

BOOK REVIEW

HERLIHY, JOHN (2005). *Borderlands of the Spirit: Reflections on a Sacred Science of Mind*. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom. xi + 216 pp. ISBN: 978-0941532679. Paperback. \$16.95. *Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos.*

“The soul is *the junction of the two seas* ([Qur’ān] 18:59) of corporeal and spiritual things.”¹

– Mullā Sadrā

The modern world has categorically ruled out all forms of knowledge that are not derived through empiricism and rationalism, essentially abolishing all ways of knowing that transcend sensory experience and human reason. This has fomented the notion that science and religion exist as two separate and distinct domains. In earlier eras of the traditional world, whether of the East or West, North or South, these domains were interactive and influenced each other with mutual benefit. A human being in the traditional world could fluidly cross the boundaries of empirical modes of knowing to spiritual modes of knowing without confusion, as they were not viewed as diametrically opposed to one another. In today’s predominantly secular environment the mindset has split these domains, making them alien to one another, as there now exists a deep-rooted antagonism between them. Yet it is in the borderlands of the transpersonal domain that the most inclusive modes of knowing and levels of reality reside.

The entire scientific premise is predicated on the assumption that sensory experience and the faculty of human reason are the sole arbiters of truth and that they alone can access the truths of the cosmos on their own terms. This predicament has persisted since the Enlightenment project, or the Age of Reason, from the 17th/18th centuries onward. In the traditional world, reason was understood to be a bridge between the two realms of logic and transcendence. Modern science has its place if it does not encroach beyond its domain of knowing and claim a monopoly to the whole of knowledge. It is worth recalling that science comes from the Latin *scientia*, which is synonymous with *knowledge*.

Rationalism has leveled the faculty of the Intellect (*Intellectus*) and at the same time elevated reason (*ratio*) as the principal faculty. In the contemporary world, they have become synonymous with one other, as the later has become substituted with the former, making itself an absolute, suggesting that there is nothing beyond reason. Due to the dissociation of the faculty of reason from higher levels of reality, its scope is radically limited, and it cannot lend itself to a holistic understanding of reality. As Herlihy notes, “The modern conception of human reason sets boundaries that cannot be crossed” (p. 18).

This work aims to revive an isthmus between science and metaphysics in order to reintegrate them, something which is needed to establish a true psychology or

¹ Mulla Sadra, “Principle (concerning the soul as ‘spiritual body’),” in *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, trans. James Winston Morris (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 148.

“science of the soul” as it was known in more traditional times and places. In accordance with the perennial psychology, Herlihy makes it clear that “No one religion has exclusive rights over the human soul” (p. xvi). Herlihy’s book is divided into three parts. *Part One: Faculties of Knowledge*, is concerned with the primary faculties of knowing: that of direct knowing of the Intellect and that of contingent knowing of reason. *Part Two: Fields of Perception* focuses on the wide-ranging field of perception, which includes imagination and the human heart as modes of perception of higher realities. *Part Three: Forces of Spirituality* touches upon the spiritual domain as it is cultivated by the higher faculties and is discerned within the life of the human being.

What is often unrecognized is that the faculty of reason is unable to guarantee within itself its own truth and requires this guarantee from a level higher than itself. The Intellect, as traditionally understood, is a transpersonal faculty that grasps things in themselves. It relies on *unmediated* intuition, not on the senses or rationality, which are much more restricted in their capacity to discern reality as it is.

The faculty of reason in the traditional world never acted independently of a higher level of reality. Reason pertains to the individual order and Intellect to the supra-individual order. Reason was always understood to be subordinate to the Intellect and not the other way around. It is through the Intellect that the function of reason can be fully realized. Herlihy situates the faculties of reason and Intellect: “In truth, human intelligence has two sources of knowledge: it relies on both the intellect and reason, *ratio* and *intellectus*, to reflect upon the order of the natural world and alternatively to transcend it” (p. 39). He further expands on their mutual coexistence when their relationship is accurately understood:

