2020

Perennialism Through the Lens of Otherness

Gabriel Fernandez-Borsot
Universitat Internacional de Catalunya

Recommended Citation

Perennialism Through the Lens of Otherness

Gabriel Fernandez-Borsot[1]
Universitat Internacional de Catalunya
Barcelona, Spain

Otherness has been a subject of the utmost relevance for continental philosophy since the beginning of the 20th century, constituting what might be characterized as an otherness turn. Otherness is here understood as the awareness that one has that other beings or things have their own separate beingness that is not subsumed within oneself. Its essential role in human relations permits the creation of a critical perspective of analysis, a "lens of otherness." Applying this lens to perennialism up through its latest iterations reveals some problematic aspects of this approach. By contrast, participatory thought may be a more "otherness compliant" alternative to perennialism. Whereas perennialism can be seen as being geared toward theoretical unification, participatory approaches are arguably guided by an ethos of otherness. Otherness is thus advanced as a relevant aspect in the debate on perennialism, and participatory thought is proposed as a more viable philosophical frame for transpersonal studies.

Keywords: *otherness, perennialism, transpersonal theory, lens of otherness, continental philosophy*

The public sphere is flooded with a variety of scintillating offers in the interface between spirituality and psychology. Common to many approaches is the assumption that the experience of oneness is the highest spiritual realization and indeed the ultimate goal of spiritual development. An example of this can be found in popularized neo-Advaitan discourse, in which the meaning of advaita as "not two" is emphasized (e.g., Katz, 2007). The term "nondual" tries to capture this same idea: that oneness or unity is the key (Hartelius, 2017b).

Transforming metaphysical theories of oneness into a unified theory of spirituality is an alluring temptation for scholars who wish to regard human spirituality as something more substantive than social constructions invented to explain psychological aberrations. In the early decades of transpersonal theory, for example, emphasis on unification led to a privileging of perennialist positions. During the last 20 years perennialism has been criticized and deconstructed in the course of a heated debate, and at least one substantive alternative—participatory philosophy—has been proposed (Abramson, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Alderman, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Ferrer, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2017; Hartelius, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013; Taylor, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

The debate on perennialism has focused on matters such as the Cartesian-Kantian split (Ferrer, 2002), the metaphysical nature of its basic assertions (Abramson, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Hartelius, 2015a, 2015b, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Taylor, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c), and the circular nature of the arguments on the supporting evidence (Hartelius, 2017b). However, an overlooked issue—the need for an effective account of otherness within perennialist thought—may have influenced both the evolution of perennialist thought and the rise of a participatory alternative. In order to expand the critique of perennialism, the concept of otherness as developed within Western continental philosophy during the 20th century can be brought to bear. For instance, Levinas's (1961) notion of "imperialism of the Same," his affirmation that ethics and not ontology must be the first philosophy (Levinas, 1984/1989), and his analysis of the tension between "Totality and Infinity" (Levinas, 1961), gather

valuable insights about otherness that expose shadows in perennialist thought. In this way, what might be termed an *otherness turn* in continental philosophy may find application in transpersonal thought, calling for an *otherness vigilance* that allows theories to be scrutinized to detect where aspects of otherness have been neglected or inadequately integrated. In this paper, I describe a method of critical analysis based on otherness, or a "lens of otherness," and apply this lens to both perennialism and participatory thought so as to identify additional problematic aspects of perennial views that participatory approaches may help to resolve (Fernandez-Borsot, 2017). In addition, the analysis highlights the need for explicit consideration of otherness in transpersonal thought.

As a working definition, otherness is here understood as the awareness that one has that other beings or things have their own separate beingness that is neither subsumed within oneself, nor is absolutely other (cf. Treanor, 2006). Instead, it implies an understanding that self and other are continually shaped by their engagement with each other. While many definitions of otherness are possible, this relational understanding of the term is congruent with the critique of perennialism advanced in this discussion.

In this discussion, a variety of cultural constructs related to spirituality, such as spiritual traditions, religions, worldviews, beliefs systems, cosmologies, and so on, are indicated by the term *spiritual frame*. I adopt Ferrer's (2002) classification of perennialism in five varieties: basic, esotericist, structuralist, perspectivist and typological (see pp. 77–80)—a classification that sufficiently covers the spectrum of perennialist theories inside and outside of transpersonal studies. While the latest generation of perennialist approaches (Rose, 2016; Studstill, 2005; Taylor, 2016) may not seem to fit wholly within this taxonomy, Taylor (2016) has correctly placed them in the perspectivist category (pp. 19, 35), though with distinctive features that are discussed below.

The Perennialist Debate: The Context

Perennialism is a philosophy of spirituality based upon the following set of assumptions:

1. There is a fundamental unity underlying all spiritual frames.
2. This unity can be somehow captured in specific formulations, descriptions, representations, or doctrines.
3. The reason this capture is possible is because there is an ultimate fixed referent for all spiritual or transpersonal experiences, which can be object of direct experience and therefore object of knowledge articulation that is universally valid.
4. The direct experience of this ultimate referent is the ultimate goal of spiritual development and its ending-point, the highest spiritual realization, the end of the human quest.

Some important problematic aspects of these assumptions have been already analyzed in-depth in the transpersonal community (Ferrer, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2017; Hartelius, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013), and here I limit my analysis to the perspective of otherness. From this point of view, the two most problematic assumptions are, first, the pretension that it is possible to establish a universal spiritual doctrine that somehow unifies the diversity of spiritual frames; I call this the *theoretical unification attempt*. Second is the assumption that the ultimate goal or end point of spiritual development can be directly experienced, and that once that has been experienced there is no further realization to be obtained; I call this the *ultimacy claim*.

Perennialism presents a variety of versions, as noted by Ferrer (2002), but all of them share these set of assumptions, although with different emphasis and more or less sophisticated epistemic articulations. During the last decade some new versions of perennialism have appeared that might seem to not comply with all the assumptions, most of them outside the transpersonal arena (Rose, 2016; Studstill, 2005), and one within it: Taylor's (2016) soft perennialism (discussed later).

Perennialism is a long-lasting philosophy whose origins in the Western tradition trace back to at least the Neoplatonism of Philo of Alexandria or the Platonic-Christian synthesis of St. Augustine

(Ferrer, 2002, p. 73). After that, it was developed in the transition from the medieval period into the Renaissance with the works of Nicolas de Cusa and the Neoplatonic Florentine Academy (with Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola; Schmitt, 1966). The first to use the term was the 16th-century Catholic scholar Agostino Steuco. The influence of perennialism in transpersonal theory came through its flourishing in the first part of the 20th century through the work of traditionalist scholars such as René Guenon (2001) and Frithjof Schuon (e.g., 1953/1984), the adaptations of Eastern philosophy by Swami Vivekananda (1947) and Ananda Coomaraswamy (2019), the esoteric teachings of the theosophical society (Blavatsky, 1888/1978), and most remarkably Aldous Huxley's (1945) popularization of the perennial philosophy. Further articulations of perennialism that influenced transpersonal thinkers can be found in the works of outstanding scholars such as Joseph Campbell (1949) and Huston Smith (1958).

