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A New Look at Theosophy

The Great Chain of Being Revisited

H. David Wenger

East Lansing, Michigan, USA

This paper presents an exploration of the evolution and multidimensional nature of human consciousness. It first establishes a context for this exploration in the Great Chain of Being (a central concept of the Perennial Philosophy—the core of philosophical wisdom common to the world's religious traditions). Next, certain constructs from the teachings of Theosophy are summarized, shown to be consistent with the Great Chain of Being, and then used as a model for exploring the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions of consciousness. Finally, implications of this model for a spiritual psychology are discussed.

*Vast chain of being! which from God began,
Nature's ethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect! what no eye can see,
No glass can reach! from infinite to thee...*

*From nature's chain whatever link you strike,
Tenth, or ten thousandth, breaks the chain
alike.*

—Alexander Pope¹

THIS PASSAGE from Pope's *An Essay on Man* illustrates the extent to which the idea of the Great Chain of Being pervaded eighteenth-century thought prior to the advent of logical positivism and scientific reductionism. The view described by the Great Chain of Being, the conception that holds the universe to be multidimensional, consisting of an infinite number of links ranging in hierarchical order through every possible grade, was for centuries one of the most well-known views in Western philosophy, science, and literature. Although this perspective eventually fell on hard times, the term was revived in the modern era by Arthur Lovejoy (1936/1961) in his book *The Great Chain of Being*, and the idea was more recently examined by Ken Wilber (1993) in his essay of the same name.

In the present paper, the Great Chain of Being is conceptualized as a foundation construct for the study of consciousness. The esoteric and now

somewhat obscure body of philosophical/spiritual thought known as Theosophy, a system that applies the Great Chain of Being with precision and detail, is then used as a lens through which to view the unfolding of human consciousness. Finally, the resulting implications for a spiritual psychology are discussed. First, however, I will very briefly review the history of the Great Chain of Being as a philosophical construct.

Historical Review

THE GREAT Chain of Being is regarded by Wilber (1993) as a central component of the broader philosophical theme called the *philosophia perennis*, or the Perennial Philosophy, said to underlie all religious traditions throughout history. Although the term *philosophia perennis* has been used in Western philosophy for centuries, it was popularized more recently by Aldous Huxley (1944) who defined it, in part, as “the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality” (p. vii). Huxley goes on to say that “rudiments of the Perennial Philosophy may be found in the traditional lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully

developed forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions" (p. vii). In ordinary language, the essence of the Perennial Philosophy is simply some form of a belief in God, an Absolute, or a Divine order. It is called "perennial" because it is common to all peoples at all times. And despite the opposing perspective offered by postmodern, contextualist schools of thought (see Ferrer, 2000; Wilber, 1998), the Perennial Philosophy is arguably the dominant worldview underlying contemporary transpersonal theory.²

Lovejoy (1936/1961) calls the Great Chain of Being "one of the half-dozen most potent and persistent presuppositions in Western thought" (p. vii). Until approximately the beginning of the nineteenth century it was "probably the most widely familiar conception of the general *scheme* of things, of the constitutive pattern of the universe" (Lovejoy, 1936/1961, p. vii). According to Lovejoy (1936/1961), the idea of the Great Chain of Being is rooted in Plato's principle of "plenitude" (Lovejoy's term), Aristotle's principle of "qualitative continuity," and Aristotle's principle of "unilinear gradation" (Lovejoy's term). Very briefly, what Lovejoy calls Plato's principle of plenitude says that if a thing *can* exist, it will.³ Aristotle's principle of qualitative continuity posits that if a thing exists it can be graded on a continuum of excellence (Lovejoy, 1936/1961, pp. 55-56); and what Lovejoy refers to as Aristotle's principle of unilinear gradation, holds that a qualitative continuum can be applied not only to matter, but to "powers of soul" as well (Lovejoy, 1936/1961, pp. 58-59).

To summarize, the Perennial Philosophy holds that the fundamental substratum, or "ground" of reality is spirit, or consciousness, and that this fundamental reality known variously as God, Brahman, or Tao manifests itself as the physical universe. Additionally, the multidimensional universe posited by the Great Chain of Being describes a hierarchy, as Wilber (1993) puts it, "reaching from the lowest and most dense and least conscious to the highest and most subtle and most conscious" (p. 53); or, a spectrum of consciousness with matter at one end and spirit at the other. In Wilber's (1993) words:

The central claim of the perennial philosophy is that *men and women can grow and develop (or evolve) all the way up the hierarchy to Spirit itself*, therein to realize a "supreme identity" with Godhead—the *ens perfectissimum* toward which all growth and evolution yearns. (p. 54)

In recent years the language used to describe the Great Chain of Being has evolved. Arthur Koestler (1968) coined the terms "holon" to denote a thing that is whole at one stage but part of a larger whole at the next, and "holarchy," defined as a hierarchy of holons. Wilber (1993) then borrowed Koestler's terminology and applied it to the Great Chain of Being. In later writings, Wilber (1998, 2000) refers to the Great Chain as a "Great Nest of Being," in which the levels are conceptualized as concentric holarchical spheres nested within themselves in a hierarchy of increasing wholeness. Wilber (2000) further describes the Great Nest as representing "a great *morphogenetic field* or *developmental space*—stretching from matter to mind to spirit—in which various potentials unfold into actuality" (p. 12), (which is essentially an updated version of Plato's principle of plenitude and Aristotle's principles of qualitative continuity and unilinear gradation, as mentioned above). Wilber's modern terms are useful reformulations of the original expression, and for purposes of this paper, I find his integration of Koestler's (1968) terminology to be especially useful. Accordingly, I will use "holarchy of being" or "evolutionary holarchy" interchangeably with "the Great Chain of Being."

Consciousness Evolution Through the Holarchy of Being

IT HAS become commonplace in contemporary society, and particularly in holistic medicine and psychology, for people to be regarded as multidimensional beings, having levels of expression in addition to, but equally as important as, the physical. Evidence of a widespread acceptance of this concept can be seen in the many current book titles that include the words soul or spirit, or some combination of the words mind, body, soul, and spirit (e.g., Jessel-Kenyon, 1999; T. Moore, 1992; Myss, 1996; Zukav, 1989). This holistic, multidimensional perspective is nothing new. It is consistent with a view of humankind planted squarely in an evolutionary holarchy, in a Great Chain of Being, and is taken directly from the world's primary wisdom/religious traditions. Although the language used varies from tradition to tradition, the dimensions of being are, quite simply, the levels of holarchy as they appear in these traditions. Partly following Wilber (1993), who summarized the terms used for the levels of

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holarchy by representative religious teachings of three widely practiced wisdom traditions—Judeo-Christian-Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist, let us look briefly at these traditions.

