideas and Western psychology, and this article owes much to his efforts (Dalal, 2001a, 2001b). Vrinte has written comparative studies of Sri Aurobindo, Maslow, transpersonal psychology, and Wilber's work (Vrinte, 1995, 1996, 2002). Basu, a psychiatrist, developed an integral model of health based on Sri Aurobindo's work, which importantly gives due credit to scientific biomedicine and moves beyond the current model of complementary/alternative medicine (CAM) to a fully consciousness-based model (Basu, 2000). Cornelissen has organized several international conferences on integral psychology, resulting in two collections of essays (Cornelissen, 2001; Cornelissen & Joshi, 2004), and is presently collaborating with others to compile the first comprehensive textbook of Indian psychology (Cornelissen, Dalal, & Rao, forthcoming). Rao, who is co-heading this project and dedicated a career to research in parapsychology, has authored an insightful exposition of classical Indian psychology and modern non-local research, in which Sri Aurobindo's contributions are duly noted (Rao, 2002).

*Overview*

Integral Yoga Psychology (IYP) is eminently transpersonal in that it is interested in studying and promoting the highest levels of spiritual development, and of transforming human egoic consciousness into an organized center for manifesting the Divine on earth. As a worldview, IYP is theistic, experiential, empiric, and evolutionary. However, it is not a religion, entails no proscribed beliefs or practices, and does not ask anyone to view Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as gurus. Although IYP is more an approach to transpersonal development than it is a type of transpersonal therapy, it has points of clinical relevance that will be discussed later.

In addition to the fact that IYP is based on experiential insights, there are three main challenges in coming to a balanced understanding of IYP, which are as follows:

1. The recorded works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother comprise a vast literature that spans over 60 years and encompasses both written and oral, public and private, communications;
2. Sri Aurobindo's writings can be difficult to grasp, because his Victorian prose is long and meditative, while modern readers are accustomed to shorter sentences and bullets of information;
3. Sri Aurobindo's cosmology is the opposite of the materialist worldview of Western science, and one must understand his metaphysics in order to understand IYP.

This essay will attempt to mitigate these problems by presenting a concise overview of IYP, drawing selectively from Sri Aurobindo's writings so as to illustrate key concepts. Several passages from Sri Aurobindo's letters to disciples are quoted because his letters are usually more succinct and practical than his formal writings. Readers interested in the Mother's life and work are referred to Van Vrekhem for further information (Van Vrekhem, 1998, 2000).

*Cosmology of Consciousness*

In terms of cosmology, Western science begins with the operational assumption that matter is the only reality, and then directs all of its energies at studying the details of how the material universe evolved after the "big bang," and how life evolved on earth much later. However, Sri Aurobindo questions the basic assumption of materialism and proposes an alternate, spiritual hypothesis for interpreting evolutionary biology, psychology, and consciousness studies. In his magnum opus on philosophy, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo argues that matter is simply a finite and dormant manifestation of the infinitely conscious Divine Reality, and that biological evolution is the ordered process through which transcendent Spirit expresses itself under the conditions of matter (Aurobindo, 1970b).

Central to Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the evolution of consciousness is his cosmological account of how matter came to exist in the first place. In brief,

Sri Aurobindo says that the supreme Being/Reality sequentially delimits or differentiates a portion of its infinite nature to become finite matter, and that this compressive process happened (or is constantly happening) before time and space came into existence, because the space-time continuum is a material phenomenon. Sri Aurobindo calls the descending process through which Spirit becomes matter *involution*, while *evolution* is the secondary process through which Spirit slowly discloses the divine potential involved in matter (Aurobindo, 1970b). Thus, Sri Aurobindo's ideas build upon and extend the range of classical Indian philosophy. In his own words (written in the third person for public circulation):

The teaching of Sri Aurobindo starts from that of the ancient sages of India that behind the appearances of the universe there is the Reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us and all.

Sri Aurobindo's teaching states that this One Being and Consciousness is involved here in Matter. Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. The next step of the evolution must be towards the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. For only then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it become possible for life to manifest perfection. (Aurobindo, 1972a)

Consequently, for Sri Aurobindo transpersonal experiences and strivings are the mark of evolution at work, and indeed human beings are only a transitional species on the way to a more spiritual (i.e., supramental) life-form that will evolve on earth in the future. While one may certainly question Sri Aurobindo's predictions, one has at least to respect his intellectual integrity in taking a stance on key issues. For instance, now that we have brain scans of Tibetan monks and Christian nuns that reveal a unique pattern of cerebral metabolism associated with transcendent states (Newberg & d'Aquili, 1998, 2001) one can expect such studies to become more nuanced in the future, perhaps describing a variety of psycho-spiritual states and capacities according to different associated neuro-physiologic and neuro-anatomic parameters. Unless transpersonal psychology is willing to let transpersonal experiences be reduced back to brain chemistry, it will need to articulate how the brain can be a correlated substrate of experience rather than its generator and final cause. Almost a century ago, in his first draft of the *Life Divine* (written 1914–19), Sri Aurobindo anticipated this dilemma and articulated a consciousness paradigm that can absorb emerging developments in neuroscience without needing to accept to the dogma of materialism (Miovic, 2003, pp. 113–32, and 2004).