Perennialism crystalized into transpersonal theory through the work of Ken Wilber (1977, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c). Wilber's work was so influential during the first decades of transpersonal psychology that his ideas shaped the basic theoretical foundations of the field, so that a perennialist-like hierarchical ontology became its most prevalent philosophical framework (Rothberg, 1986), with nonhierarchical models not so much "alternative as complementary to a hierarchical ontology" (p. 24). Wilber's paradigm reigned until the end of the 20th century, and though it started to be questioned in the late 1980s (e.g., Washburn, 1988), it was not until the end of the 1990s that it received a critique substantial enough to dethrone it (see Heron, 1996; Rothberg & Kelly, 1998). The most incisive and influential critique arguably came from Ferrer's early work (1998, 2000, 2002), which was partly directed at overcoming the flaws inherent in Wilber's perennialism. Since then, the debates around perennialism in transpersonal psychology have been multiple and heated at times. Arguably, perennialism has been the topic that has entertained more philosophical discussion in the field. The aim of this paper is to contribute to that discussion, responding to the call issued by Lancaster and Friedman (2017), and adding to the debate the perspective of otherness.

Otherness in Continental Philosophy: The Otherness Turn

After centuries of Western philosophy in which metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology played a hegemonic role, the beginning of the 20th century witnessed a pivotal turn with the irruption of Husserl's phenomenology (1900/1970a, 1901/1970b, 1931/1977). Husserl's purpose was to study first-person conscious experience. Husserl's project quickly revealed to him the essential role of intersubjectivity (Zahavi, 1996), and he concluded that first-person experience is not independent from second-person or third-person phenomena. Otherness, the first-person awareness of other subjects and objects that are different from the self that is aware of them, made its appearance as a topic of utmost relevance. Otherness, as a condition of possibility for intersubjectivity and as a fundamental function in the psyche, was revealed to be foundational to experience (Zahavi, 1996, 1999, 2014). By emphasizing intersubjectivity, and the implicit presence of otherness, Husserl inaugurated a wide venue of work within the phenomenological tradition and beyond: the role of "the other" in the psychological and sociocultural life. Many brilliant thinkers put otherness at the core of their philosophical analyses: Sartre (1943) viewed the self as vicariously receiving its being from its relationships with others—and therefore subject to their judgement—leading to the experience that "hell is other people" (Sartre, 1944/2015); Merleau-Ponty (1960/1964, 1945/2013) approached otherness from a somatic stance; Heidegger (1927/1962, p. 149) emphasized the relational nature of being, captured in his famous statement "Dasein ist Mitsein" (Being is being-with); Levinas (1961, 1974, 1984/1989, 1991/1998, 1995/1999) focused on otherness as the long ignored central topic of philosophy that dethroned metaphysics and ontology and rehabilitated ethics as the core philosophy; Marcel (1964) insisted on relative otherness as opposed to Absolute Otherness; Derrida (1967/1976, 1967/1978) playfully noted that "tout autre est tout autre" ("every other is wholly

other") to illustrate his notion of *différance*; Ricoeur (1990/1992) viewed the self as interwoven with the other through narratives; Kearney (2003) analyzed the hermeneutic of otherness; Foucault (1973, 1994a, 1994b) critiqued the othering process effected through knowledge construction and the associated normative prescriptions; Deleuze (1994) subverted the traditional relationship between identity and difference. This list merely samples the range of positions inspired by the centrality of otherness.

The intellectual current created by the reflections on otherness has overstepped the boundaries of philosophy and entered the discourse of many other disciplines: Lacanian psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1977, 1998), intersubjective psychoanalysis (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984, 1992), relational psychoanalysis (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983; Mitchell & Aron, 1999), sociology (Bauman, 1991; Jenkins, 1996), education (Freire, 1970), anthropology (Leistle, 2015), and cultural analyses (Docherty, 1996; Jervis 1999), to name a few.

Moreover, the increased awareness of the relevance of otherness that continental philosophy brought during the 20th century flourished in a variety of critical perspectives in social sciences. Each one of these critical perspectives focused in one aspect of human life that served as basis for othering: race (Crenshaw et al., 1995), class (Ferguson et al., 1990), gender (Benjamin, 1998; De Beauvoir, 1949/2008; Irigaray, 1993a, 1993b), colonization (Ferguson et al., 1990; Said, 1993), cultural recognition (Taylor, 1992), cultural expression (Docherty, 1996), cultural differences (Jervis, 1999), and even geographical analyses (Duncan, 1993; Staszak, 2009). These perspectives illustrate how the social construction of otherness can be used to oppress and exploit individuals and communities.

In this way, the 20th century saw a progressive prominence of otherness in philosophy—an otherness turn which then permeated into social sciences and cultural analyses—in synergy with the linguistic turn. This otherness turn has increased awareness of the relevance of otherness, and of the oppression and abuse that can be involved in the social processes of othering. The lessons of the otherness turn can be summarized in three ideas:

1. Otherness is a core dimension of human experience, both at the individual and collective levels.
2. There has been a historical tendency in Western society to use ideas, discourses, arguments, and ideologies to oppress and marginalize the individuals, communities, cultures, and worldviews whose features do not adhere to established normative models.
3. Therefore, any commitment against oppression and marginalization requires ethical otherness vigilance.

The emerging prominence of otherness as a foundational aspect of humanness may well constitute the basis for development of a specific critical perspective of analysis capable of discerning whether otherness has been neglected or inadequately integrated into a given theory. However, before such a lens of otherness can be engaged, it is necessary to consider whether otherness should be conceived in absolute or relative terms. While this might seem an obscure distinction, it will be shown to have sweeping impact on the ethical impact of otherness integration. Absolute otherness is otherness *qua* difference, that is, that difference is defined only in separative terms, so that the only constitutive aspect of otherness is difference. By contrast, relative otherness is the view that otherness occurs within a similarity-difference polarity, just as the categories of self and other obtain their meaning from reciprocal relationship with each other.

The 20th century saw an important debate on this issue of absolute versus relative otherness between Levinas (1987/1994, 1991/1998, 1995/1999) and Marcel (1951a, 1951b, 1964, 1965, 1995). Treanor's (2006) extensive analysis of this debate considered its ramifications in the works of Derrida, Caputo, Ricoeur, and Kearney, and concluded that absolute otherness is not a viable philosophical position because it leads to all sorts of aporias and contradictions. Extending Treanor's analysis, relative otherness is also a more generative and useful framing of otherness for use as a critical perspective of analysis for the social sciences, since defining otherness in terms of a similarity-difference polarity provides a pragmatic

basis for understanding a variety of psychological and social mechanisms. For example, closer to the similarity pole one might locate dynamics of identification, projection, empathy, symbiosis, assimilation, reciprocity, resonance, communion, shared worldview, shared values, shared cultural traits, the construction of an "us," syncretism, and hybridization—concepts that would be difficult to explain based on otherness as absolute, because absolute otherness requires an absolute separation that permits no continuum, and no relationship, between similarity and difference. Likewise, the aspect of the continuum weighted toward difference can be seen in the dynamics of rejection, alienation, marginalization, stigmatization, difference as threat, competition, rivalry, and conflicts between cultures, races, ethnicities, classes, genders, and social groups. However, traces of similarity are also present in experiences of difference as enrichment, difference as complement, and difference as awesomeness—common nuances that an absolute otherness would not permit.

If otherness is to be employed as a critical lens of analysis, then, it seems clear that it will need to employ otherness in a relative rather than an absolute sense. Relative otherness is not only more pragmatic, as noted, but also more capable of cultivating the sort of ethical discernments appropriate to critical analysis. For example, Derrida's (2000) analysis of hospitality demonstrates the absurdity and distance from common human experience that is introduced by an absolute interpretation of the term. Derrida claimed that any act of hospitality, because it is relative and situationally conditioned rather than absolute and unconditional, contains in itself a primary act of hostility. This led him to coin the expression "hostipitality," reflecting a fundamental distrust of human encounters (cf. Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). Yet this analysis emphasizes only the restrictive nature of human bonds, and denies their role in human relations, society, and the individual and communal creativity that emerges from these.