The Christian terms for the dimensions of being derive from the tripartite holarchy of body, soul, and spirit seen in both the ancient Greek and Hebrew traditions.⁴ Although there is probably some variation in the terms that can be accurately used to describe the Christian view, in my opinion they can be appropriately rendered as: body, flesh, mind, soul, and spirit.⁵ In Vedanta Hinduism, the levels of holarchy can be seen in the five “sheaths” or dimensions of being (the *koshas*) that are said to cover human essence like the layers of an onion, each of which corresponds to one of the world divisions, or planes of existence (the *lokas*). These sheaths are called *annamaya-kosha* (literally, the sheath made of food, or the physical body), *prānamaya-kosha* (the sheath made of *prāna* or vital life force), *manomaya-kosha*

(the sheath made of mind), *vijñānamaya-kosha* (the sheath made of intuition, or higher mind), and finally, *ānandamaya-kosha* (the sheath made of bliss) (Chatterji, 1931/1992; Werner, 1997).⁶

In Buddhism, correspondences to the levels of holarchy are not as neatly packaged as they are in Christianity and Hinduism. Nevertheless, glimpses of holarchy can be seen throughout the various schools in the concept of the five groups, aggregates, or *skandhas* (Prebish, 1975; Schumann, 1993); in the later doctrine of the three bodies of Buddha, the *trikāya* (Nagao, 1991; Schumann, 1993); and in the eight levels of consciousness, the *vijñānas*, of the Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna (Ehman, 1975; Schumann, 1993). Specifically, in the Yogācāra system, the first five levels of consciousness (holarchy) are the five senses. Following these are the *mano-vijñāna*, the sixth level, mental consciousness; the seventh level, *manas*, a more subtle mental consciousness related to the reception and disposition of the data

Figure 1
Approximate Correspondences of the Terms Used for Evolutionary Holarchy by Christianity, Vedanta Hinduism, the Yogācāra School of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Theosophy⁷

TEACHING OR TRADITION	LEVELS OF HOLARCHY					
	Body	Flesh	Mind	Soul	Spirit	
CHRISTIANITY Levels of Being	• physical body	• non-distinct physical form • physical-emotional appetites or desires	• cognition and intellect	• vital existence	• God • Source of life	
VEDANTA HINDUISM Sheaths, or Koshas	Annamaya-kosha (sheath made of food) • physical body	Prānamaya-kosha (sheath made of “vital air”) • emotional energy • vital life force	Manomaya-kosha (sheath made of mind) • concrete mind based on sensory data	Vijñānamaya-kosha (sheath made of intuition) • higher, or subtle mind	Ānandamaya-kosha (sheath made of bliss)	Spirit • Brahman-Atman • ultimate reality
MAHĀYĀNA (Yogācāra) BUDDHISM Levels, or Vijñānas	The First Five Vijñānas • the five senses		Mano-vijñāna • mental consciousness	Manas • a more subtle mental consciousness	Alaya-vijñāna • “storehouse” consciousness	Level of the Absolute
THEOSOPHY Vehicles of Consciousness	Physical Body	Emotional Body • emotional energy • “desire” body	Mental Body • concrete mind based on sensory data	Causal, or Spiritual Body • higher, or subtle and intuitive mind	Body of Bliss • super-consciousness	Spirit • universal consciousness • monadic consciousness

from the preceding six consciousnesses; and finally, *alaya-vijñāna*, the eighth consciousness or “storehouse consciousness” (Ehman, 1975). And beyond these levels is the Absolute (Schumann, 1993), what Wilber (1993) calls “pure Spirit.”

An objective of this paper is to explore aspects of the expression and evolution of consciousness through the dimensions of human experience, examining what the Great Chain of Being really looks like in human terms. In my view, one of the most thorough, detailed, and sensible conceptualizations available regarding the human multidimensional makeup, and the manner in which human consciousness is expressed and evolves through these dimensions, is found in the esoteric writings of Theosophy. Although Theosophy does not enjoy widespread popularity in modern transpersonal thought, I find it to be a particularly useful perspective from which to view human consciousness because holarchy is delineated with clarity and precision, both as a cosmology and as a corresponding system of personal evolution through that cosmology. Thus, the Theosophical view of evolutionary holarchy is the specific philosophical/theoretical foundation on which my observations about the evolution of consciousness are based. An overview of how the Theosophical conception of the levels of holarchy compares with those of Christianity, Vedānta Hinduism, and the Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna Buddhism can be seen in Figure 1.

The reader will note that the Theosophical view of holarchy is equivalent to these widely practiced religious/wisdom traditions, all of which, as we have seen, perceive the Great Chain in much the same way.

As background material, I will next present a brief summary of the Theosophical teachings regarding the “planes of nature” (the Great Chain), what might be thought of as the overall cosmology of Theosophy, and the corresponding “bodies” or “vehicles” through which consciousness is expressed.⁸ Following this summary, I will discuss implications for a spiritual psychology.

An Overview of Selected Theosophical Concepts

THEOSOPHY IS a body of philosophical and esoteric spiritual thought based on the late nineteenth-century writings of Helena Blavatsky

(e.g., *Isis Unveiled*, 1884; *The Secret Doctrine*, 1888), further developed by Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, and others, and derived from ancient Hindu, Tibetan, and Egyptian sources. Theosophy, which provided one of the earliest introductions to Eastern religious thought in the West, is only one of a number of movements based on broad spiritual principles that emerged as alternatives to traditional Western religions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The teachings of Theosophy are extremely detailed and abstruse, and use archaic terms such as “permanent atom” and the like which fall discordantly on twenty-first-century Western ears. In part for these reasons, as well as a confusing variation in detail from writer to writer, and in all likelihood because it was not clearly differentiated in the public mind from spiritualism (which was tainted with charges of charlatantry), Theosophy has, for the most part, been relegated to a place of semiobscurity in modern spiritual and psychological thought.⁹

The brief summary given here is somewhat streamlined. I have limited it to concepts most germane to this paper, have omitted details that serve more to obscure than to clarify, and have modified some of the terminology to render it more palatable to the modern reader.

The Planes of Nature

ACCORDING TO the Theosophical version of evolutionary holarchy, the universe is composed of a series of discrete yet continuous dimensions, or planes, called the “planes of nature,” a conception that appears to be essentially identical to the world divisions, or planes of existence (the *lokas*), found in Hinduism.¹⁰ Leadbeater (1903/1980) referred to these planes as consisting of matter in differing degrees of density, or texture, ranging from the physical plane that we perceive with our ordinary five senses through graduated and increasingly more subtle spiritual planes to the plane of pure spirit. Bailey (1930) described the composition of the higher planes somewhat differently, but her meaning is essentially the same. According to Bailey (pp. 56-57), the universe is filled with an underlying substance which can be defined as matter in the sense that matter is energy. Thus, physical matter is energy in its densest form and spirit is this same energy in its highest, or most

subtle, form. A modern writer (Gerber, 1988) described the substance of the various planes as differing in vibration rate, or frequency, and used the analogy of musical notes increasing in frequency from one octave to the next to describe the progression from one plane to another.

Theosophy teaches that there are seven planes in all and that each plane in turn is divided into seven subplanes. Different sources use different names for these planes. In this paper, I will use the names employed by Lansdowne (1986): adi, monadic, atmic, buddhic, mental, emotional, and physical, with the highest plane (adi) being the plane of pure spirit and ranging downward in order to the plane of dense matter, the physical. These seven planes are illustrated in Figure 2.

It should be noted that, although the planes are depicted graphically as layers one on top of another like a bookshelf, this is only a two-dimensional representation of a complex, multidimensional construct. In reality, the planes occupy the same three-dimensional space and thoroughly interpenetrate one another.

The Vehicles of Consciousness

ACCORDING TO Theosophy, the real human Self is a spark, or fragment, of Universal Consciousness called the “monad,” defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary* (Morris, 1969) as “an indivisible and impenetrable unit of substance.” Although rooted in the highest plane (the adi), the natural home of the monad is the second plane (the monadic). As a fragment of Supreme or Universal Consciousness, the monad has the same three-fold nature as Universal Consciousness, namely, the aspects of will, love-wisdom, and active intelligence. This three-fold expression of Supreme Consciousness is the Trinity of Christianity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in that order) and of Hinduism (Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma, in that order). The monad might be conceptualized as the human spirit, a spark or fragment of the Divine Spirit, and therefore of the same three-fold nature as Divinity.