## *Planes of Consciousness and Parts of the Being*

Sri Aurobindo describes the sequential involution of the infinite Reality into finite matter using the metaphor of a series of descending steps on a staircase, which he calls “planes of consciousness.” Listed from highest to lowest in descending ontological order, the major planes of consciousness are as follows (based on Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 232–277):

1. Sacchidananda (Brahman, the transcendent Divine)
2. Supermind (the self-determining infinite consciousness)
3. Overmind (cosmic consciousness, plane of the Gods and Goddesses)
4. Intuitive Mind
5. Illumined Mind
6. Higher Mind
7. Mind (with several layers)
8. Vital (with higher, middle, and lower subdivisions)
9. Subtle Physical
10. Physical proper (usually refers to the body)
11. Subconscious (individual and universal “unconscious” of psychology)
12. Inconscient (matter proper and existential Non-Being)

According to Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual experience, all of the non-material planes of consciousness listed above (i.e., everything from the subtle physical up to the Sacchidananda) exist in their own right, independent of matter, and would continue to exist even if our current material universe came to an end. Thus, Sri Aurobindo views each plane of consciousness as a universe unto itself, and the sum of created existence as a spectrum or stacked series of universes that ascend from densely unconscious but manifest matter at the base, to fully conscious but unmanifested Sacchidananda at the peak (*sacchidananda* is a Vedantic term that means “existence-consciousness-bliss”).

In addition to this vertical scale of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo also describes a concentric dimension of consciousness, which he refers to as “parts of the being.” While the planes of consciousness are impersonal states or gradations of existence, the “parts of the being” refer to organized centers and faculties of consciousness that exist or can emerge in the human being. Through these, the human being becomes aware of and enters into relationship with the aforementioned planes of consciousness. The major parts of the being are listed below, from most interior on the left to most exterior on the right:

Inmost Being	Inner Being	Outer Being
Psychic being (evolving soul)	Inner mental	Mental (cognitive)
	Inner vital	Vital (affective)
	Inner physical	Physical (biological)

Essentially, the outer being with its physical, vital (i.e. emotional and libidinal), and mental awareness constitutes the “self” or “ego” of the Western biopsychosocial model. Between the psychic being (evolving soul) and the inner being stands the Purusha, or pure witness consciousness that people sometimes experience in

meditation, while behind the psychic being stand the Jivatman and Atman (non-evolving Self). The Jivatman and Atman will be described later, but space does not permit a discussion of the Purusha, so readers are referred to Dalal for further exposition of that topic (Dalal, 2001a).

Experientially, Sri Aurobindo observes that the planes of consciousness above the Mind, when clearly perceived, are subjectively felt to exist above the head and pour their influence down into the inner being from there. For this reason, he often refers to them as the “overhead” planes. In contrast, the parts of the inner and inmost beings are experienced as follows: the *chakras* as residing within the body or along the spine and opening to the inner mental, vital and physical sheaths of consciousness (discussed later); the psychic being (soul) behind the heart chakra; and the Jivatman and Atman entirely above the body (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 233–377). The neuro-physiological correlates for this somatotopic organization of experience are not currently known, but offer a fascinating subject for future research. In the following letter, Sri Aurobindo summarizes the psychological and spiritual functions of the various parts of the being:

...There are, we might say, two beings in us, one on the surface, our ordinary exterior mind, life, body consciousness, another behind the veil, an inner mind, an inner life, an inner physical consciousness constituting another or inner self. This inner self once awake opens in its turn to our true real eternal self. It opens inwardly to the soul, called in the language of this yoga the psychic being which supports our successive births and at each birth assumes a new mind, life and body. It opens above to the Self or Spirit which is unborn and by conscious recovery of it we transcend the changing personality and achieve freedom and full mastery over our nature. (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 1020–21)

The rest of this essay will elaborate and illustrate the various relationships among the planes of consciousness and parts of the being outlined above, and describe their relevance to transpersonal development.

### *Liberation vs. Transformation*

One of the perennial sources of confusion for Western transpersonalists interested in the perennial philosophy is the question of what precisely constitutes “enlightenment.” Various referred to as *moksha*, *mukti*, *nirvana*, *satori*, *Self-realization*, or realization of the *Atman* or *Brahman* in different traditions of Buddhist and Hindu literature, Western readers may well wonder if the Buddhists who experience nirvana as no-self (*anatta* or *anatman*) are achieving the same enlightenment as the Vedantists who experience the transcendent Self alone as real. Also, some teachers and traditions have described enlightenment as a sudden and final awakening (such as Ramana Maharshi and various Zen masters), while others (including Sri Aurobindo) maintain the experience can be gradually cultivated and grow in frequency, intensity, depth, and duration. Sri Aurobindo accepts all of these terms as roughly equivalent, and notes both the commonalities and nuanced variations in people’s experience of enlightenment:

The Buddhist Nirvana and the Adwaitin’s Moksha are the same thing. It corresponds to a realisation in which one does not feel oneself any longer as an

individual with such a name or such a form, but an infinite eternal Self spaceless (even when in space), timeless (even when in time). Note that one can perfectly well do actions in that condition and it is not to be gained only by Samadhi [yogic trance state]. (Aurobindo, 1970a, p. 62)

The impressions in the approach to Infinity or the entry into it are not always quite the same; much depends on the way in which the mind approaches it. It is felt first by some as an infinity above, by others as an infinity around into which the mind disappears (as an energy) by losing its limits. Some feel not the absorption of the mind-energy into the infinite, but a falling entirely inactive; others feel it as a lapse or disappearance of energy into pure Existence. Some first feel the infinity as a vast existence into which all sinks or disappears, others, as you describe it, as an infinite ocean of Light above, others as an infinite ocean of Power above. If certain schools of Buddhists felt it in their experience as a limitless Shunya [void or non-being], the Vedantists, on the contrary, see it as a positive Self-Existence featureless and absolute. No doubt, the various experiences were erected into various philosophies, each putting its conception as definitive; but behind each conception there was such an experience. . . . (Aurobindo, 1970a, p. 63)

Sri Aurobindo often refers to the realization of the non-dual awareness described above as *spiritual liberation*, because it brings a release from the egocentric consciousness of the outer mind, life, and body. However, he notes that this first realization of the Self is passive, and can be followed by a dynamic heightening and widening of consciousness that leads eventually to *transformation* of both the inner and outer beings. The following letter to a disciple further describes the difference between liberation and transformation in the sequence of transpersonal development:

The realisation of the Spirit comes long before the development of overmind or supermind; hundreds of sadhaks [spiritual seekers] in all times have had the realisation of the Atman in the higher mental planes, *buddheh paratah*, but the supramental realisation was not theirs. One can get *partial* realisations of the Self or Spirit or the Divine on any plane, mental, vital, physical even, and when one rises above the ordinary mental plane of man into a higher and larger mind, the Self begins to appear in all its conscious wideness.