This lens of otherness finds application not only within the social sciences generally, but may have specific relevance for those approaches within psychology that reach for an understanding of spirituality as a natural expression of the human person—humanistic, integral, and transpersonal psychologies. For example, the topic of transcendence can be considered in either relative or absolute terms. For Levinas (1990; Treanor, 2006), the very enterprise of mysticism was a deceptive pursuit of contact with the transcendent, since in his interpretation of the transcendent as Absolute Other, no such contact was even theoretically possible. By contrast, just as it is possible to situate otherness on a continuum that includes both similarity and difference, transcendence can be located on a continuum that extends from immanence. Understood this way, transcendence and immanence provide a relational spectrum along which a variety of transpersonal notions can be situated, spanning from phenomenal encounters with immanent spiritual presence to metaphysical concepts of a universal Absolute Other.

However, before applying the lens of otherness to questions of human spirituality within these more whole person approaches to psychology, it is necessary to address a common objection. Prevalent in some perennialist approaches such as Wilber's (2001b, 2007) integral theory and Grof's (1998) neo-Advaitin model is the idea that nondual states of consciousness and their associated nondual stages of development transcend all categories, dichotomies, and dualities. Therefore, nonduality transcends the limited duality that is implied with otherness, and a perspective based in otherness has no contribution to make to an ultimate that is its superior source. However, the lens of otherness is not in competition with nondual or perennialist views for the position of dominant metatheory. The lens of otherness is simply an analytical tool that can be applied within the linguistic realm where discussion of nondual states and stages takes place; it can also be used to consider aspects of such theories that may be problematic in terms of their impact on psychological maturity, as well as ethical personal and social relations. With these preliminaries aside, the discussion turns to how a lens of otherness perspective can contribute to the analysis of perennialist thought within whole person approaches—and specifically within transpersonal studies.

Perennialism Through the Lens of Otherness:
An Imperialism of the Same

Applying the lens of otherness to the analysis of perennialism brings to the forefront several important problems. The first one concerns the *theoretical unification attempt*. The aim of efforts at theoretical unification among spiritual traditions is to capture the essence of human spirituality. Perennialist approaches attempt to create a universal map of "how things really are" in regard to spirituality—that is, they make ontological claims about the structure of cosmic reality reflected in spiritual systems. Different versions of perennialism map this alleged essence in various ways: (a) the basic form offers a set of philosophical universal principles; (b) the esotericist form describes a small set of esoteric paths that remain consistent across traditions, and that traverse a shared spiritual territory in different ways to the same destination; (c) the structuralist form discerns a set of deep structures that characterize a universal spiritual developmental path; (d) the perspectivist form portrays each path as leading to a different facet of the same spiritual ultimate; and (e) the typological form sees each type of mysticism as a unique expression of a single underlying spiritual reality (Ferrer, 2002).

Epistemic problems associated a Cartesian-Kantian split implied in this map-like representational approach, and the corresponding fall into the myth of the given, have been extensively analysed (Ferrer, 2002, 2017; see also Rorty, 1979). From the perspective of otherness an additional critique can be offered: any universal map of "how things are" represents not only all the objects in the universe, but also subsumes within a single representation the myriad of differently located experiences of subjects included in that expanse—that is, it assimilates others into its own perspective without their participation. Here Levinas's (1984/1989) analysis on the relationship between knowledge and otherness applies. Levinas noted how Western philosophy had embarked for centuries in a mapping process that gave ontology and epistemology a prominent role—a process in which the other is absorbed into the same because the priority is to create functional representations of the other instead of engaging with

its otherness and being transformed in the process. Treanor (2006) explained this point of Levinas:

> when confronted with otherness, scientists, explorers, philosophers, and theologians have generally attempted to analyze the foreign phenomenon in order to learn something—indeed ultimately everything—about it. This almost invariably entails placing the other within a system where it can be understood in juxtaposition to other elements of the system. … Otherness is thought in juxtaposition to, or in the terms of, the same; otherness is other-than-the-same. The goal is to convert something unknown (other) into something known. (pp. 3–4)

This pressure exerted on otherness to conform to how it has been represented is what Levinas (1961) called the "imperialism of the Same," which carries out a systematic suppression of the Other. This rejection of what is different and disturbing is followed by an enforced assimilation of the other into what is known and familiar. Western philosophy has effected such an assimilation by placing ontology ("how things are") as first philosophy. Ontology as it has been developed in the Western tradition is focused on producing and refining an overarching system rather than on attending carefully to unique aspects that defy classification within the current state of that system. Therefore, it cannot fully accommodate the radical openness to the other that ethics requires. In Levinas's words (1984/1989), if one is to respect the other, one must put "ethics as first philosophy" (p. 75). If ontology is primary, ethics will suffer. In this way, there is a previously unexamined ethical liability of the perennialist positions: its attempt to create a unified theory incorporating all spiritual frames will necessarily suppress otherness. The root of the problem lies not in a particular version of perennialism, but in the very attempt to create a theory about all beings without the participation of all beings. What suffers in perennialism is then hermeneutics—that is, the depth of the other's experience. The problem is not with creating a model that integrates elements of many spiritual frames, but with presenting it as "the way things are," as a reflection of the very essence of spirituality. A unifying model could

instead be presented as an invitation to exploration, a hermeneutical container that provides guidance, and a proposal to others that does not pretend to already encompass them.

In addition to calling for ethics as first philosophy, Levinas reflected a related idea in one of his most celebrated works, *Totality and Infinity* (1961). The dichotomy between totality and infinity embodies the intrinsic tension between ontology and the ethics required by otherness. Ontology circumscribes being into a system, and what falls outside the system is ignored (annihilated) or forced to fit in (assimilated). Ontology, therefore, tends to totalization. In contrast, otherness points to what falls outside the current system, to infinity, to the inexhaustible source of creativity and novelty in the universe that overflows any attempt of establishing a fixed system.

While the expressions "ethics as first philosophy" and "totality and infinity" have become emblematic of Levinas's work, these are by no means idiosyncratic aspects of his philosophy but reflective of the larger otherness turn in Western thought. For example, Dahnke (2001) showed that Levinas's articulation of these ideas represents the maturation of ideas that were already prefigured in Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger—and Crowell (2015) added Sartre to the list. One can also find further articulations of this strand of thought in those he influenced, as with Derrida's (1978) "violence and metaphysics" (p. 97) or Vattimo's "Belief" (1999).

These core ideas of the otherness turn in Western philosophy illuminate an intrinsic shadow of the perennialist endeavor. The theoretical unification attempted by perennialism retains the essential character of totalizing modern philosophical systems rooted in the Enlightenment age: Diderot and Dalembert's *Encyclopaedia* (1751), Laplace's (1809) system of the world, Hegel's (1807) synthetic system, and Comte's (1835) law of three stages, to name a few. Perennialism presents its theories of everything as advances, when in fact their structure reflects an anachronism that has not come to terms with the otherness turn. Perennialism retains the modern view of theory as a map, philosophy as "the mirror of nature" (Rorty, 1979), and the pretension to locate

knowledge outside of the intersubjective space (cf. Ferrer, 2017). This account contrasts with a view of theory as a toolbox (Foucault, 1994a), philosophy as an invitation, knowledge as a relational and situated task. When considering these ideas in the transpersonal context, the contrast is between on one hand a conception of spiritual doctrines as descriptive or representational and on the other as a relational matrix of hermeneutical locations that include descriptive and representational elements as well as exhortative, soteriological, and prescriptive ones (cf. Ogilvy, 2013).