Monads that choose to develop consciousness on the five lower and increasingly dense planes anchor a reflection, or a stepped-down version, of themselves on the third and fourth planes (the atmic and buddhic) and on the highest subplane of the mental plane. This lower reflection of the

monad is called the Spiritual Triad because, on these lower planes, it manifests the three aspects of Universal Consciousness: will, love-wisdom, and active intelligence. The Spiritual Triad is a seed of divine life on these planes and is the spirit, or life force, that ensouls the human expression which occurs on the three lower planes: the mental, emotional, and physical. These three planes are the “field” of normal human evolution—the so-called “Three Worlds” in which human consciousness is expressed.

Theosophy teaches that on the three lower planes, the monad (or individual human spirit) constructs bodies, or vehicles, for the purpose of expressing consciousness and gathering experience on these planes. These vehicles are constructed of the matter, or substance, of which the lower three planes are composed and allow consciousness access to these planes. Thus, not only do we have a physical body, but emotional and mental bodies which occupy roughly the same space as, and interpenetrate, the physical body as well. The only real differences are that the bodies that exist on the emotional and mental planes are constructed of the more highly refined, or more subtle matter (or higher vibration rate, depending on one’s viewpoint) of these higher planes. In the previous section I pointed out that the Theosophical notion of the planes of nature is essentially the same as the planes, or world divisions, found in Hinduism. In like manner, the concept of the vehicles of consciousness corresponds to the Vedantic view of the *koshas*, the sheaths which surround human essence (each of which relates to one of the world divisions).¹²

As Figure 2 indicates, the physical body consists of two portions: the dense physical body and the etheric body. The world of ordinary matter that we perceive with our five senses is composed of the substance of the three lowest (or most dense) subplanes of the physical plane: the gaseous, liquid, and solid subplanes. In Theosophy, the highest four physical subplanes are called the first, second, third, and fourth ethers (using the language of the time), and the etheric body is built of the substance of these subplanes.

The etheric body is the lowest of what are sometimes referred to as the “subtle bodies.” However, the etheric body is not a separate vehicle, but simply a part of the physical body. It

Figure 2
Theosophical View of Human Evolution Through the Great Chain of Being¹¹

Spirit-Matter Continuum	PLANES OF NATURE	CONSCIOUSNESS CORRESPONDING TO THE PLANES OF NATURE	
SPIRIT FIELD OF DIVINE ACTIVITY	ADI PLANE	Universal Consciousness (three-fold in essence): will, love-wisdom, and active intelligence	
	MONADIC PLANE	The Monad, a spark of Universal Consciousness (three-fold in essence)	
FIELD OF THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS field of super-normal evolution field of normal human evolution MATTER	ATMIC PLANE	Super-Consciousness: Body of Bliss	The Spiritual Triad: Lower reflection of the Monad as the spirit, or life force, in three-fold manifestation
	BUDDHIC PLANE		
	MENTAL PLANE	Spiritual (Causal) Body	Soul/Higher Self
	EMOTIONAL PLANE	Mental Body	ASPECTS OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS Personality
	PHYSICAL PLANE first ether second ether third ether fourth ether gaseous liquid solid	Etheric Body	
		Dense Physical Body	

is what is sometimes called the “vital body” (or the “energy body”) and is the link between the physical body and the various forces of the higher planes, including the universal life force, or energy, which in the East is called *ch'i* or *prāna*. The etheric body *underlies* the dense physical body through an intricate system of energy channels, or very fine threads of force, called “nadis” (Bailey, 1942, 1953) that parallel and energize the nervous system. Where many lines of etheric force (or nadis) intersect are found the major centers of etheric force called “chakras” (from Sanskrit meaning “wheels,” so named because to persons with clairvoyant vision they

resemble whirling vortices). Each chakra underlies, or is associated with, a particular nerve plexus and endocrine gland. Detailed information on the etheric chakra system is beyond the scope of this paper. I mention the chakras for the purpose of indicating the manner in which this fairly widespread concept fits in the broader structure of the vehicles of consciousness.¹³

The emotional plane lies just above the physical plane in the Great Chain of Being and is the world of emotion and sensation. The corresponding emotional body, sometimes called the “desire” body, acts as an interface between the physical body and the mental body in that it

converts information received from the physical body into sensations that are passed on to the mental body as perceptions. To these sensations the emotional body can add qualities, such as “pleasant” or “unpleasant,” or any feeling, such as desire, fear, or envy (Lansdowne, 1986, p. 5). The emotional body is often referred to in the esoteric literature as the “astral body” (and the corresponding emotional plane is often called the “astral plane”) because the emotional body is said to have a luminous, or “starry,” appearance to the clairvoyant eye.

The next highest plane in the Great Chain, the mental plane, is the world of thought and intellect. It contributes two vehicles to our multidimensional makeup: the mental body and the causal body. The mental body consists of the substance of the lower four subplanes of the mental plane, and the causal body is built of the matter of the three highest subplanes (see Figure 2). The mental body is sometimes called the “lower concrete mind.” It is through this vehicle that the ordinary aspects of intellect which involve manipulating and attaching meaning to sensory data are expressed. The causal body is sometimes referred to as the “higher mind” because it is built on the highest levels of the mental plane and is the province of abstract thinking and of those aspects of intellect (such as intuition and wisdom) that go beyond usual conscious thought (Lansdowne, 1986, pp. 7-8). The causal body deals with the essence and underlying nature of things, “the true causes behind the illusion of appearances” (Gerber, 1988, p. 155).

The causal body differs from the physical, emotional, and mental vehicles in several important ways. Before addressing these differences, however, it is necessary to comment briefly on the Theosophical tenet (or, more generically, the Eastern view) that the evolution of the human soul takes place over the course of many lifetimes. While not entirely prerequisite to the conceptions developed in this paper, much of their substance and complexity depends on viewing the process of human psychological and spiritual maturation as resulting from having experienced human existence in virtually all possible forms and circumstances. The present paper is not the forum in which to argue the case for reincarnation; this has already been done, and done well (e.g., Cranston & Williams, 1984; Howe, 1974; L. D. Moore, 1992, 1994; Stevenson, 1966). I will

mention, however, that this view is not entirely an Eastern perspective. It perfectly fits the idea of evolutionary holarchy, a construct which appears to be universal. Secondly, it was not foreign to ancient Greek thought, as seen in the Myth of Er in Plato’s *Republic* (10.614-621). And finally, as pointed out by L. D. Moore (1992, 1994), it is not contradicted by the teachings of Christianity.¹⁴

Now let us return to the ways in which the causal body differs from the physical, emotional, and mental vehicles. First, whereas the lower three bodies are temporary, that is, they are used for one lifetime and are replaced with each new lifetime, the causal body is a permanent vehicle throughout the many lifetimes of human evolution.¹⁵ Secondly, the causal body is the home of the soul. It is the seat of human consciousness, the receptacle for the seed of spirit, or life force with which the monad (via the Spiritual Triad) vitalizes the human form. At the beginning of the human cycle of evolution the causal body exists in only rudimentary form. It is built slowly over many lifetimes by the accumulation of good qualities which are developed in each life. It is the storehouse for the abstracted positive essence of each life, for the character, wisdom, and spiritual qualities that build life after life. The causal body is the vehicle of expression for what I refer to as the “spiritual” dimension, or level of being. Thus, I have chosen to replace the Theosophical term “causal body” with “spiritual body” in order to bring the terminology in line with the conception of the spiritual dimension as it is commonly understood, and as it is used in this paper. From this point on, I will use the term “spiritual body” interchangeably with “causal body.”

