

THE TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHO-PHENOMENOLOGY
OF SELF & SOUL: MEDITATORS AND MULTIPLES
SPEAK

A research project has been undertaken to explore the phenomenology of self. The goal has been to elicit from participants explicit expressions of their implicit understanding of the nature of their self. More specifically, the focus has been on the sense of self as ‘nonlocal.’ The term nonlocal has been defined as: beyond the conventional understanding of time, space, material reality, and causation, i.e. with respect to self, concerned with dimensions beyond the Newtonian-Cartesian understanding of the body-mind-sense complex. The focus on nonlocality of self brings this project into the arena of what Ron Valle has termed *transpersonal phenomenological psychology* (Anderson *et al.*, 1996).

TRANSPERSONAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

William Braud, defines transpersonal psychology as that which, “studies experiences and processes that extend or go beyond ... the usual limits of ego and personality. It concerns itself with consciousness and unusual states of consciousness ...” (op. cit., p. 3)

Phenomenological psychologist, Amedeo Giorgi, interviewed by Christopher Aanstoos, illuminates the connection between transpersonal psychology, and the transcendental subjectivity of classical phenomenology. Giorgi comments that, “there may be a way in which what the transpersonalists are pointing to [is] the same thing that Husserl is pointing to ... our personal subjectivity can access a field of subjectivity” (Aanstoos, 1996, p. 11). He goes on to delineate the transcendental reduction as, ‘intense receptivity,’ which requires that we, ‘still all that ego stuff’ (Aanstoos, 1996, p. 13). Giorgi concludes that, “... if you could develop the reduction that would be one way of exploring transcendental subjectivity” (loc. cit.). He describes several levels of reduction, concluding with the deepest level, “... the transcendental phenomenological reduction, which brackets the empirical subject as well as

the world" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 240). Phenomenology, in conjunction with the exploration of transpersonal types of experience, could be said to be particularly appropriate to illuminate a phenomenon of a transpersonal nature such as a nonlocal understanding of self.

When describing the arena of transcendent awareness, Valle comments:

... these types of awareness are not really "experience" in the way we normally use the word, nor are they the same as our prereflective sensibilities ... Transcendent awareness seems somehow prior to this reflective-prereflective realm, presenting itself as more of a space or ground from which our more common experience and felt-sense emerge ... which appears to be inclusive of the intentional nature of mind but not of it. (Anderson *et al.*, 1996, p. 25)

Valle notes that this "ground" can be described as, "... a reality not of (or in some way beyond) time, space and causality as we normally know them" (Anderson *et al.*, 1996, p. 26). Finally, Valle suggests that phenomenological research which addresses issues of this sort be called "transpersonal phenomenological psychology."

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The material discussed in this paper is culled from a larger body of results belonging to a preliminary exploration of self as nonlocal in the specific target groups. Two groups of participants who might be seen as having an amplified understanding of self as nonlocal were exposed to the research protocol. These were individuals with multiple personalities (dissociative identity) [the DI group] and individuals who were long-time meditators [the LM group]. This research was constructed to access the understanding of locality of self in individuals with dissociative identity and, at the same time, to put the responses of dissociative identity participants in a context which may serve to illuminate the data obtained. The goal was to contrast and compare the dissociative identity group ($n = 8$) with the long-time meditators group ($n = 5$).

Both individuals with dissociative identity and long-time meditators have been found to have a significantly greater than average prevalence of experiences of the nonlocal type, often called *anomalous* experiences. Further, the DI participants have constructed a system of multiple alter personalities which may be characterized as functioning according to principles of nonlocality (sometimes called *trance logic*). Finally, anecdotal evidence from clinical practice has indicated to this researcher that individuals with DI appear to have an implicit understanding of self which somewhat parallels that of long-time meditators. A comparison between the two participant groups could expand knowledge in this area.