To give a specific example, in Indian philosophy, the exhortative and soteriological dimension is primary and prevalent over the descriptive and representational one. As Menon et al. (2018) explained, "The focus of metaphysical discussions in Indian philosophical literature is on how to create a dynamic and continuous process of spiritual uplift that is not distanced or alienated from the lived experiences of the person" (p. 24). Another example is to be found in Banerji's (2018) clarification of how Sri Aurobindo's integral endeavor must be understood:

> Thus integrality in Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga must not be thought of as a Theory of Everything that explains the cosmos and claims to hegemonize the field of yoga, but rather a process psychology leading to an aporetic experience of integral consciousness and future supramental possibility, for which mind has no language. (p. 30)

Transpersonal perennialist models such as Wilber's integral theory do not acknowledge such a distinction appropriately. In the attempt to create a unified theory from an ontological (descriptive and representational) perspective, several mistakes are made. First, the original traditions presumably integrated in the perennial map are distorted in order to force them to fit (Berkhin & Hartelius, 2011; Ferrer, 1998, 2002; Hayes, 1994; Kremer, 1998; Richards, 1978). Second, some philosophical and scientific knowledge used to bolster parts of the perennialist map are equally distorted (Bauwens, 2005; Falk, 2009; Meyerhoff, 2010), and some unfounded claims of scientific consensus are

affirmed (Meyerhoff, 2010). Third, essential dialogue with the current members of the involved traditions is omitted, being especially poignant the case of many indigenous traditions that are often situated in the lower rungs of the perennialist developmental scheme (Kremer, 1998). Fourth, the direct translation into Western categories of the categories and concepts used in non-Western spiritual frames constitutes an epistemic, colonialist reduction that simplifies the original terms into familiar Western classifications, thereby stripping them of much of their richness and otherness. The following quote by Rothberg (2000) explained this problematic instance of the "imperialism of the Same":

> To assume that the categories of current western epistemology are adequate for interpreting [non-Western] spiritual approaches is to prejudge the results of such an encounter, which might well lead to significant changes in these categories. (pp. 175–176)

In the same vein, Ochs (2006) affirmed that religious studies will remain colonialist as far as that they "tend to remove 'religious phenomena' from the contexts of their societal embodiments and resituate them within conceptual universes of our own designing" (p. 126; cf. Hammer, 2001). In addition to other shortcomings, then, the unification attempt is essentially colonialist in nature.

In addition to the problems associated to the attempt at theoretical unification, the ultimacy claim is also problematic. Affirming that a specific experience or a specific stage of development is ultimate is not affirming anything about that specific state or stage, but about all the other states and stages: these are necessarily less (less relevant, less valuable, less high, less evolved, etc.). The claim of ultimacy is a comparative and universal claim that has a totalizing character. Thus, it is subject to the aforementioned "imperialism of the Same": once one affirms ultimacy, one will feel a strong tendency to dismiss anything that challenges it. The human psyche is prone to the transition from "how things really are" to "how things really should be." This is what Vattimo (1999), drawing on Derrida's (1978) previous works on "violence and metaphysics" pointed to when he concluded that every metaphysical ultimate is potentially violent. In my view, what Vattimo stated is that affirming any metaphysical ultimate places ontology over ethics.

Nonetheless, this argument calls for a distinction, lest any claim of ultimacy fall into this dilemma and all notions of ultimacy become meaningless. When a claim of ultimacy is accompanied by a claim of uniqueness, that is, with the claim that a specific ultimate is ontologically the only ultimate, then the problem manifests in all its seriousness. That is the case with perennialist theories; an example is the way the notion of enlightenment is treated, in concomitance with its confused importation from Eastern traditions, in some New Age circles (Jacobs, 2020). However, if ultimacy is relational rather than ontological, then a multiplicity of ultimates that occur in a variety of relational contexts are simultaneously admitted (cf. Ferrer, 2002). Moreover, in a relational context, any ultimate necessarily takes the character of a *yet-to-explore* ultimate rather than a clear-cut theoretical ultimate, because a relational matrix is constantly shifting in ways that brings forward novelty.

Another problematic aspect from the lens of otherness concerning the ultimacy claim points toward ethical inconsistencies. If one takes a specific achievement (e.g., nondual realization) as the ultimate spiritual realization, once a human being has achieved it there will not be any other aspects to develop. This assumption stands in contrast with the cases of extremely unethical behavior of some gurus who have allegedly achieved this nondual realization. Especially poignant are the cases of supposed masters that Wilber had previously endorsed as realized nondual masters (Conway, 2007; Yenner, 2009). This problem led Wilber to complexify his model by distinguishing multiple lines of development, yet if there is a single nondual ultimate, then all these lines must converge and meet in that ultimate, and a nondual realization would necessarily reflect an ultimate realization of each and every developmental line. It would therefore seemingly be impossible for a master with a complete nondual realization to fall short in any developmental line, including ethical development.

This is not to suggest that perennialist authors have failed to wrestle with otherness.

Analyzed from the stance of the lens of otherness, the five modalities of perennialism can be viewed historically as successive efforts at the integration of otherness—as if the evolution of perennialism was being pushed by the requirement for integrating otherness. The first or basic variety (beginning of 20th century until the 1980s) posits that there is only one path and one goal. Apparent variations are irrelevant and correspond to cultural modulations. In this case, diversity is devalued, and with it, otherness: if others have experiences which differ from the model, then they are plainly wrong, or not on the path.

The second variety, esotericist (beginning of 20th century until the 1990s), posits that there are many paths but only one goal. By valuing the diversification of paths, it introduces an implicit valuation of otherness: if the others have a different experience is just because they are in a different path. Nonetheless, as all the paths must converge to the one goal, experiences differing significantly from this one goal (e.g., indigenous accounts) will be labeled as distant from the goal. The third or typological form (1930s to 1980s) admits many paths and many goals, but only as instances of a finite number of basic types. Diversity is admitted but limited.

The fourth or structuralist type (1990s to the present) posits many paths and many goals in surface structures that correspond to one path and one goal in regard to the deep underlying structures. In this case diversification is introduced also at the level of the goals, creating more space for otherness.

However, with the need of characterizing the deep structures and distinguishing which elements are surface and which elements are deep, associated problems appear: who establishes what is surface and what is deep? It is often someone outside of the relevant spiritual frames who claims to discern the difference. Others are then told how they should interpret their experience. The fifth kind of perennialism, perspectivist (1990s to the present), posits many paths and many goals, and the unification relies only on the affirmation that this diversity corresponds somehow to different aspects, perspectives, or dimensions of the same underlying spiritual ultimate. This variety of perennialism is otherness compliant to the degree that the unifying spiritual ultimate remains free from description in ontological terms. Taylor's (2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) soft phenomenological perennialism would be a more spacious version of this variety, but it still presents some ontologizing (Ferrer, 2017).

Significantly enough, only structuralist and perspectivist versions of perennialism, which present a better integration of otherness, have persisted within the transpersonal field. Even the most relevant version of structuralist perennialism, Wilber's integral theory (2001a, 2001b, 2006, 2007), has been described in successive phases (Kazlev, 2009) that also display a progressive integration of otherness (for details, see Fernandez-Borsot, 2017, pp. 212–232). Taylor's (2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) recent version of perspectival perennialism, which he has called soft perennialism, is in turn the most otherness compliant version of perennialism to date. Accordingly, it deserves a specific lens-of-otherness-based analysis.