Theosophy also describes a higher vehicle which Besant (1918) calls the “body of bliss.”¹⁶ This body corresponds to the Hindu *ānandamaya-kosha*, or “sheath made of bliss,” and is the vehicle of expression at the level of consciousness beyond that which requires physical plane incarnation. It is a dimension to which spiritually advanced mystics (both Eastern and Western) apparently have access. This level of consciousness is known as “superconsciousness” and corresponds to the atmic and buddhic planes of nature (see Figure 2).

According to Theosophy, during the time the human soul is maturing, or gathering experience in the Three Worlds of human evolution, the soul is housed in the physical, emotional, mental, and

spiritual bodies while in physical incarnation, and these bodies are vehicles for the human multidimensional expression. At death, the soul simply exits, or sheds, the physical vehicle. The soul is still clothed, however, in the emotional, mental, and spiritual bodies and the person is just as alive as before. The essential difference is that now the individual's primary plane of conscious experience is the emotional plane rather than the physical plane. The level (subplane) within the emotional plane at which the soul primarily operates between lives will vary depending on its level of evolution, and since the planes interpenetrate, the soul does not necessarily go anywhere in a spatial sense.

Although the soul residing primarily on the emotional plane between lives can perceive the physical plane, most of us on the physical plane cannot see into the higher planes. However, those persons gifted with clairvoyant vision can see emotional, mental, or spiritual vehicles and therefore can perceive entities from the emotional or mental planes. And there are times when some of the rest of us (especially children) are given a brief glimpse into these realms. What are commonly referred to as "auras" are nothing more than the subtle bodies (i.e., the etheric, emotional, mental, and spiritual vehicles). The majority of clairvoyants, however, do not perceive beyond the emotional body.

Implications for a Spiritual Psychology

IF WE view humankind not as physical beings but as spiritual beings expressed through bodies on multiple dimensions, the focus of psychology must perforce turn to the indwelling spiritual essence: the Self, soul, or consciousness. Human consciousness, as we have seen, is a reflection of spirit—or Universal Consciousness—on the lower planes. This fragment of Divinity evolves along a continuum, metaphorically called the Great Chain of Being, toward eventual reunion with Universal Consciousness, the *ens perfectissimum*. And further, the vehicles through which the evolving consciousness is expressed are manifested on dimensions which can be thought of simply as points on the Great Chain.¹⁷ Thus, viewing consciousness from the perspective of the

Great Chain of Being, we bring psychology and spirituality together. If we perceive consciousness to be the stuff with which psychology is concerned, and see it as "reaching from the lowest and most dense—to the highest and most subtle" (Wilber, 1993, p. 53), and also as the manifestation of spirit, we see that there is no difference between psychological growth and spiritual growth—they are both an evolution in consciousness. This view is not an *integration* of psychology and spirituality. Rather, it is a recognition that they are essentially *one and the same*.

Modern psychology was spawned within the broader context of philosophy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, in the beginning, was not sharply differentiated from theology. As nineteenth-century empiricism fueled a growing schism between science and religion, however, psychology sought distance from its philosophical/theological roots and scrambled to align with its more measurable cousin, biology. Freud even went so far as to imply that religion is a form of neurosis.

It is therefore interesting that at the beginning of a new millennium we should be searching for a psychology that embraces humankind's spiritual nature when the seeds of this psychology have been latent within the discipline all along. It is also interesting, if not ironic, that the wedge which was driven between science and religion is arguably best illustrated by the debate over Darwinian evolution, and now, with a return to the *philosophia perennis*, the concept of evolution provides an underlying construct for a spiritual psychology. But in this case, the principle of evolution is applied to aspects of Self beyond the physical—the evolution of consciousness; what Aristotle might have called "powers of soul."

In my view, a psychology of consciousness (or the soul)—by definition a spiritual psychology—must include the following three areas of inquiry: (a) the evolution of consciousness which occurs as a function of many incarnations on the physical plane; (b) the multidimensional nature of consciousness and the effects of the expression of consciousness on these dimensions; and (c) individual differences in the nature of souls prior to birth that influence the development of personal characteristics.

The present paper addresses the first two areas of inquiry. The third area, the notion that souls

differ in some innate manner independent from experience, lies outside the parameters of this paper. I will note, however, that the Theosophical teaching of the seven "rays," or the seven fundamental building blocks of creation, first mentioned by Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) and extensively expounded by Bailey (1936-1960), provides a remarkable vehicle for a detailed analysis of these differences. Interpretations of Bailey's abstruse writings have been compiled by many authors, most notably by Robbins (1988).¹⁸

Consciousness Evolution: A Developmental Psychology

IN THE evolution of any given individual, there occurs a gradual growth and expansion of consciousness and a concomitant development, or refinement, of the emotional, mental, and spiritual vehicles as a function of accumulated experience and personal effort. That is, as the soul experiences the human condition from a large variety of perspectives and in virtually all circumstances in the course of many lives, the way in which the individual perceives and understands the world and the Self in relation to (and as part of) the world evolves. Thus, human evolution proceeds as a series of gradual, yet at times dramatic, expansions in consciousness. And as consciousness expands and is expressed through the vehicles, the vehicles themselves mature. According to Leadbeater (1903/1980), the trained clairvoyant can literally see the emotional, mental, and causal (spiritual) bodies and can estimate from this the individual's level of evolution.

The expansion of awareness through four levels of consciousness is a process not unlike the changes in understanding and awareness that occur in a person's growth from childhood to adulthood. As one would expect, the level of consciousness expansion, or soul maturity, varies from person to person at the beginning of any specific life. From this perspective, any theory of developmental psychology is, at best, incomplete without the understanding that one's behavior, general level of functioning, and character are very much dependent on the level of consciousness brought into, and developed during, the present lifetime.

Current theories of psychological development work better when applied to children than to adolescents or adults, because all children are focused on mastery of the physical dimension, and variations in the development of the emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions are not yet apparent. Theories of psychological development tend not to work as well in explaining and predicting growth into adolescence, adulthood, and beyond because developmental tasks that are normal for people at any given age vary enormously according to the individual's level of consciousness evolution, or soul maturity. Not only are there tasks, or developmental markers, specific to each of the dimensions of human expression, but expected levels of development, or normal ages at which developmental markers "should" occur, on each of these dimensions, are not the same for all people because of differences in consciousness level. Thus, when researchers study developmental data from large samples using psychological instruments, unless overall consciousness evolution is accounted for, normal developmental markers and the appropriate ages for these markers to show up will "wash out," or be obscured. Several theories of ego development (e.g., Erikson, 1950, 1968; Loevinger, 1976) and Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development do offer useful models of psychological development through adolescence and adulthood. Yet, the usefulness of these models is limited because we do not know the levels of consciousness of the populations from whom the theories were derived.

In the initial incarnations of any soul on the physical plane, the focus is on physical body functioning. This is not to suggest that the individual does not function at all from the higher bodies. Certainly, a person does have emotional, mental, and spiritual capacities at any evolutionary phase. The functioning of these bodies, however, is not mature, and the overall functioning and behavior of that individual will reflect the relative lack of development (or evolution) of each of these bodies. The person at this stage will be primarily focused on physical behaviors; emotional control, as well as intellectual and spiritual functioning, will be rudimentary.

In later incarnations after physical body functioning has been mastered, the focus shifts to the emotional body. This is not meant to suggest

that physical capabilities are lost or that the physical body in later incarnations is necessarily less strong or vital, only that the emotional body is now maturing as well. Since the emotional body is the seat of the emotions, as this vehicle matures the emotions are tamed. This does not mean that the full spectrum of emotions is not, or should not be, experienced. It does mean, however, that an individual's behavior is no longer at the mercy of unbridled, primitive passions such as rage and revenge; mastery of the emotional life is achieved. Obviously, the maturation of the emotional body will change and broaden an individual's experience of the world (and of the Self in relation to the world) and will result in a clear shift in the person's ability to live effectively in a social context. Developmentally speaking, this represents a major expansion of consciousness which marks a significant step forward.