It is by full entry into this wideness of the Self that cessation of mental activity becomes possible; one gets the inner Silence. After that this inner Silence can remain even when there is activity of any kind; the being remains silent within, the action goes on in the instruments, and one receives all the necessary initiations and execution of action whether mental, vital or physical from a higher source without the fundamental peace and calm of the Spirit being troubled.

The overmind and supermind states are something yet higher than this; but before one can understand them, one must first have the self-realisation [Self-realization], the full action of the spiritualised mind and heart, the psychic awakening, the liberation of the imprisoned consciousness. . . .(Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 105–6)



In short, Sri Aurobindo opines that what people usually mean by the word “enlightenment” is not necessarily the end of transpersonal development, but can be rather the beginning of a higher evolution. Sri Aurobindo’s views on the Buddha and Buddhist psychology are complex and deserve a separate essay. Briefly, Buddhist phenomenology has certainly described aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s transpersonal anatomy of awareness, but using different terminology and often an agnostic worldview. Sri Aurobindo accepts this phenomenology as a statement of experience, but notes that more comprehensive experiences are possible, too, and he rejects Impermanence as the ultimate truth of existence. For Sri Aurobindo, omnipresent Reality is the ultimate truth of existence, of which the Buddhist Void and phenomenal impermanence are only partial aspects. Also, he feels that no school of Buddhism ever clearly set the goal of achieving a supramental evolution on earth (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 59–69).

### *Self, Overmind, and Supermind*

Whatever one decides to make of Sri Aurobindo’s larger claims about cosmology and the evolution of consciousness, his phenomenological descriptions of the “overhead” planes of consciousness are a useful contribution to transpersonal psychology. Space does not permit a detailed study here of the differences among the Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, and Intuitive Mind, but the following statement nicely summarizes some of the essential qualities and characteristics of each, and also describes further the relationship between static (passive) and dynamic realizations of the Self (Atman):

The Self governs the diversity of its creation by its unity on all the planes from the Higher Mind upwards on which the realisation of the One is the natural basis of consciousness. But as one goes upward, the view changes, the power of consciousness changes, the Light becomes ever more intense and potent. Although the static realisation of Infinity and Eternity and the Timeless One remains the same, the vision of the workings of the One becomes ever wider and is attended with a greater instrumentality of Force and a more comprehensive grasp of what has to be known and done. All possible forms and constructions of things become more and more visible, put in their proper place, utilisable. Moreover, what is thought-knowledge in the Higher Mind becomes illumination in the Illumined Mind and direct intimate vision in the Intuition. But the Intuition sees in flashes and combines through a constant play of light—through revelations, inspirations, intuitions, swift discriminations. The overmind sees calmly, steadily, in great masses and large extensions of space and time and relation, globally; it creates and acts in the same way—it is the world of the great Gods, the divine Creators. Only, each creates in his own way; he sees all but sees all from his own viewpoint. There is not the absolute supramental harmony and certitude. These, inadequately expressed, are some of the differences. I speak, of course, of these planes in themselves—when acting in the human consciousness they are necessarily much diminished in their working by having to depend on the human instrumentation of mind, vital and physical. Only when these are quieted, they get a fuller force and reveal more of their character. (Aurobindo, 1970a, p. 1154)

As stated above, Sri Aurobindo describes the Overmind as the plane of the great gods and goddesses of Greek, Hindu, Mayan, and other traditions. In his view, the

Gods are real beings who exist eternally on the overmental plane, and are not merely creations of a primitive human mentality. The human mind can build forms that the Gods accept, but the Gods exist in their own right and can inspire various forms of manifestation into the human mind. For example, Sri Aurobindo noted that the Greek goddess Pallas Athene and the Indian goddess Maheshwari are not two different beings, but the same being manifested differently in two separate cultures (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 383–387, 389). According to this principle, the Egyptian Aman-Re, the Greek Apollo, the Hindu Surya, and the Mayan Sun God are not four separate beings, but one and the same, as it is for the Greek Poseidon, Hindu Varuna, and Mayan Chac. In my experience, the presence of these immortal beings can still be felt at various temples in Greece, Mexico, and India.

A second important characteristic of the Overmind, according to Sri Aurobindo, is that people generally have experiences of cosmic consciousness through opening to this plane of existence. Since Bucke introduced the term “cosmic consciousness” to describe various mystical states drawn from biographical data (Bucke, 1969), the term has been used loosely to denote a broad range of transpersonal experiences. Sri Aurobindo uses the term “cosmic consciousness” specifically to describe the awareness of cosmic or universal (i.e., not personal or individual) forces operative on each plane of consciousness. Such cosmic consciousness may come before spiritual liberation, but usually it comes later, with the overmental realization, which Sri Aurobindo evokes vividly here:

... When the Overmind descends, the predominance of the centralizing ego-sense is entirely subordinated, lost in largeness of being and finally abolished; a wide cosmic perception and feeling of a boundless universal self and movement replaces it: many motions that were formerly egocentric may still continue, but they occur as currents or ripples in the cosmic wideness. Thought, for the most part, no longer seems to originate individually in the body or the person but manifests from above or comes in upon the cosmic mind-waves: all inner individual sight or intelligence of things is now a revelation or illumination of what is seen or comprehended, but the source of the revelation is not one's separate self but in the universal knowledge; the feelings, emotions, sensations are similarly felt as waves from the same cosmic immensity breaking upon the subtle and the gross body and responded to in kind from the individual centre of the universality. ...In this boundless largeness, not only the separate ego but all sense of individuality, even of a subordinated or instrumental individuality, may entirely disappear; the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic delight, the play of cosmic forces alone are left. ... (Aurobindo, 1970b, p. 987)