Soft perennialism presents two distinctive features: (a) spiritual development is conceived as an open-ended process, with no goal, and (b) phenomenology is prioritized over ontology (Taylor, 2016). Using the lens of otherness, these two distinctive features represent an important step forward. The first feature is an explicit renunciation of the ultimacy claim, and the second softens the problems associated with ontologizing that are present in the theoretical unification attempt. Indeed, the phenomenological turn that Taylor proposed can be interpreted as a move toward respect for otherness: the phenomenological analysis starts from the experience of the individual, whatever that maybe, and attempts to honor and respect it. The fact that Taylor has repeatedly emphasized the secondary role of ontology can be seen as a safeguard against the tendency to impose a priori statements on the experience of the other, an effort to avoid the "imperialism of the Same."

Nonetheless, his articulation still presents clear efforts at ontologizing by claiming that the most fundamental ground of being can be best described as an all-pervading spiritual force, which is claimed or assumed to be immanent and

impersonal (Taylor, 2016, p. 29). Following this line of reasoning, descriptions of a spiritual ultimate in any other terms—for example in transcendent or personal terms—would also reference this same underlying force, but with added elements that are not ontologically present. The problems associated with Taylor's ontological claims have been analyzed in depth by Ferrer (2017) and Hartelius (2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c), and here I merely emphasize implications from a lens of otherness stance. If the impersonal quality of this speculatively posited ultimate ground of being is emphasized over other qualities, and if the attribution of any personal quality to the spiritual ultimate is seen as an artificial addition, then intersubjective relationships are intrinsically devalued. Yet there is a problem of otherness here: if any transpersonal experience, however interpreted, is defined as being *actually* an encounter with an impersonal ground of being, this dismisses the possibility of having an experience in which something larger than the self is encountered as relational love (cf. Levinas, 1961).

Accordingly, while Taylor's (2016) soft perennialism is the most otherness compliant version of perennialism, it still retains some problems relative to ontologizing an impersonal, immanent spiritual realm or force. This issue notwithstanding, his research into the phenomenology of certain types of developmental experiences may point to important commonalities in postconventional development (e.g., Taylor, 2010).

Participatory Thought
Through the Lens of Otherness

The application of a participatory perspective in transpersonal studies arose in response to problematic aspects of perennialism (Ferrer 1998, 2000, 2002). In contrast to perennialist thought, a participatory approach expresses a commitment to respect and honor the specificities and particularities of each spiritual frame, each individual and each community—inspired, as it were, by an *ethos of otherness*. Consonant with this full respect of otherness, participatory thought provides a philosophical container for diversity rather than a unified theory. It supplies a frame in which there is space for any spiritual frame to exist on its own

terms, minimizing the need of reinterpretation relative to any other knowledge frame outside of it—other than the implicit and central challenge to any totalizing ontologies such frames may posit. This goal is achieved by holding each spiritual frame as a particular enaction of the infinite potentialities that spirituality offers. Each enaction is brought forth into manifestation through a process of co-creation within a specific social, historical, and environmental context.

In a participatory approach, each spiritual frame is like an ecosystem. Each ecosystem is a specific, located manifestation of the potentialities of biological life. Though there are many commonalities between ecosystems (e.g., the ubiquitous presence of cells as fundamental constitutive elements), there is an imaginative diversity that so permeates these systems that one could not claim they reflect a "core ecosystem" of what is essential to all ecosystems. Indeed, any claim of an essential core would be a reduction of the inherently propagating diversity. Abstracting similarities from various phenomena remains a useful tool for comprehending and controlling complex systems to a certain level, but ontologizing these abstracted categories into any kind of essential structure marginalizes or even denies the ways in which the mapping process falls short of the territory.

For example, a participatory perspective will certainly acknowledge that it is perfectly valid for Christians to worship the Trinity. The Trinity is not just a social construction, an invention, or a fantasy; within the Christian spiritual world it has ontological richness and status. Yet just as ecosystems are not isolated from one another, so socially located spiritual domains interact and engage with other domains—both spiritual and secular. A Christian who adopted a participatory stance would refrain from interpreting other traditions inside a Christian framework—which would constitute assimilation—and would resist attempting to prove that other spiritual frames are incorrect or false—which would constitute annihilation. This stance does not mean that critiques cannot be developed, but rather that critiques deserve to be accompanied by genuine curiosity and dialogical engagement instead of the a priori assumption that one specific spiritual frame

depicts "ultimate reality" more fully than another (cf. Duckworth, 2014). Moreover, in alignment with Levinas's (1984/1989) call for ethics and not ontology to be the first philosophy, the criteria proposed by Ferrer (2011b) to develop critical discernment when approaching any spiritual frame focus on pragmatic results, such as the correction of eco-socio-political injustice and the overcome of ego-centeredness, rather than on doctrinal-ontological matters. As such, critiques of spiritual frames developed by a participatory approach will emerge from critical engagement with ethical considerations rather than from ideological claims.

Consideration of spiritual frames as enactions frontally contrasts with the perennialist approach (cf. Ferrer, 2008). While perennialism attempts to provide a map with specific slots where each spiritual frame is assigned, a participatory approach provides an open container where each spiritual frame can find its place or places in relationship, respecting its own specificities and those of others while offering grounds for cross-cultural inspiration and criticism. Whereas perennialism provides a shelf with a box for each spiritual frame, a participatory approach brings an infinite blank canvas where each tradition can express and represent itself, with the sole condition of ethical considerations such as leaving space for others to disclose theirs. While perennialism attempts to reduce all traditions to a single theory, a participatory approach brings a frame in which even totalizing theories are contextualized within a permissive diversity. It is in this way that a participatory approach encourages respect for otherness: it integrates the pole of difference within the play of similarity-diversity by calling for each spiritual frame to be respected in its integrity in return for abstaining from levying judgments on other frame—other than ethical critiques of its claims for ultimacy beyond its own community, or respectful engagement over the impact of its doctrines or practices on human wellbeing.

The similarity pole of otherness, and the relational ground in which similarity and diversity arise, also need to be integrated within a participatory stance. Otherness without similarity can lead to either relativistic indifference or tribalism, but a participatory approach encourages an engaged relationality that responds to similarity with curiosity and respect. The very fact of shared being—of presence together in a shared world—provides ground for similarity. A participatory approach differs from typical postmodern approaches by affirming that there is a shared world; yet it holds back from ontologizing claims about the nature of any such shared world. It is in this way that it moves from relativistic to relational. At the same time, the presence of a shared world needs to be referenced in some way that acknowledges its existence in an undetermined way. Ferrer (2011b) has referred to this as "a dynamic and undetermined mystery or generative power of life, the cosmos, and/or the spirit" (p. 2), out of which all spiritual enactions—as well as secular enactions—are brought forth, through the co-creative participation of all the involved beings. On one hand, this mystery is both dynamic—that is, not fixed—and undetermined. These qualities imply that the mystery cannot be described through any set of characteristics or attributes beyond those embodied in its plural enactions; it transcends any conceptual definition, it defeats any theoretical unification attempt. On the other hand, it is not any kind of "something," and therefore, while it can be diversely apprehended through direct experience, it cannot be comprehended. Humans enact this mystery through spiritual expressions, and at the same time cannot capture its full potential with those expressions because we are immersed—participating—within it.

At the same time, participatory thought does not see the mystery and its enactions as separate entities. Continuing with the metaphor of ecosystems, it does not make sense to see physical ecosystems as separate from the processes that shape them. Equally, the mystery is not distinct from its enactions, nor reducible to any of them. By pointing this idea, participatory thought avoids a neo-Kantian dualism between the mystery and its enactions, which might spur competition among spiritual frames for the status of being less separated from the mystery (Ferrer, 2017).