In like manner, in due time the developmental focus shifts to the mental body. As was true during the maturation of the emotional body, the individual's perceptions and manner of viewing the Self and the world broaden, and the quality of social interactions changes as a reflection of the person's growing intellectual capacity and corresponding tendency to apply reason and thoughtfulness to all aspects of life. The resulting shift in awareness constitutes another major expansion of consciousness.

According to Bailey (1942), the physical, emotional, and mental vehicles, as a unit, form the personality which, together with the soul, constitutes the human expression in the Three Worlds, or the field of human evolution. With relative maturity of the mental vehicle the physical, emotional, and mental components of the personality begin to work together as an integrated system. Prior to this developmental stage, which Bailey refers to as "personality alignment," the component vehicles operate independently. At this point, however, the personality becomes a fully functioning entity that is greater than the sum of its parts and is able to receive input from the soul. Personality alignment allows the physical, emotional, and mental aspects of one's Self to unite in common purpose. Thus, the individual is now capable of a high level of achievement.

During all the lifetimes in which the physical, emotional, and mental bodies are maturing and the personality is becoming coordinated, the

spiritual body is, of course, also gradually developing, and in time the developmental focus shifts to the spiritual nature. As I pointed out earlier, the spiritual (or causal) body is the home of the soul. Thus, as the spiritual body develops, the individual has greater access to guidance from his or her soul. The soul begins to contribute higher understandings and insight through intuition, or an inner knowing, and the individual responds more clearly to the world of higher values, such as unselfishness and service to others. Gradually, the nature and purposes of the soul (as opposed to those of the personality) begin to dominate, and the personality assumes a role subordinate to the soul. Bailey (1942) refers to this process as "soul fusion"; the personality energy at this stage becomes united with, and complementary to, that of the soul. The individual naturally experiences a concomitant shift in outlook, perspective, and values, accompanied by corresponding changes in behavior. These developmental shifts mark an especially dramatic expansion of consciousness.

An aspect of particular importance regarding the development of the spiritual body and the corresponding increase in input from the soul is that, in my opinion, what we think of as "conscience" is actually guidance from the soul. Does it really make sense that what is commonly called the "still small voice" comes from a psychoanalytic conception called the superego? I believe that the superego is an accurate and useful construct for describing the internalization of parental and societal prohibitions. It is, indeed, an important mechanism that influences behavior, especially in children and in individuals near the beginning of their physical plane incarnations. However, the superego controls behavior as a reminder of prohibitions and consequences only. It tells us what behaviors are wrong, not because they are *not right*, but because they evoke punishment. It is our soul that tells us what is right. We then control our own behavior because we know that certain behaviors are *not right*. This is what is really meant by the term "knowing right from wrong," which might be more accurately phrased "knowing right from that which is not right."

The still small voice is just that. The soul does, indeed, communicate to us in a quiet voice and is available to everyone throughout the entirety of

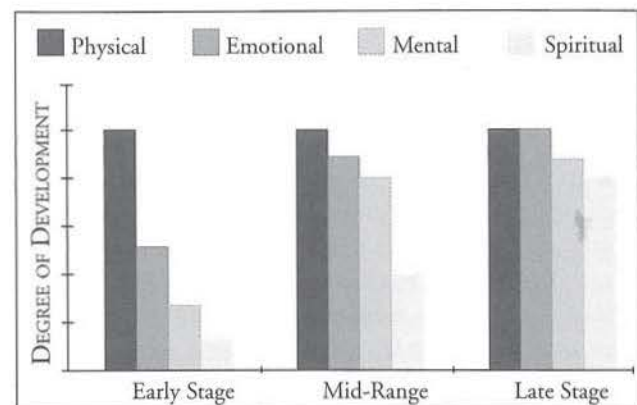
the evolutionary cycle. However, before the spiritual body is developed to any significant extent, that voice is not heard consistently or clearly. As the spiritual body matures and input from the soul becomes more pronounced, the still small voice is more easily heard and understood. A formal method for training oneself to listen better to that inner voice is meditation, or contemplative prayer.

For individuals at or near the beginning of the evolutionary cycle, the superego may be the greater part of what controls behavior. As development proceeds, the ratio of superego to soul influence gradually shifts, and for those persons closer to finishing the cycle, soul influence is the greater part of the individual's inner control. This change, or shift, in the agent of inner influence might be described as a shift from the avoidance of punishment to moral, principled behavior. There is a parallel to the long-term evolutionary process in the development from childhood to adulthood as well, in that a young child's behavior is governed more by what is or is not wrong, and an adult's behavior is governed more by what is or is not right. Those occasional persons who are characterized as being without a conscience, I suspect, are individuals who are near the beginning of the evolutionary cycle *and* whose superego mechanisms have failed.

I wish to be very clear that the evolution of the vehicles of consciousness does not occur in discrete steps from one body to another. There is some functioning and development of all the bodies from the beginning, and growth of the emotional, mental, and spiritual vehicles occurs simultaneously, but mature functioning in each of the bodies occurs in developmental sequence. One might visualize a rough and hypothetical representation of this evolution for an individual at various points as depicted in Figure 3.

I also wish to stress that just because any given body is mature from an evolutionary perspective, there is no guarantee that the individual will choose to focus on or develop that functioning in any given life. Mature functioning of any vehicle, once developed, exists as potential in a specific lifetime, but the body may or may not function maturely depending on the choice or effort of the individual. As an example, an individual with mature spiritual functioning will also be capable of mature functioning at the physical, emotional,

Figure 3
Hypothetical Comparison of Sequential Development at Different Points in the Evolution Process



and mental levels (given healthy and undamaged vehicles, of course). Complete, or balanced, functioning for this individual would require a focus on each of the four bodies (or levels of consciousness). However, she or he may not necessarily choose to maintain a focus on each body, resulting in a less than fully balanced life. On the other hand, a person who is, for example, at the early stages of developing the emotional vehicle will have some capacity for functioning in the higher bodies (or from a higher level of consciousness), but will not be capable of mature functioning in these bodies. In either case, there is no judgment implied. That would be like comparing a child with an adult.¹⁹

Balanced functioning for any individual, regardless of his/her degree of evolution, requires a focus on the development of each of the four bodies irrespective of the maturity level of each body. For example, balanced functioning for a person who is in the early stages of emotional body development would require a continued focus in the physical world, while also exercising the emotional faculties, and in addition, bringing to bear mental and spiritual functioning at whatever levels the person is capable, regardless of what those levels are. The important aspect is the "exercise of function."²⁰

By the same token, balanced functioning for the individual who is primarily at the stage of maturing the mental body would require a continued focus on mature functioning of the physical and emotional bodies and a stretching of functioning into the spiritual realm. Similarly, balanced functioning for someone who is maturing

the spiritual body would require continued attention to the functioning of the three lower bodies. Everyone is familiar with individuals who are focused in the mental body to the exclusion of proper functioning of the physical, emotional, and spiritual bodies. It is also very common to see individuals who are focused on developing their spiritual body but have abandoned attention to the full functioning of their lower vehicles (e.g., individuals who engage the mental body to the point of deciding that religious dogma as they know it no longer makes sense, and then abandon critical thought while embracing every new spiritual teaching they encounter).

There are, of course, those persons who have special challenges to balanced functioning in that one or more of the three lower vehicles are damaged. For those who have suffered trauma to the physical, emotional, or mental bodies, the exercise of the greatest degree of functioning and balance that is possible (given the limitation) is important, even though the result may look somewhat different than would otherwise be true.