Obviously, to live in such an overmental consciousness permanently would constitute an extraordinary transpersonal achievement, for it would entirely alter one's normal awareness and whole sense of self. Nonetheless, Sri Aurobindo still considers the Overmind as pertaining to the “Ignorance,” because it is a consciousness of multiplicity not absolute unity. In contrast, the Supermind is a unitary Truth-Consciousness:

The Supermind is in its very essence a Truth-Consciousness, a consciousness always free from the Ignorance that is the foundation of our present natural or

evolutionary existence and from which nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and world-knowledge and a right consciousness and the right use of our existence in the universe. The Supermind, because it is a Truth-Consciousness, has this knowledge inherent in it and this power of true existence; its course is straight and can go direct to its aim, its field is wide and can even be made illimitable. This is because its very nature is knowledge: it has not to acquire knowledge but possesses it in its own right; its steps are not from nescience or ignorance into some imperfect light, but from truth to greater truth, from right perception to deeper perception, from intuition to intuition, from illumination to utter and boundless luminousness, from growing widenesses to the utter vasts and to very infinitude. On its summits it possesses the divine omniscience and omnipotence, but even in an evolutionary movement of its own graded self-manifestation by which it would eventually reveal its own highest heights it must be in its very nature essentially free from ignorance and error: It starts from truth and light and moves always in truth and light. . . .(Aurobindo, 1971, pp. 79–80)

In Sri Aurobindo's judgment, the central limitation of the perennial philosophy is that it leads only to a passive perception of the transcendent Self (Atman), whereas supramental realization would confer an active mastery of phenomenal existence, because Supermind is the subsidiary aspect or movement of Sacchidananda that has, in fact, created all the worlds and planes of phenomenal manifestation. Sri Aurobindo's final prose writings describe possible individual, social, and biological routes a supramental evolution could take in the future. The following passage highlights some of his intimations about the future of the body:

. . . New powers have to be acquired by the body that our present humanity could not hope to realize, could not even dream of or could only imagine. Much that can now only be known, worked out, or created by the use of invented tools and machinery might be achieved by the new body in its own power or by the inhabitant spirit through its own direct spiritual force. The body itself might acquire new means and ranges of communication with other bodies, new processes of acquiring knowledge, a new aesthesis, new potencies of manipulation of itself and objects. It might not be impossible for it to possess or disclose means native to its own constitution, substance, or natural instrumentation for making the far near and annulling distance, cognizing what is now beyond the body's cognizance, acting where action is now out of its reach or its domain, developing subtleties and plasticities that could not be permitted under present conditions to the needed fixity of a material frame. . . .(Aurobindo, 1971, pp. 76–77)

Note well that Sri Aurobindo views the "new powers" described here as new properties and abilities of the *physical body itself*, not the usual clairvoyance, telepathy, telekinesis, and other parapsychological phenomenon that arise from the inner being (see below). For IYP, this distinction is relevant to correctly interpreting Murphy's extensive documentation of mind-body phenomenon (Murphy, 1992), and related data from contemporary non-local research (such as Braud, 2000; and Rao, 2002). Whether or not certain esoteric doctrines implied a supramental transformation

of the body is open to debate, however, Sri Aurobindo makes his own position clear. It should also be understood that Sri Aurobindo's notion of a supramental evolution would *necessarily* encompass all four quadrants of Wilber's model of psychology, as Wilber seems to think differently (Wilber, 2000). Finally, note that future alterations to the human brain and body through genetic engineering would not contradict Sri Aurobindo's proposition of a supramental evolution, but would rather constitute one route (among others) through which such an evolution could proceed.

### *The Psychic Being*

Practically, the central process of IYP is the evocation ("bringing forward") of the true soul, or seat of divine individuality within each person, as the soul alone can lead towards a radical transformation of the outer ego. Sri Aurobindo calls the soul the "psychic being," coining his term from the original meaning of the Greek root *psyche*, and credits the Mother with having shown him the full practical import of the psychic being. The following letter lucidly differentiates the parts of the inmost being (Atman, Jivatman, and psychic being) and describes their respective roles in the process of spiritual liberation and spiritual transformation:

The Jivatman, spark-soul and psychic being are three different forms of the same reality and they must not be mixed up together, as that confuses the clearness of the inner experience.

The Jivatman or spirit, as it is usually called in English, is self-existent above the manifested or instrumental being—it is superior to birth and death, always the same, the individual Self or Atman. It is the eternal true being of the individual.

The soul is a spark of the Divine which is not seated above the manifested being, but comes down into the manifestation to support its evolution in the material world. It is at first an undifferentiated power of the Divine Consciousness containing all possibilities which have not yet taken form, but to which it is the function of evolution to give form. This spark is there in all living beings from the lowest to the highest.

The psychic being is formed by the soul in its evolution. It supports the mind, vital, body, grows by their experiences, carries the nature from life to life. It is the psychic or *caitya puruṣa*. At first it is veiled by mind, vital and body, but as it grows, it becomes capable of coming forward and dominating the mind, life and body; in the ordinary man it depends on them for expression and is not able to take them up and freely use them. The life of the being is animal or human and not divine. When the psychic being can by sadhana [spiritual practice] become dominant and freely use its instruments, then the impulse towards the Divine becomes complete and the transformation of mind, vital and body, not merely their liberation, becomes possible.