Given that all spiritual enactions are posited to be brought forth out of the mystery, it provides a certain sense of unity in the diversity: a unity not in terms of a common end-point, but of a shared

yet undetermined ground. It is in this sense of a unifying principle that Ferrer (2002, 2008, 2017) spoke of a "relaxed spiritual universalism." This universalism can account for similarities among traditions in a way that acknowledges the similarity pole of otherness: the different enactions of the mystery are not merely incommensurable realities, totally independent from each other. They arise from a shared ground, result from hybridizations of previous enactions, and continue to be involved in processes of hybridization (Ferrer, 2009; Ferrer [2017] has acknowledged at least seven kinds of equivalences among traditions).

In this way a participatory approach enables unity through otherness by acknowledging a common relational ground (the mystery), while providing an intellectual strategy to accept difference without compromising the integrity of one's own spiritual frame. The mystery functions as an evocative construct, exemplifying a yet-to-explore unknown. When current spiritual frames are seen as specific enactions of the mystery that do not exhaust its possibilities, the door is open for novel forms of spiritual inquiry (Ferrer, 2003; Heron, 1998, 2006). Spirituality is much more than reproduction of past inspirations; it is an ever-present invitation to explore and co-create more and more possibilities of the mystery: the unfolding unknown of existence itself.

A participatory approach overcomes two major problems of perennialism: the theoretical unification attempt and the ultimacy claim. As such, it is much more otherness compliant than perennialism in any of its forms or iterations. Considering that participatory perspectives arose in a moment when the otherness turn in philosophy had already influenced Western culture, it seems possible that this same otherness turn may have been part of the impulse that brought forth the participatory endeavor.

Conclusion

The analysis of perennialism through a lens of otherness has highlighted two problematic aspects of perennialist assumptions: the theoretical unification attempt and the ultimacy claim. The root of the shortcomings can be summarized through

Levinas's (1984/1989) assertion that ethics, and not ontology, must be the first philosophy. Attempting to provide a unified theory, as perennialism does, puts ontology first—an exercise that exerts a marginalizing pressure on those who do not fit easily into the unified theory; these are fated to distorted assimilation into a perennialist model or complete dismissal as irrelevant on account of their noncompliant particularities. This coercive influence is what Levinas (1961) called the "imperialism of the Same" (p. 28).

Though Levinas provided a synthetic formulation of these arguments especially suitable for the critique developed in this paper, he is only the most visible member of a broad current in Western philosophy. This current unfolded throughout the 20th century, increasing the awareness of the relevance of otherness, and extending its influence to social sciences, to the point of promoting a variety of critical perspectives rooted in otherness. The relevance of this philosophical current suggests that important trends of Western thought in the 20th century experienced what can be called an otherness turn.

Given the salience of otherness, I have argued that it can be used as the foundation for a critical perspective of analysis, which I call the lens of otherness. I have provided an outline of the theoretical foundation for the lens of otherness and have applied it to perennialism to show problematic aspects of its fundamental assumptions. I have also argued that the evolution of the perennialist thought has appeared to respond to the need of improving the integration of otherness. Even Taylor's (2016) soft perennialism, though more "otherness compliant" than its predecessors, still retains the characteristic problems of perennialism.

A participatory approach appears to more fully remedy the problems identified in perennialism. Indeed, the level of otherness compliance in participatory approaches is such that one could say they are inspired by an ethos of otherness, a commitment to respect and honor the specificities and particularities of each spiritual frame, each individual, and each community. In this way, it may be that the otherness turn of Western philosophy can make substantial contributions to the debate

on perennialism, showing that otherness is a key consideration that unavoidably alters the terms of the debate on its viability as a frame within psychology, religious studies, or transpersonal studies. By contrast, a participatory approach may be a more viable philosophical frame for efforts to hold diverse spiritual traditions in a relational rather than relativistic frame—one that permits a discerning study of their uniqueness and similarities as expressions of a shared undetermined mystery.

Note

1. This paper is based in part on a dissertation submitted by the author in partial fulfillment of the PhD degree in Transformative Studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). The paper was completed during a term as visiting scholar at CIIS. I wish to thank Glenn Hartelius for helpful and valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper and for the scholar rigor he has fostered in my work.

References

Abramson, J. (2014a). The misunderstanding and misinterpretation of key aspects of Ken Wilber's work in Hartelius and Ferrer's (2013) assessment. *Transpersonal Psychology Review, 16*(1), 3–12.

Abramson, J. (2014b). The misunderstanding and misinterpretation of key aspects of Ken Wilber's work in Hartelius and Ferrer's (2013) assessment: A response to the reviewer. *Transpersonal Psychology Review, 16*(1), 15–16.

Abramson, J. (2015). The emperor's new clothes: Ferrer isn't wearing any—Participatory is perennial. A reply to Hartelius. *Transpersonal Psychology Review, 17*(1), 38–48.

Alderman, B. (2011). Kingdom come: Beyond inclusivism and pluralism, an integral post-metaphysical invitation. *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice, 6*(3), 14–31.

Alderman, B. (2012a). Opening space for translineage practice: Some ontological speculations. *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice, 7*(2), 49–71.

Alderman, B. (2012b). The participatory turn (Review of The participatory turn: Spirituality, mysticism,

religious studies edited by Jorge N. Ferrer and Jacob H. Sherman). *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice, 7*(2), 120–126.

Atwood, G., & Stolorow, R. (1984). *Structures of subjectivity: Explorations in psychoanalytic phenomenology*. The Analytic Press.

Atwood, G., & Stolorow, R. (1992). *Contexts of being: The intersubjective foundations of psychological life*. The Analytic Press.

Banerji, D. (2018). Introduction to the special topic section on integral yoga psychology: The challenge of multiple integrities. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 37*(1), 27–37. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2018.37.1.27

Bauman, Z. (1991). *Modernity and ambivalence*. Polity Press.

Bauwens, M. (2005). A critique of Wilber and Beck's SD–Integral. *P/I: Pluralities/Integration, 61*(3), 1–3.

Benjamin, J. (1998). *The shadow of the other: Intersubjectivity and gender in psychoanalysis*. Routledge.

Berkhin, I., & Hartelius, G. (2011). Why altered states are not enough: A perspective from Buddhism. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 30*(1-2), 63–68. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2011.30.1-2.iii

Blavatsky, H. P. (1978). *The secret doctrine*. Theosophical. (Original work published 1888)

Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Pantheon Books.

Coomaraswamy, A. K. (2019). *Metafísica: Volumen II*. (P. Rodea, Trans.). Independently published.

Conway, T. (2007). *Adi Da and his voracious, abusive, personality cult*. Enlightened-Spirituality.org. http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/Da_and_his_cult.html

Comte, A. (1835). *Cours de philosophie positive*. Bachelier.

Crenshaw, K. W., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, P. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. The New Press.

Crowell, S. (2015). Why is ethics first philosophy? Levinas in phenomenological context. *European Journal of Philosophy, 23*(2), 564–588. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2012.00550.x

Dahnke, M. D. (2001). Ethics as first philosophy. *Auslegung, 24*(2), 199–218. https://doi.org/10.17161/AJP.1808.9486

de Beauvoir, S. (2008). *Le deuxième sexe* [The second sex]. Gallimard. (Original work published 1949)

Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and repetition*. (P. Patton, Trans.). Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1967)

Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference* (A. Bass, Trans.). University Of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1967)

Derrida, J. (2000). Hostipitality. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities, 5*(3), 3–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/09697250020034706

Derrida, J., & Dufourmantelle, A. (2000). *Of hospitality: Anne Durfourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond*. (R. Bowlby, Trans.). Stanford University Press.