Although the experience and effort required for the vehicles of consciousness to reach maturity takes many lifetimes, there is a parallel of this developmental process which occurs within each lifetime (depending to some extent on the level of evolution already achieved). According to Bailey (1942, pp. 52-53), this results in five crisis points in the life of the individual. The first three crises result from the soul appropriating the physical, emotional, and mental bodies. By *appropriating*, Bailey means that the soul begins to use that vehicle as an instrument of its purposes. When this occurs, a crisis point is created because the influx of soul energy causes rapid change which can destabilize the vehicle. The five crisis points are:

1. Appropriation of the physical body between approximately ages four and seven.
2. Appropriation of the emotional body during adolescence. This crisis is manifest, and is easily observed in most people, as an emotional instability during this time.
3. Appropriation of the mental vehicle in late adolescence.
4. A crisis point that occurs between the mid-to-late-thirties and the early-to-mid-forties when the individual's essence begins to emerge. At this point there will be changes in the person's life direction and focus, sometimes dramatically so.

5. A crisis point that occurs in the late fifties to early sixties in those individuals who have developed an effective relationship between their soul and their personality.

At crisis point 4, the age at which this process begins will vary, and the direction, length, and intensity of the resulting crisis will differ according to circumstances and what is evolutionarily appropriate for the individual. Essentially, at or near mid-life one's highest level of consciousness can potentially begin to manifest. In those persons with a measure of emotional and mental vehicle maturity who have not yet achieved personality alignment, the crisis can be as simple as the discovery that one's interests and values differ from what one was taught through environmental conditioning. In those persons who have achieved personality alignment or soul fusion (either in the present life or in a previous life), it is during this time that the soul begins to influence the personality, and in this case the crisis results from the emergence of soul aims as opposed to personality aims. In a person whose soul influence is emerging, one may or may not see identification with, or a specific interest in, religious or spiritual matters. Nevertheless, one's life will follow a spiritual (i.e., not a material) path, the need for service to humanity will become evident, and one will have the benefit of intuitive promptings by, and understandings of, the soul. From that point on, service to humanity in some form will be the vehicle for further spiritual growth.

Many people will experience the promptings from the soul, and an emergence of essence, in a strong but confusing manner that will be manifested in restlessness and dissatisfaction with one's life as it is, but without a sense of what one's soul is attempting to become. In these persons, the very natural need for change may be experienced in a materialistic manner. If so, they are likely to trade in their possessions for newer models (toys, houses, cars, spouses, etc.). But if this is done primarily because of disinterest in what they have and without a corresponding interest in, or understanding of, the aims of their soul, they may very well remain restless and dissatisfied, and their spiritual growth will likely be truncated. This results in the worst-case scenario of the "mid-life crisis."

At crisis point 5, the degree to which the individual responds to soul input and the degree to which the higher vehicles are used and developed determine to what degree the soul continues to use the vehicles in a vital manner into old age. Conversely, in those persons who do not continue fully using and developing their vehicles of consciousness, the soul begins gradually to disengage and to withdraw its input. This does not mean that the soul leaves the body (this does not occur until death), only that the wisdom, intuition, and guidance that comes from the soul is withdrawn, and the personality is no longer a useful instrument for the soul.

The timing of the vehicle appropriations, or the ages at which they occur, can have profound developmental significance. This is especially true of the emotional and mental body appropriations. The developmental effects of timing differences in a child's physical body maturation are easily seen and understood. However, the effects of timing differences in emotional and mental development are more difficult to perceive and understand and are typically not addressed when assessing growth and development of adolescents and early adults. This is because existing theories of psychological development have not fully viewed emotional and mental growth in the context of a paradigm which accounts for normal developmental lags such as are obvious in physical growth. The normalcy of physical growth variations is easily understood, resulting in comments such as, "She hasn't reached her growth spurt yet." However, in emotional and mental development, what I believe to be normal lags in growth are typically seen as developmental failures, and result in pejorative labels such as "immature" and "underachiever." In reality, variations in emotional and mental development must be viewed simply as normal differences in the age of appropriation of the emotional and mental bodies. Unfortunately, in the absence of this understanding, and the resulting design of appropriate growth experiences, young people who vary on these dimensions are routinely damaged by our acculturation institutions as they currently exist. Often, those persons who lag behind on emotional and mental body appropriations eventually catch up and excel on those very dimensions, but they must overcome the handicap of societal damage to do so.

General Psychotherapy Considerations

FIND IT interesting that although the dominant Western philosophical/religious tradition does not teach reincarnation, it is nevertheless a component of popular culture. As an example, the long-term view of evolutionary growth is often tacitly acknowledged in our contemporary Western culture by common use of the term "old soul." The existence of an "old" soul presupposes the existence of its opposite, or "young" soul, and by extrapolation, levels of soul age in between.²¹ Using the theory of consciousness evolution through the four levels of spiritual development which I have described, or the corresponding concept of soul age, with a modicum of practice it is not difficult to arrive at a rough estimation of where any given soul is in its evolution. Such an understanding has profound implications for the practice of counseling and psychotherapy. Normal functioning for an individual near the beginning of his or her physical plane incarnations will be very different from what is normal for a person who is mature on all four dimensions. For example, a person whose developmental focus is on the emotional vehicle will be working with the experience of emotions like rage and jealousy. However, a person who is focused at the mental or spiritual levels and/or who has achieved soul fusion (see earlier discussion) will concentrate on aspects of life more germane to his or her particular developmental level. That person may continue to have the emotions of rage or jealousy, but they will be experienced differently and will be secondary, rather than primary, life issues. Obviously, for individuals at these different developmental levels, the therapy goals will be different, therapeutic interventions will be different, and the ways we measure outcomes will be correspondingly different.

As a starting point in treatment it is important that the therapist evaluate the individual from a perspective of psychospiritual development. Essentially, the therapist must determine where a given individual is in the evolutionary spectrum and in what ways functioning on the four dimensions of consciousness may be out of balance. Therapy focus and interventions can be designed accordingly to encourage functioning at the highest possible level, to encourage a stretching into the next higher level (and by doing so to facilitate mastery of the level below), and to

encourage balanced functioning. Also, it is important to attend to any level or levels on which an individual may have abandoned focus in the belief that lower levels are of less importance, or are less “spiritual,” than the higher levels. The developmental evaluation must also include an assessment of the sequential appropriation process as described in the previous section. Were there significant variations or delays in the appropriations and corresponding crisis points? Did trauma occur as a result of out-of-phase or poorly executed appropriations? Is the individual at this time experiencing an appropriation crisis? To what extent has trauma from an earlier crisis point damaged the ability to smoothly negotiate the vicissitudes of an appropriation or crisis point currently in progress?

I suspect that for optimum psychological health it is important for individuals to advance their overall evolutionary development to the fullest extent that they are able. For the most part, consciousness will expand in each lifetime simply as a function of living. However, when individuals choose not to expand and develop their emotional, mental, and spiritual vehicles when the opportunity exists to do so, I believe that depression and/or other kinds of physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual imbalances will occur. Persons who fail to develop the emotional, mental, and spiritual levels of functioning of which they are developmentally capable, or who fail to advance the spiritual development with which they were born, essentially waste the opportunity of a physical plane lifetime. It is such persons who are most likely to experience difficulty at the crisis point in the late fifties and early sixties, when the soul chooses whether or not to remain fully invested in using the bodies (see crisis point 5). For those persons in whom the soul does begin to withdraw input at this point, there will be a gradual decline into the worst aspects of their personalities, and ultimately into bitterness, depression, and despair.