The Self or Atman being free and superior to birth and death, the experience of the Jivatman and its unity with the supreme or universal Self brings the sense of liberation, it is this which is necessary for the supreme spiritual deliverance: but for

the transformation of the life and nature the awakening of the psychic being and its rule over the nature are indispensable. (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 282–283)

IYP's emphasis on the role of the psychic being in transpersonal development is one of the key ways in which IYP differs from those schools of Buddhist psycho-spiritual that do not recognize the existence of a true soul (see Epstein, 1995). Subjectively, the psychic being is usually felt as residing deep within the center of the chest, *behind* the heart chakra, with which it is frequently confused. Opening to the psychic being brings feelings of spiritual devotion, surrender to the Divine, gratitude, sweetness, quiet joy, love of all that is good and beautiful and harmonious, and a spontaneous recoil from all that is false, evil, dishonest, selfish, or discordant (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 1092–1117). Note that the intuitive tact or guidance of the psychic being is quite different from the intuitions of “psychics” in the West, which usually arise from various levels of the inner being, and are far more prone to error (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 458–461).

Now, a topic of perennial interest that involves the psychic being is the process of reincarnation, which Sri Aurobindo accepts as a fact of life (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 433–463). However, he clarifies that it is not the outer personality that reincarnates, but rather the psychic being, whose aim is to grow through the process of evolution. In another letter to a disciple, Sri Aurobindo commented on this in a somewhat humorous vein:

You must avoid a common popular blunder about reincarnation. The popular idea is that Titus Balbus is reborn again as John Smith, a man with the same personality, character, attainments as he had in his former life with the sole difference that he wears coat and trousers instead of a toga and speaks cockney English instead of popular Latin. That is not the case. What would be the earthly use of repeating the same personality or character a million times from the beginning of time till its end? The soul comes into birth for experience, for growth, for evolution till it can bring the Divine into Matter. It is the central being that incarnates, not the outer personality—the personality is simply a mould that it creates for its figures of experience in that one life. In another birth it will create for itself a different personality, different capacities, a different life and career. . . . (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 451–452)

Psychologically, an important corollary of IYP's view of evolution is that the future is more important than the past, because the whole mission of the psychic being is to grow towards a supramental manifestation on earth. Consequently, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not advocate “past-life regression” as a primary therapeutic method (which is not to say that past-life memories cannot be healing in some instances), and also warned that people's purported past-life memories are easily distorted by imagination and autosuggestion. Only the psychic being's memory of the past is veridical, and even when one has the true psychic memory, that fact alone does not solve the problem of what to do with one's present and future lives (for comparative views, see Weiss, 1992; Jue, 1996). As Sri Aurobindo noted succinctly:

But too much importance must not be given to the past lives. For the purpose of this yoga one is what one is and, still more, what one will be. What one was has a minor importance. (Aurobindo, 1970a, p. 455)

In my experience, discussing this future-orientation can help prepare clients who are considering visiting a “psychic” to get a past-life reading, or who are interested in past-life regression therapy. By setting realistic expectations as to what can be achieved with such consultations, and by maintaining focus on current choices and future development, the therapist can help the client maintain a growth-orientation that is both emotionally and spiritually healthy. This approach also tends to reduce using spirituality to defend against or bypass psychological issues (see Battista, 1996; and Cortright, 1997). For example, I once consulted on a case where the client developed an erotic transference to the therapist that was simultaneously defensive *and* based on a real past-life relationship as determined by a psychic. In this situation, acknowledging both the spiritual and psychological components of the transference allowed the therapy to proceed productively, because the client felt genuinely understood.

### *The Inner Being*

In the process of trying to contact the psychic being, people often experience some aspect of the inner being, which stands between the psychic being and the outer personality (ego). In the terminology of IYP, the inner being consists of the subtle bodies or sheaths of consciousness (inner mental, vital, and physical), the *chakras* of classical Indian yoga, and an individual element of the subconscious. The correspondences among the traditional yogic descriptions of the chakras and Sri Aurobindo’s elucidation of their psycho-spiritual functions are interesting, and are listed in Table 1. Again, IYP views most parapsychological and non-local phenomenon studied in the West as arising from the inner being (for instance, precognition and telepathy involve the inner mental, “astral travel” the inner vital, and spontaneous or “miraculous” healing the inner physical).

Sri Aurobindo views the chakras as subtle (i.e., non-material) organs of perception and action that put the individual consciousness into relation with the larger universe of forces and beings that operate on each of the non-material planes of consciousness described previously. Sri Aurobindo generally agrees with classical Tantric descriptions of the chakras; however, he does add original insights based on his notion of the evolution (see Table 1). For example, he discerns a complex interaction among several parts of the being and planes of consciousness associated subjectively with the levels of the subtle body that correspond roughly to the physical region of the throat, neck, and lower face. This nexus of consciousness accounts for a variety of psychological and clinical phenomena, including the “mental vital,” through which strong emotions and affective drives can rise up and cloud reasoning (as in the defense mechanism of rationalization); and the “vital mind,” which is involved in day-dreaming and narcissistic fantasies of grandeur (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 334–38, 1329). This nexus also encompasses the “mechanical mind,” which can produce the clinical syndrome of obsessive-compulsive disorder (now known to have a specific neuropsychological substrate whose function can be modified both pharmacologically and by cognitive behavior therapy); and the “physical mind,” which is responsible for problems in speech, self-expression of mental will, and dealing mentally with the physical world (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 373–75).