Diderot, D., & D'alembert, J.-B. le R. (1751). *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres*. André le Breton. https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.82225

Docherty, T. (1996). *Alterities: Criticism, history, representation*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198183570. 001.0001

Duckworth, D. (2014a). How nonsectarian is "nonsectarian"? Jorge Ferrer's religious pluralist alternative to Tibetan Buddhist inclusivism. *Sophia, 53*(3), 339–348. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-013-0398-5

Duncan, J. (1993). Sites of representation: Place, time and the discourse of the Other. In J. Duncan & D. Ley (Eds.), *Place/culture/representation* (pp. 39–56). Routledge.

Falk, G. D. (2009). *Norman Einstein*. Million Monkeys Press.

Ferguson, R., Gever, M., Minh-ha, T. T., & West, C. (Eds.) (1990*). Out there: Marginalization and contemporary culture*. MIT Press.

Fernandez-Borsot, G. (2017). *A theoretical analysis of integral theory and the participatory paradigm through the lens of otherness* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.

Ferrer, J. N. (1998). Beyond absolutism and relativism in transpersonal evolutionary theory. *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution, 52*, 239–280. https://doi.org/10.1080/02604027.1998.9972709

Ferrer, J. N. (2000). The perennial philosophy revisited. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 32*(1), 7–30.

Ferrer, J. N. (2002). R*evisioning transpersonal theory: A participatory vision of human spirituality*. State University of New York Press.

Ferrer, J. N. (2008). Spiritual knowing as participatory enaction: An answer to the question of religious pluralism. In J. N. Ferrer & J. Sherman (Eds.), *The participatory turn: Spirituality, mysticism, religious studies* (pp. 135–169). State University of New York Press.

Ferrer, J. N. (2009). The plurality of religions and the spirit of pluralism: A participatory vision of the future of religion. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 28*, 139–151. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2009.28.1.139

Ferrer, J. N. (2011a). Participation, metaphysics, and enlightenment: Reflections on Ken Wilber's recent work. *Transpersonal Psychology Review, 34*(2), 3–24.

Ferrer, J. N. (2011b). Participatory spirituality and transpersonal theory: A ten-year retrospective. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 43*(1), 1–34.

Ferrer, J. N. (2017). *Participation and the mystery: Transpersonal essays in psychology, education, and religion*. State University of New York Press.

Foucault, M. (1973). *Madness & civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason*. Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1994a). *Dits et écrits, vol. II* [Sayings and writings, volume II]. Gallimard.

Foucault, M. (1994b). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (A. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). Vintage Books.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogía del oprimido* [Pedagogy of the oppressed]. Tierra Nueva.

Greenberg, J., & Mitchell, S. A. (1983). *Object relations in psychoanalytic theory*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjk 2xv6

Grof, S. (1998). *The cosmic game: Explorations at the frontiers of human consciousness*. State University of New York Press.

Guenon, R. (2001). *The collected works of Rene Guenon*. (H. D. Fohr, Trans.). Sophia Perennis.

Hammer, O. (2001). Same message from everywhere: The sources of modern revelation. In M. Rohstein (Ed.), New age religion and globalization (pp. 42–57). Aarhus University Press.

Hartelius, G. (2015a). A startling new role for Wilber's integral model: Or, how I learned to stop worrying and love perennialism (A response to Abramson). *Transpersonal Psychology Review, 17*(1), 38–48.

Hartelius, G. (2015b). Participatory thought has no emperor and no absolute — A further response to Abramson. *Transpersonal Psychology Review, 17*(1), 49–53.

Hartelius, G. (2016a). Participatory transpersonalism: Transformative relational process, not the structure of ultimate reality. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *35*(1), iii–ix. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2016.35.1.iii

Hartelius, G. (2016b). Taylor's soft perennialism: A primer of perennial flaws in transpersonal scholarship. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 35*(2), 42–47. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2016.35.2.42

Hartelius, G. (2017a). Zombie perennialism: An intelligent design for psychology? A further response to Taylor's soft perennialism. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 36*(2), 93–110. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.93

Hartelius, G. (2017b). Circular reasoning is not the uroboros: Rejecting perennialism as a psychological theory. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 36*(2), 121–135. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.121

Hartelius, G. (2017c). Taylor's soft perennialism: Psychology or New Age spiritual vision? *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 36*(2), 136–146. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.136

Hartelius, G., & Ferrer, J. N. (2013). Transpersonal philosophy: The participatory turn. In H. L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 187–202). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118591277.ch10

Hayes, R. P. (1994). Nagarjuna's appeal. *Journal of Indian Philosophy, 22*, 299–378. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01095223

Hegel, G. W. F. (1807). *Phänomenologie des geistes*. Joseph Anton Goebhart.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarie & E. Robinson, Trans.) SCM Press. (Original work published 1927)

Heron, J. (1996). Spiritual inquiry: A critique of Wilber. *Collaborative Inquiry, 18*, 2–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049600200107

Heron, J. (1998). *Sacred science: Person centered inquiry into the spiritual and the subtle*. PCCS Books.

Heron, J. (2006). *A farewell to authoritarian religion*. Lulu Press.

Husserl, E. (1970a). *Logical investigations: Volume 1*. (J. Bermudez, T. Crane & P. Sullivan, Eds.). Routledge. (Original work published 1900)

Husserl, E. (1970b). *Logical investigations: Volume 2*. (J. Bermudez, T. Crane & P. Sullivan, Eds.). Routledge. (Original work published 1901)

Husserl, E. (1977). *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to phenomenology*. (D. Cairns, Trans.). Kluwer Academic. (Original work published 1931) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-9997-8

Huxley, A. (1945). *The perennial philosophy*. Harper & Row.

Irigaray, L. (1993a). *An ethics of sexual difference* (G. C. Gill, Trans.). Cornell University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1993b). *Je, tu, nous: Toward a culture of difference* (A. Martin, Trans.). Routledge.

Jacobs, B. J. H. (2020). Getting off the wheel: A conceptual history of the New Age concept of enlightenment. *Numen*, *67*, 373–401. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685276-12341588

Jenkins, R. (1996). *Social identity*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203292990

Jervis, J. (1999). *Transgressing the modern: Explorations in the Western experience of otherness*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Katz, J. (Ed.) (2007). *One: Essential writings on nonduality*. Sentient.

Kazlev, M. A. (2009). *Ken Wilber's philosophy, and some critical appraisals*. Kheper.net. http://www.kheper.net/topics/Wilber/index.html

Kearney, R. (2003). *Strangers, gods and monsters: Interpreting otherness*. Routledge.

Kremer, J. (1998). The shadow of evolutionary thinking. In D. Rothberg & S. Kelly (Eds.), *Ken Wilber in dialogue: Conversations with leading transpersonal thinkers* (pp. 239–258). Quest Books.

Lacan, J. (1977). Écrits*; A selection* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Routledge.

Lacan, J. (1998). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (Vol. Book XI). W. W. Norton.

Lancaster, B., & Friedman, H. (2017). Introduction to the special topic section: The Taylor-Hartelius debate on psychology and spirituality. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 36*(2), 72–74. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017. 36.2.72

Laplace, P. S. (1809). *Exposition du système du monde*. Bachelier.

Leistle, B. (2015). Otherness as a paradigm in anthropology. *Semiotica, 2015*(204), 291–313. https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2014-0089

Levinas, E. (1961). *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'exteriorité* [Totality and infinity: Essays on exteriority]. Martinus Nijhoff.