In my psychotherapy practice, I have found certain observations and conceptions derived from the present model to be particularly useful in framing a clinical understanding of individuals and in designing appropriate psychotherapeutic interventions. Although a full discussion of the clinical applications lies outside the parameters of this paper, I will briefly summarize these conceptions as follows:

1. Bonding between individuals occurs on each of the four levels of consciousness, and human relationships consist of complex arrangements of bonding on these levels. This conception has profound implications for understanding how people function in a social or relational context. In general, successful relationships tend to occur between people who share similar levels of vehicle maturity. More specifically, I believe that the quality of intimacy in a relationship increases dramatically as levels of consciousness on which bonding exists are added to a relationship.

2. The occurrence and timing of appropriations and the associated crisis points offer a perspective for viewing rapid changes in people’s lives that can destabilize psychosocial adjustment.

3. It is my belief, based on my interpretation of clinical data, that each of the vehicles of consciousness has memory. This conception has direct application to understanding the human response to emotional trauma and to the treatment of psychological dysfunction which results from trauma, especially Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Concluding Thoughts

I BELIEVE THAT a spiritual psychology must be much more than simply an acknowledgment that humankind has a spiritual nature that yearns for fulfillment. This is not a psychology of spirit, merely a psychology that does not *exclude* spirit. At the same time, I believe that a fledgling spiritual psychology must avoid the temptation to rely too heavily on counting and measuring in an attempt to look like a “real” science. While there is certainly nothing wrong, for example, with developing taxonomies of altered states of consciousness or cataloging the varieties of mystical experience, we should beware of being seduced into reductionistic *culs-de-sac*.

If science and religion are truly not antagonistic, and if psychology and spirituality can indeed be viewed as aspects of the same process, then not only should we count and measure what can at this time be quantified, we should also admit data from spiritual sources to scrutiny, and allow contemplation and intuition as methods of inquiry. In this same vein, Wilber (1998) argues that the scientific method, conceived as a broad empiricism, can legitimately be applied to realms beyond the physical. Thus, using what

Wilber calls the “three eyes of knowing” (flesh, mind, and contemplation), the entire Chain of Being is exposed to the gaze of science. To that end, in this paper I have proposed the Theosophical version of the Great Chain as a conceptual framework well suited to the task of exploring the evolution of consciousness through the nonphysical dimensions, thereby providing structure for a spiritual psychology.

Notes

1. *An Essay on Man in Four Epistles*. (1733-1734/1776, Epistle I, lines 237-240, 245-246).

2. Although few transpersonal theorists are likely to dispute that interpretation and context are important factors in understanding mystical or transpersonal experience, the postmodern schools of thought that hold truth and reality hostage to context-dependent interpretation are basically atheistic: Contextualism taken to its logical conclusion would deconstruct Huxley’s “divine Reality” to a meaningless concept. In my opinion, a view of human spirituality not firmly rooted in a divine Reality, as is apparently suggested by Ferrer (2000), risks advocating that humankind seek transcendence to a contextual morass.

3. Lovejoy explains Plato’s principle of plenitude as “the thesis that the universe is a *plenum formarum* in which the range of conceivable diversity of *kinds* of living things is exhaustively exemplified—[and] that no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled” (Lovejoy, 1936/1961, p. 52).

4. The ancient Greek terms were body (*sōma*), soul (*psuchē*), and spirit (*pneuma*; literally, breath). Old Testament Hebrew does not express the idea of body as a physical form. The word used is flesh (*bāšār*): the body as a whole but not the form or shape. Thus, the corresponding Hebrew terms are: flesh, soul (*nephesh*), and spirit (*ruach*, meaning life force) (Bond, 1991, p. 1299; Stricker, 1991, p. 61; Turner, 1980, p. 421; Wolf, 1991, p. 202).

5. The terms I use for the first two levels, body and flesh, differ from the corresponding matter and body used by Wilber (1993, 1998) and again by Walsh (1997). Matter and body do make sense as descriptors of ascending points on the Great Chain of Being, and thus appropriately designate the first two levels of Wilber’s “basic great chain” (Wilber, 2000). However, the terms as used by these authors in describing the Christian view of holarchy lack support in the New Testament.

In Christian usage, the meaning of the word flesh is taken from the Hebrew *bāšār* and the Greek *sarx* (both nondistinct designations of physical form) and emphasizes a suggestion of physical/emotional appetites, or desires (Grant & Rowley, 1963, p. 299; Hoehner, 1991, p. 498; Stricker, 1991, p. 61; Turner, 1980, pp. 176-178). Body, in

New Testament writings, is the Greek *sōma* (Stricker, 1991, p. 61).

For the most part, the word mind is not clearly differentiated from heart and soul in biblical usage, and the words are translated somewhat interchangeably from a number of Greek and Hebrew terms. In the New Testament, however, the concept of mind as the human faculty (or dimension) of cognition and intellectual activity does emerge more clearly in the fairly consistent use of the Greek *nous* (see Cowen, 1991, pp. 967-968).

6. The works cited here, and in the treatment of Buddhism in the following paragraph, are resources to be used in understanding the terms and concepts from Hinduism and Buddhism that I mention. They do not relate these concepts to holarchy as used in this paper.

7. This figure is intended to compare the Theosophical version of evolutionary holarchy with the way in which holarchy is seen in some of the world’s primary wisdom traditions, and the terms used to describe these traditions are based in part on Wilber (1993). Many systems use four or five levels and a level thought of as Spirit, God, the Absolute, or a similar term. Accordingly, I show six levels including Spirit, or God. However, this figure will correspond to the Great Chain viewed as the seven levels given in Theosophy or the Hindu *lokas*, or by Ken Wilber’s charts (Wilber, 2000, pp. 197-217) through the first five levels. The final two levels of the seven-level system are collapsed into my final level. Thus, the levels (or terms) in Wilber’s charts will stretch across my figure a little differently, but basically correspond to it. Also, Wilber’s five-level “General Great Chain” terms (matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit) can be read from left to right across my figure with the first three corresponding fairly closely to my first three cells.

8. Many of the ideas presented in my brief summary are basic Theosophical teachings that are derived from many sources and, therefore, are not specifically referenced. However, although by no means a comprehensive bibliography, these ideas can be found in the following works: A. A. Bailey (1936-1960); A. Besant (1904/1954; 1918); Z. F. Lansdowne (1986); and C. W. Leadbeater (1903/1980).

9. In this regard, note the title of Peter Washington’s (1995) book—*Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America*. In the title alone, Washington manages to erroneously identify Theosophy as spiritualism, as well as malign the character of principal Theosophical figures. Another example: Nelson (2000) characterizes Theosophical teachings as either distortions of Hindu and Buddhist thought or as having been fabricated by Blavatsky (p. 81).

10. Hinduism views the universe as consisting of differing regions, planes, worlds, or world divisions, called the *lokas*, with each world produced from the “matter” of the world above it in descending order from the world of Brahman

through decreasingly subtle regions to the physical world (see Chatterji, 1931/1992; Grimes, 1996; Werner, 1997; Wood, 1964). Different schools of Hindu thought use somewhat different terms to describe the world divisions; Grimes (1996, p. 177) lists seven planes (in ascending order from the physical plane): (1) *bhū-loka*, (2) *bhuvar-loka*, (3) *sva-loka*, (4) *maha-loka*, (5) *jano-loka*, (6) *tapo-loka*, and (7) *satya-loka*.

11. This figure is a compilation of information collected from many sources, and elaborates on a graphic representation of the seven planes in *Initiation, Human and Solar* (p. xiv) by A. A. Bailey (1922).