With regard to other aspects of classical Tantra, it is important to note that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not recommend raising the *kundalini shakti* (force or

Table 1  
*The Inner Being (based on Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 328–9, 334–8, 364–77)*

Chakra	Sri Aurobindo's description
<i>Sahasradala</i> Thousand-petalled lotus; top of head; blue with gold light	<i>Higher Mind, Illumined Mind</i> Commands the higher thinking mind ( <i>buddhi</i> ) and the illumined mind, and opens upwards towards the intuitive mind and Overmind.
<i>Ajna</i> Forehead; two petals; white	<i>Dynamic Mind</i> Commands thought, will, vision, inner mental formation. "Third eye."
<i>Visuddha</i> Throat region; sixteen petals; grey	<i>Externalizing Mind</i> Commands expression and externalization of all mental movements and forces; also called <i>physical mind</i> when it gives a mental order to external things and deals with them practically. Different from gradations of consciousness below that have no specific chakra: <i>Mechanical Mind (Mental Physical)</i> Repeats customary ideas and habits endlessly, strong in childhood. <i>Vital Mind</i> Involved primarily in dreaming, imagining, planning for the future (e.g., fantasies of greatness, happiness, wealth, fame, heroism, etc). <i>Mental Vital</i> Gives mental expression to vital movements such as emotion, desire, passion, and nervous sensations. Through this avenue vital movements can rise up and cloud or distort reasoning (e.g., rationalization).
<i>Hritpadma</i> or <i>Anahata</i> Sternal region; twelve petals; golden pink	<i>Emotional Mind and Higher Vital</i> Seat of various feelings, such as love, joy, sorrow, hatred, affection, etc. The "heart" chakra.
[ <i>Chaitya purusha</i> , not a chakra per se and not emphasized in older yogas]	<i>Inner Heart (Psychic Being)</i> Perceived as deep inside center of chest, behind the heart chakra; is the evolving soul that grows from life to life and is the core of true individual identity.
<i>Nabhipadma</i> or <i>Manipura</i> Region from heart to navel; ten petals; violet	<i>Central Vital</i> Source of the stronger vital longings and reactions, such as ambition, pride, fear, love of fame, attractions and repulsions, desires, passions, will to power.
<i>Svadhithana</i> Between the navel and base of spine; six petals; deep purple red	<i>Lower Vital</i> Connects all centers above with the physical consciousness below; is concerned with small desires (food and sex), as well as small likings and dislikings, such as vanity, quarrels, love of praise, anger at blame, little wishes.
<i>Muladhara</i> Base of spine; four petals; red	<i>Physical Consciousness</i> Governs the physical being down to the subconscious. When not transformed, is prone to inertia, ignorance, repetition of habits, slowness, resistance to spiritual consciousness. The subconscious has no organized chakra, but arises from below the feet.

power) from below, because doing so can lead to a variety of psychological disturbances acknowledged by transpersonal psychology (Scotton, Chinen, & Battista, 1996, pp. 261–270). Instead, IYP proceeds by bringing forward the psychic being and infusing the psychic into the entire inner being first, and then the outer being, as well. The advantage of this method is that by virtue of its inherent contact with Divine, the psychic being can gently open the chakras and canalize the kundalini power without danger of inducing what transpersonal psychologists now call “spiritual emergencies” (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 1146–51, 1091–1239).

### *The Subconscious and Inconscient*

The final elements of IYP that will be reviewed here are the *subconscious* and the *Inconscient*. The Inconscient refers to a densely unconscious inversion of the Sacchidananda in which all being and existence seem to disappear. From this arises the subatomic and atomic consciousness of matter, as well as the molecular organization of matter into intracellular machinery. In yogic experience, the Inconscient can be felt externally as extending through all material substance (e.g., even rocks have a consciousness according to Sri Aurobindo), and internally as supporting the consciousness of the body’s cells. The Mother’s statements about her “cellular yoga” in the latter part of her life afford extraordinary glimpses into the spiritual transformation of the Inconscient (Van Vrekhem, 1998, 2000). However, this goes well beyond the current purview of transpersonal psychology, and transpersonal therapists should not confuse the emotional memories clients frequently have during bodywork with the true cellular consciousness of supramental yoga.

Psychologically, a much more common clinical phenomenon is the interfusion of the vital plane with the physical consciousness of the body, leading to a variety of ways in which emotion can be somatized. This is how and why body-oriented therapies (massage, acupuncture, myofascial release, therapeutic touch, etc.) can be helpful in expanding the range of consciously experienced emotion, and in resolving somatized psychological distress (Basu, 2000). Alternatively or simultaneously, repressed emotion can be pushed down and back from frontal awareness into what Sri Aurobindo calls the *subconscious*. This plane of consciousness accounts for the “unconscious” of Western psychology, as well as chronic or recurrent physical illnesses and habits:

The subconscious is universal as well as individual like all the other main parts of the Nature. . . . It contains the potentiality of all the primitive reactions to life which struggle out to the surface from the dull and inert strands of Matter and form by a constant development a slowly evolving and self-formulating consciousness; it contains them not as ideas, perceptions, or conscious reactions but as the fluid substance of these things. But also all that is consciously experienced sinks down into the subconscious, not as precise though submerged memories but as obscure yet obstinate impressions of experience, and these can come up at any time as dreams, as mechanical repetitions of past thought, feelings, action, etc., as ‘complexes’ exploding into action and event, etc., etc. The subconscious is the main cause why all things repeat themselves and nothing ever gets changed except in appearance. It is the cause why people say character cannot be changed, the cause also of the constant return of things one hoped to have got rid of for ever. All seeds are there and all Sanskaras [fixed patterns] of



the mind, vital, body,—it is the main support of death and disease and the last fortress (seemingly impregnable) of the Ignorance. All too that is suppressed without being wholly got rid of sinks down there and remains as seed ready to surge up or sprout up at any moment. (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 354–5)

Sri Aurobindo is careful to differentiate the subconscious from the inner being (subtle physical, inner vital, and inner mental), which he also calls the “subliminal being.” From the perspective of IYP, Jung’s memoirs reveal a rich and detailed subliminal awareness (see Jung & Jaffe, 1961), and his notion of the collective unconscious reflects an interaction between the subliminal being and portions of the subconscious. Also, note that Jung did not definitively settle on the immortality of the soul until the end of his life (McLynn, 1996), so it is debatable to what degree specific passages from his writings do or do not reflect the influence of the psychic being on human personality.

#### IMPLICATIONS: TRANSPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The implications of Integral Yoga Psychology (IYP) for transpersonal psychology can be divided into two broad categories, transpersonal development and transpersonal therapy, which will be addressed in sequence.