Levinas, E. (1974). *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* [Otherwise than being or beyond essence]. Martinus Nijhoff. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-1111-7

Levinas, E. (1989). Ethics as first philosophy (S. Hand & M. Temple, Trans.). In S. Hand (Ed.), *The Levinas reader* (pp. 75–87). Basil Blackwell. (Original work published 1984)

Levinas, E. (1990). *Difficult freedom: Essays on Judaism*. (S. Hand, Trans.). Athlone Press.

Levinas, E. (1994). *Outside the subject*. (M. B. Smith, Trans.). Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1987)

Levinas, E. (1998). *Entre nous: Thinking-of-the-other*. (M. B. Smith & B. Harshav, Trans.). Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1991)

Levinas, E. (1999). *Alterity and transcendence*. (M. B. Smith, Trans.). The Athlone Press. (Original work published 1995)

Marcel, G. (1951a). *Mystery of being, Vol. 1: Reflection and mystery*. (G. S. Fraser, Trans.). Harvill Press.

Marcel, G. (1951b). *Mystery of being, Vol. 2: Faith and reality*. (R. Hague, Trans.). Harvill Press.

Marcel, G. (1964). *Creative fidelity* (R. Rosthal, Trans.). Farrar, Strauss.

Marcel, G. (1965). *Being and having: An existentialist diary*. (K. Farrer, Trans.). Harper Torchbooks.

Marcel, G. (1995). *The philosophy of existentialism*. (M. Harari, Trans.). Citadel Press.

Menon, S., Rajaraman, S., & Kuchibotla, L. (2018). Well-being and self-transformation in Indian psychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 37*(1), 13–26. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2018.37.1.13

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). *Signs* (R. C. McClearly, Trans.). Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1960)

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2013). *Phenomenology of perception* (D. A. Landes, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1945) https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720714

Meyerhoff, J. (2010). *Bald ambition: A critique of Ken Wilber's theory of everything*. Inside the Curtain Press.

Mitchell, S. A., & Aron, L. (1999). *Relational psychoanalysis: The emergence of a tradition*. The Analytic Press.

Ochs, P. (2006). Comparative religious traditions. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 74*, 125–128. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfj021

Ogilvy, J. (2013). The new polytheism: Updating the dialogue between East and West. *East-West Affairs, 1*(2), 29–48.

Richards, G. (1978). Sunyata: Objective referent or via negativa? *Religious Studies*, *14*(2), 251–260. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500010726

Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as another* (K. Blamey, Trans.) University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1990)

Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton University Press.

Rose, K. (2016). *Yoga, meditation, and mysticism: Contemplative universals and meditative landmarks*. Bloomsbury.

Rothberg, D. (1986). Philosophical foundations of transpersonal psychology: An introduction to some basic issues. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, *18*(1), 1–34.

Rothberg, D. (2000). Spiritual inquiry. In T. Hart, P. Nelson & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp 161–184). State University of New York Press.

Rothberg, D. & Kelly, S.M. (Eds.) (1998). *Ken Wilber in dialogue: Conversations with leading transpersonal thinkers*. Quest Books.

Said, E. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. Chatton & Windus.

Sartre, J. P. (1943). *L'Étre et le néant* [Being and nothingness]. Tel Gallimard.

Sartre, J. P. (2015). *No exit*. Amazon Digital Services LLC. (Original work published 1944)

Schmitt, C. (1966). Perennial philosophy: Steuco to Leibniz. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 27*, 505–532. https://doi.org/10.2307/2708338

Schuon, F. (1984). *The transcendent unity of religions*. Theosophical. (Original work published 1953)

Smith, H. (1958). *The world's religions: Our great wisdom traditions*. HarperOne.

Staszak, J.-F. (2009). Other/otherness. In R. Kitchin & N. Thrift (Eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography* (pp. 43–47). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00980-9

Studstill, R. (2005). *The unity of mystical traditions: The transformations of consciousness in Tibetan and German mysticism*. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047407218

Swami Vivekananda (1947). *The complete works of Swami Vivekananda* (8 vols.). Vedanta Press.

Taylor, C. (1992). *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition*. Princeton University Press.

Taylor, S. (2010). *Waking from sleep: Why awakening experiences occur and how to make them permanent*. Hay House.

Taylor, S. (2016). From philosophy to phenomenology: The argument for a "soft" perennialism. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 35*(2), 17–41. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2016.35.2.17

Taylor, S. (2017a). The return of perennial perspectives? Why transpersonal psychology should remain open to essentialism. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 36*(2), 75–92. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.75

Taylor, S. (2017b). Keeping the account open: Metaphysical mistrust and ideology in transpersonal psychology (A response to Hartelius, 2017). *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 36*(2), 111–120. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.111

Taylor, S. (2017c). Moving beyond materialism: Can transpersonal psychology contribute to cultural transformation? *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 36*(2), 147–159. https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.147

Treanor, B. (2006). *Aspects of otherness: Levinas, Marcel, and the contemporary debate*. Fordham University Press.

Vattimo, G. (1999). *Belief*. Stanford University Press.

Washburn, M. (1988). *The ego and the dynamic ground: A transpersonal theory of human development*. State University of New York Press.

Wilber, K. (1977). *The spectrum of consciousness*. Quest.

Wilber, K. (1979). *No boundary: Eastern and Western approaches to personal growth*. Shambhala.

Wilber, K. (1980). *The Atman project: A transpersonal view of human development* (2nd Ed.). Quest.

Wilber, K. (1981). *Up from Eden: A transpersonal view of human evolution*. Quest.

Wilber, K. (1983). *A sociable God: Toward a new understanding of religion*. Shambhala.

Wilber, K. (1984). *Eye to eye: The quest for the new paradigm* (3rd ed. Rev.). Shambhala.

Wilber, K. (1996). *A brief history of everything*. Shambhala.

Wilber, K. (1999). *The marriage of sense and soul: Integrating science and religion*. Three Rivers Press.

Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral psychology: Consciousness, spirit, psychology, therapy*. Shambhala.

Wilber, K. (2001a). *A theory of everything*. Shambhala.

Wilber K. (2001b). *Sex, ecology, spirituality: The spirit of evolution* (2nd ed.). Shambhala.

Wilber, K. (2001c). *The eye of spirit: An integral vision for a world gone slightly mad*. Shambhala.

Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral spirituality*. Integral Books.

Wilber, K. (2007). *The integral vision: A very short introduction to the revolutionary integral approach to life, God, the universe, and everything*. Shambhala.

Yenner, W. (2009). *American guru: A story of love, betrayal and healing—Former students of Andrew Cohen speak out*. Epigraph Books.

Zahavi, D. (1996). Husserl's intersubjective transformation of transcendental philosophy. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, 27*(3), 228–245. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.1996.11007165

Zahavi, D. (1999). *Self-awareness and alterity: A phenomenological investigation*. Northwestern University Press.

Zahavi, D. (2014). *Self and other: Exploring subjectivity, empathy, and shame*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199590681.001.0001

About the Author

Gabriel Fernandez-Borsot holds a PhD in Transformative Studies from the California Institute of Integral Studies of San Francisco, a Master's degree in Philosophy from the University of Barcelona, and a Master's degree in Industrial Engineering from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. His research is focused on the fields of transpersonal studies and consciousness studies, and he is an expert in the transdisciplinary approach to otherness. He teaches at the International University of Catalonia, has served as visiting scholar at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, and is a certified Gestalt Therapist. He is the co-director of the Integrative Transpersonal Training (FTI) of Barcelona, a 3-year program in transpersonal psychotherapy. Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Gabriel Fernandez-Borsot, Faculty of Humanities, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, 08017 Barcelona, Spain (gabi@uic.es).

About the Journal