12. The correspondence between the Theosophical bodies and the Vedantic *koshas* requires explanation because Vedanta also uses the word “body,” and uses it in several different ways with differing shades of meaning. The term thus invites confusion in understanding how it is used in Theosophy as well as in more specifically transpersonal writings that use Vedantic concepts. In the most common usage, Vedanta posits three bodies (the *sharīras*): the gross, subtle, and causal bodies (in Sanskrit: *sthūla-sharīra*, *sūkshma-sharīra*, and *kāraṇa-sharīra*) composed of progressively finer layers of matter (Grimes, 1996; Werner, 1997; Wood, 1964). The three *sharīras* correspond to, but are not exactly the same as, the five sheaths, or coverings of Atman, called the *koshas*. The first and third bodies (*sharīras*) correspond to the first and fifth sheaths (*koshas*) respectively. However, the second, or middle *sharīra* corresponds to, or is composed of (depending on one’s viewpoint), the middle three *koshas*. In addition, although the *koshas* and the *sharīras* are not the same thing, I believe it is accurate to view them as structurally related, or as having a similar nature. Some scholars (e.g., Grimes, 1996; Werner, 1997; Wood, 1964) regard the *koshas* as the layers which form the three bodies. Additionally, Wood (1964) uses “body” to describe both the *sharīras* and the *koshas* with the difference being primarily one of classification, but with the *sharīras* having more of an implication of an instrument or vehicle (p. 26). Chatterji (1931/1992, p. 90) says simply that the *koshas* are “only the [physical] body and other human factors regarded from a particular point of view” (emphasis mine). In Theosophy, the system is viewed as five bodies which are also conceptualized as instruments, or vehicles, to be used by consciousness (much like Wood, 1964). Each of these bodies corresponds to a plane of nature just as the *koshas* (in Vedanta) correspond to the *lokas*.

It is also important to understand that in both Vedanta and Theosophy the Great Chain of Being is most fundamentally represented by the underlying worlds (*lokas*), or planes, which might be viewed simply as areas on what I call the spirit-matter continuum (see Figure 2). The Vedantic *koshas* (or in Theosophy, the bodies) are constructed from the substance of their corresponding planes, from the physical body up through the range of the subtle bodies. Thus, the *koshas* and/or the bodies can be conceptualized as the Great Chain made manifest, a correspondence to the Great Chain, rather than the Chain itself.

13. The topic of the etheric chakra system is well covered in many sources. A particularly thorough treatment can be found in *Vibrational Medicine: New Choices for Healing Ourselves* by Richard Gerber (1988).

14. Moore (1994) noted that reincarnation was commonly accepted in Jesus’ day and that he did not deny or teach against it (pp. 182-184); many of the early church leaders taught reincarnation (pp. 185-186); and no ecumenical council of the Christian Church has ever officially rejected belief in the preexistence of the soul or reincarnation (p. 321). Contrary to common belief, the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553 A.D.) did not condemn the belief in reincarnation. According to Moore (1994), the Council was called by the Byzantine emperor Justinian for primarily political reasons. One of his political agendas was the condemnation of Origen, a prominent and respected third-century church leader who taught the preexistence of the soul, as well as reincarnation specifically. Significantly, although the Council rejected his views on Christology (the nature and identity of Christ), it remained conspicuously silent on the issues of the preexistence of the soul and reincarnation.

15. Although only the causal body is a permanent vehicle that remains throughout every life, a template or “seed” of the emotional and mental bodies is stored in the causal body and becomes the starting point for those vehicles in the succeeding incarnation.

16. Lansdowne (1986) uses the term “spiritual body” in reference to this higher vehicle. Since I already use “spiritual body” in place of “causal body,” I prefer to use either the term “light body” or Besant’s “body of bliss” to describe this vehicle of consciousness.

17. Combs and Krippner (1999), in critiquing Ken Wilber’s views of spiritual evolution, seem to question whether a theory of spiritual growth defined as a progression through the Vedantic stages can be viewed as following an evolutionary course. Since the concept of human consciousness evolving via the Theosophical bodies (which correspond to the Vedantic *koshas*) is central to the thesis developed in this paper, let me point out several tenets of Hindu thought, and advance some perspectives, which argue for the validity of viewing a spiritual progression through Vedantic planes of being as an evolutionary model.

The concept of evolution is fundamental to Hindu philosophy. Consider the basic Hindu principle of the inbreath and outbreath of Brahman: In this view, the creation process is seen as alternating between two phases of divine manifestation, *srishti* (throwing out) or *involution*, and *pralaya* (drawing in) or *evolution*, in an eternal cycle (Chatterji, 1931/1992). Thus, the physical universe (the physical plane) is the maximum point of the outbreath (involution), and (as seen in Theosophical theory) the human spirit, or monad, is a fragment of Universal Consciousness on the return to source (evolution); a worldview that is, by definition, a theory of spiritual growth following an evolutionary path.

I believe that confusion is introduced when a spiritual progression through Vedantic stages is discussed without differentiating the underlying worlds or planes (*lokas*) from the sheaths (*koshas*) that are manifested from the “substance” of their corresponding planes. For example, Combs and Krippner (1999) refer to Vedantic stages interchangeably as metaphysical planes and as sheaths (*koshas*), which they then identify as states of consciousness. Since they had already noted Tart’s (1975) view that states of consciousness are discrete, it is implied that the Vedantic stages (identified as undifferentiated planes/sheaths/states) are discrete, and thus the hierarchical and continuous nature of the underlying Hindu cosmology, or the Great Chain of Being, is obscured.

In addition, when Combs and Krippner (1999) argue that spiritual growth, defined as experiencing or identifying with the more subtle planes of being, cannot be viewed as following an evolutionary course because these experiences “are simply not evolutionary in and of themselves” (p. 17), they again imply that a view of spiritual growth as an advancement through Vedantic stages is not evolutionary. While I fully agree with this observation, and would add that experiencing or identifying with the more subtle planes also is not necessarily a measure of spiritual attainment, the observation is unrelated to whether a Vedanta-based theory of spiritual growth follows an evolutionary path.

18. In addition to Bailey’s material, a body of channeled information called the “Michael” teachings (Yarbro, 1980, 1986, 1988) includes a framework for understanding innate soul characteristics that correspond in many ways to the seven-ray material. I believe that either or both of these systems can usefully be incorporated into a spiritual psychology.

It may be tempting to reject channeled material out-of-hand. However, if we believe in the existence of states of consciousness other than the normal waking state, and in higher, more intuitive states of mind such as the Vedantic *vijñānamaya-kosha*, and if we recall the history of “revealed” teachings in the major religious traditions, we must also realize that it is only a mind closed to wondrous possibility that can categorically reject (to borrow a phrase from St. Paul) “things which are not seen.”

19. Judgment might be more easily understood if one compared a child to an adult who continues to behave like a child, and this is an evolutionary possibility which does occur. But even in this eventuality, the individual’s choice must be treated with respect. Learning and karmic consequences which give opportunity for learning are latent within even the worst choices.

20. “Exercise of function” is a term coined by Heinz Hartmann (1939/1958) in his seminal work, *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation*, to describe the critical developmental importance of using undeveloped, but emerging, fundamental components of the ego. As a matter of interest (and in an extension of Hartmann’s concept) it should be noted here that, in my view,

ultimately the emotional body comes to complete maturity through application of the mental body to whatever degree it is capable. Similarly, the mental body comes to complete maturity through application of the spiritual body.

21. The recent “Michael” teachings (Yarbro, 1980, 1986, 1988) describe five distinct soul ages (infant soul, baby soul, young soul, mature soul, and old soul), and give a detailed delineation of behaviors, tendencies, attitudes, and understandings characteristic of each level. I perceive this to be a corresponding presentation of essentially the same material as the system of consciousness evolution I have outlined in this paper.

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