Evidently, IYP is consonant with the central thesis of transpersonal psychology that development proceeds from pre-personal, to personal, to transpersonal levels (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). However, because IYP is theistic and views reincarnation as a fact, for IYP the development of the psychic being (true soul) across multiple lives, and the outer personality (ego, self) in one life, are two distinct yet interacting trajectories of growth. Thus, one can find emotionally immature children with well-developed psychic beings, as well as adults whose psychic expression is inhibited by Axis I and II disorders, while much of public life is organized by “generative” adults who are well-meaning but may have less psychic sweetness than certain low-functioning schizophrenics I have been privileged to meet. Such observations could not arise if inner and outer development were invariably synchronized. By the same token, psychic development does not erase or obviate the normal sequence of outer development described by Erikson (1997), but rather heightens the spiritual consciousness brought to each stage of the lifecycle. Wilber arrives at a similar conclusion about childhood spirituality, but seems tentative, perhaps because he discusses the issue as if all children had equal psychic (soul) development (Wilber, 2000, pp. 139–42), while Sri Aurobindo and the Mother observe that they do not.

At the same time, interactions routinely arise between the psychic being and outer personality, some of which are reflected in Fowler’s research on stages of faith development (Fowler, 1981). The most pervasive example of this interaction effect is captured in the Western construct of “ego strength,” which for IYP includes positive effects the psychic being exerts on ego development and functioning. Thus, what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would call “highly psychosized” personalities, such as Mother Teresa and the current Dalai Lama, score extremely well on ego strength (GAF nearing 100) even though their level of development is clearly post-egoic. In terms of IYP, such transpersonal growth is possible precisely

Table 2  
*Hierarchy of Ego Functioning*

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**I. Ego defense mechanisms** (adapted from Vaillant, 1993)

**Psychotic**

Delusional projection  
Denial  
Distortion

**Immature**

Projection  
Fantasy  
Hypochondriasis  
Passive aggression  
Acting out  
Dissociation

**Intermediate (Neurotic)**

Displacement  
Isolation/Intellectualization  
Repression  
Reaction formation

**Mature**

Altruism  
Sublimation  
Suppression  
Anticipation  
Humor

**II. Ego transformational processes**

**Therapeutic movements**

Observing ego (e.g. “witnessing” in meditation, “sitting with affect” in therapy)

**Psychic (soul) movements**

Aspiration  
Surrender  
Rejection

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*because* the psychic being (soul) is entirely real and can, through its direct link with the Divine, bring to the outer being a deep source of psychological strength and sustenance. Practically, this means the psychic being (soul) has the power to transform ego functioning, even to heal psychological wounds that seem therapeutically unsolvable.

Conceptually, a simple way to operationalize IYP is to extend vertically the well-known hierarchy of ego-defense mechanisms, so as to append psychic (soul) processes of ego-transformation (Table 2). Thus, whereas ego defense mechanisms deny, disguise, or distort negative/painful/frightening psychological content so as to make it more bearable, psychic (soul) “movements” accept such content unaltered and work to transmute it. In between ego defense mechanisms and psychic movements proper, stand the psychological capacities familiar to dynamic psychotherapists as the observing ego and to cognitive-behavioral therapists as cognitive skills of affect regulation (these functions are dubbed “therapeutic movements” in Table 2). Epstein (1995) has lucidly explained how these functions can be strengthened by Buddhist meditation practices, and the present author has suggested elsewhere that such ego-transformational processes mediate between soul and ego (Miovic, 2001, 2003, pp. 90–112).

Sri Aurobindo names and defines the psychic (soul) movements of ego-transformation as follows. *Aspiration* is an inner invocation of and yearning to feel the presence of the Divine and to manifest its spiritual qualities in one's life. By *surrender* he means to open oneself entirely to that higher power and to it alone, and to let oneself be a vehicle for its dictates. *Rejection* he defines as using the psychic being's discriminative tact to evaluate the source and quality of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and to discard or transform all that is false, weak, divisive, harmful, ego-centric, or simply not conscious of the Divine (Aurobindo, 1999).

For both clients and therapists, it is critical not to confuse these psychic (soul) movements with ego conflicts and deficits, or unconscious drives and wishes (desires). "Surrender" here means to the inner Divine as mediated via one's own psychic being (soul), *not* to any absolute human authority or the vulnerabilities of one's own ego. True spiritual practice requires the application of correct understanding (insight), good judgment, willpower, and appropriate boundaries—all of which are encompassed in Sri Aurobindo's concept of "rejection." Also, true rejection proceeds directly from the soul, unlike suppression, which is a psychological defense that involves trying to control emotions with mental willpower (Miovic, 2001, 2003, pp. 90–112).

Finally, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother placed special emphasis on the role of artistic endeavors in transpersonal development, as the creative arts can be used as a field for learning to receive and express inspiration from the inner being and higher planes of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's commentaries on the spiritual sources of poetic, literary, musical, and artistic inspiration are probably the most insightful statements on the subject ever written (see Aurobindo, 1972b).

#### IMPLICATIONS: TRANSPERSONAL THERAPY

In the 1930s, Sri Aurobindo criticized the early psychoanalytic practice of rapidly raising the lower vital subconscious through Oedipal interpretations (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 1605–1606), and this has led some to conclude incorrectly that he would be against contemporary psychotherapy. On the contrary, psychoanalysis has evolved greatly since the 1930s and is now generally in agreement with Sri Aurobindo's suggestion to strengthen ego functioning before delving into the subconscious (Miovic, 2004; Mitchell & Black, 1995). Also, many contemporary therapies (such as CBT, DBT, EMDR, interpersonal and short-term models) avoid the subconscious entirely, or work at the pre-conscious level and allow issues to emerge from the subconscious at their own pace.

Thus, today one can say that the chief rationale for mental health treatment from the perspective of IYP is that all manner of Axis I and II issues engender much mental and vital (emotional) noise that distracts one from spiritual practice offered calmly and quietly to the Divine. In as much as IYP's central strategy is to "quiet" the outer being so that the psychic being can emerge, both psychotherapy and psychotropic medications can be employed as tactical means to achieve that strategic end. As a clinical framework, IYP is inclusive and concurs with the many excellent insights and perspectives in the *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology* (Scotton, Chinen, & Battista, 1996). IYP would simply encourage all clinicians to develop a clearer *functional* analysis of the planes of consciousness and parts of the

being involved in any given clinical presentation and treatment modality, and of helping clients to grow in awareness of the same.

IYP would, however, offer a few caveats for current transpersonal practice to consider. First, although psychedelics, kundalini yoga, and breathwork (called *pranayama* in yoga) can alter consciousness and induce transpersonal experiences, these are all potentially dangerous methods and even when done safely, they are either unnecessary or incomplete in comparison to IYP's method of opening to the psychic being within and gradations of higher consciousness above. Second, it is important to understand that classical meditation practice certainly helps people develop a witnessing consciousness, but in order to transform ego-functioning it is essential to find and evoke the psychic being (evolving soul) as well. Third, understanding and dealing effectively with the issue of hostile influence is the most difficult problem a clinician can face, and is best avoided unless one truly has the inner calling and spiritual protection needed to engage in such work. Although possession and so-called alien abduction can lead eventually to spiritual renewal (Lukoff, 1996; Mack 1994), clinicians would be wise not enter this territory naively.

More specifically, Sri Aurobindo interprets many cases of psychosis and epilepsy as due to the *interaction* among hostile vital beings who invade or possess the individual, psychological issues that invite such attacks (such as narcissistic and histrionic tendencies), and underlying physical brain defects (whether genetic or acquired) that permit and perpetuate the condition(s). However, Sri Aurobindo also recognizes that some cases of psychosis and epilepsy may be purely organic, as is the medical condition of delirium (Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 1768–1775). Importantly, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother observed that hostile vital beings are polymorphic in nature and can manifest themselves in various forms, according to the mental schema of different times and cultures. Thus, the demons and devils of old and the inimical space aliens of today are related phenomenon that involve the same hostile forces that have been plaguing humanity since its beginning. Mack (1994) entertains this possibility in his seminal work on alien abduction, but his discussion would have benefited from IYP's consciousness perspective.

For example, I once had a Haitian patient with affective psychosis who presented with vivid descriptions of being attacked and possessed by a voodoo spirit. Later in treatment, she spontaneously reported an episode of "alien abduction" during which her "soul" (actually either subtle physical or inner vital in IYP terms) was lifted up into a UFO and experimented upon. Notably, she described this frightening event in purely supra-physical terms, probably because her cultural acceptance of voodoo spirits allowed her not to translate this powerful subtle experience into solely physical terms, as many contemporary Euro-Americans are prone to do because they lack non-materialist explanatory models. Basu recently presented a paper on IYP's approach to possession and psychosis at the World Psychiatric Congress, with compelling case studies (Basu, 2004).

Finally, transpersonal clinicians need not disparage synthetic psychotropic medications, because they are useful treatment tools and are backed by the rational methodology of science, which is itself a considerable progressive force put forward

by the Divine to aid in the evolution of consciousness on earth. Nonetheless, there is hope that ongoing work with flower remedies (as in Bach and other flower essences) based on the Mother's extensive insights into the psycho-spiritual qualities of flowers (Mother, 2000), will lead eventually to reliable supra-rational methods of psychopharmacology to complement rational ones (Vandana, 1998; Miovic, 2003, pp. 133–160; Basu, personal communication, 2004).

#### CONCLUSION

This article has presented an overview of Sri Aurobindo's cosmology of consciousness and Integral Yoga Psychology (IYP). Because the scope of IYP is vast, this essay has compressed many topics into a short space in order to show how IYP interprets the central relationships among metaphysics, transpersonal psychology, and clinical practice. In summary, IYP agrees with the general model of transpersonal psychology and psychiatry, but would expand and refine current understandings in a few areas. The most important of these are distinguishing between spiritual liberation and transformation; recognizing the existence and function of the psychic being; differentiating the parts of the inner being and various overhead planes of consciousness; and holding open the possibility of a supramental evolution of life in the future. Clinically, IYP offers novel approaches to avoiding spiritual "emergencies," dealing with past-life memories, distinguishing between the subliminal being and the subconscious, and conceptualizing cases of hostile influence and possession.

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### The Author

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Transpersonal psychology is a sub-field or "school" of psychology that integrates the spiritual and transcendent aspects of the human experience with the framework of modern psychology. It is also possible to define it as a "spiritual psychology". The transpersonal is defined as "experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos". It has also been defined as "development beyond Academic journal article Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. Sri Aurobindo and Transpersonal Psychology. By Miovic, Michael. Read preview.Â Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), the noted Indian spiritual teacher, is a seminal thinker whose writings have immense value for transpersonal psychology. In addition to interpreting the "perennial philosophy" to the West in an experientially authoritative and intellectually accurate fashion, he also made original contributions to transpersonal psychology. While several important transpersonal thinkers have been influenced by Sri Aurobindo's work (including Murphy, Wilber, Cortright, and others), this journal has never undertaken a comprehensive presentation of his psychological system Influence on Transpersonal Psychology Sri Aurobindo's ideas have already influenced the development of transpersonal psychology in many ways. Spiegelberg, who helped found the American Academy of Asian Studies, was an Aurobindo enthusiast and introduced Michael Murphy to the writings of Sri Aurobindo. Murphy actually studied in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the late 1950s, and his project at Esalen was in part inspired by this experience, as was his later work on transpersonal experiences of the body (Murphy, 1992; Taylor, 1999). At the same time