Reason displays a reflective quality that brings to its line of thought all of the supportive documentation of the human emotions, the imagination, natural instinct, and a fundamental capacity for intuition that all take part in enriching the process of humanity’s reasoning and in extending the human mind beyond its cognitive ability to encompass the possibilities of higher imagination, insight, inspiration, and creativity that is the very frontier of the borderland of the spirit. The full range of this intellectual process can be achieved by none other than the use of the human *ratio* as a principle of coherence and the *intellectus* as principle of transcendence as well as the source medium for direct access to the truth. (p. 40)

The traditional world situates the heart as the seat of consciousness rather than the contemporary idea that the brain performs the highest function of the human being. The heart is also often misunderstood to be limited to physiology as the life-sustaining force of the human body. The human heart is a symbol for the inner heart where knowledge and identity coincide and unify; therefore it has been traditionally referred to as the “eye of the heart.” Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) writes, “My eye and the eye of God are one eye, one vision, one knowledge, and one love” (p. 60).

Throughout the religious and spiritual traditions, the human being is known to comprise a tripartite structure consisting of Spirit, soul, and body. Herlihy indicates

that “the soul constitutes the sacred ground of our being” (p. 109). He addresses the challenges of defining the human psyche: “The idea of the soul defies clear mathematical definition and cannot be described in the empirical language of modern science” (p. 114). He additionally conveys that “The soul is not a final destination or an end in itself; it serves a mediatory function as bridge between worlds” (p. 120). The paramount role of knowledge and identity as an integral foundation of the human psyche is outlined in the following: “The imbalance and disequilibrium of the human soul is counterbalanced by the stability and equilibrium implicit in the knowledge of the one Reality. The forgetfulness of our self-identity is counterbalanced by the consciousness of the greater Self” (p. 107).

Many of the dilemmas of the present day exist because of the eclipse of the Intellect. The once open door to the infinite through this transpersonal faculty seems to have been closed to the contemporary mindset due to its truncated and myopic epistemology, which is no longer rooted in metaphysics, sacred science, and spiritual principles. Science and religion were once unified and understood to be interdependent; however, metaphysics was always understood to be of greater importance within the scientific endeavor. Aristotle (384–322) indicates the transcendent knowledge or metaphysical roots of science when he writes, “Since scientific knowledge is by definition knowledge of causes, and since these first principles have no first causes, the ultimate foundation of scientific knowledge must be something other than scientific knowledge” (p. 42). Although the realm of the senses cannot be fully trusted, paradoxically, it is the empirical epistemologies that are privileged while dismissing other ways of knowing. The modern world has discarded metaphysics and religion; however, it rarely acknowledges that it has replaced its faith with science or rather *scientism*. Herlihy perceives that science has become a substitute for religion and is not without its own believers: “The modern day alternative to faith is nothing short of a faith in religion’s counterpart: a faith in modern science that is based on human reason rather than divine revelation” (p. 142).

This book provides a much-needed antidote to the crisis and impasse of contemporary ways of understanding the human psyche as known through modern Western psychology and its science. The reduction of the Intellect to reason and the heart to sentiment has had devastating effects on the spiritual intelligence of the human being, including the true understanding and purpose of psychology or the “science of the soul.” Psychology in the present day has become so disfigured in comparison to how it was originally understood that if one turned the table around and viewed today’s psychology from a traditional context, it would be unrecognizable. It is by resurrecting reason as an intermediate and mediating faculty of the Intellect that the domains of science and metaphysics, especially sacred science, can again provide an epistemic pluralism and a multidimensional understanding of the human condition. Through the integral recovery of cognition as understood through the traditional cultures of the world many ills of the present day can be remedied.

The Author(s)

John Herlihy was born in Boston, Massachusetts of Irish American origin. He has pursued a dual track career of writing and teaching at universities in Europe, the

Middle East, and in Asia. He has written a number of books on travel and spirituality, with special emphasis on the integration of the traditional world within the modern world and has several books of poetry. The author has retired after working over 50 years in academia and now lives in Miami Beach, spending much of his time writing and publishing his poems. His books include: *In Search of the Truth* (out of print; 1990), *Veils and Keys to Enlightenment* (1998), *Modern Man at the Crossroads* (1999), *Near and Distant Horizons* (2005), *Borderlands of the Spirit* (2005), *Wisdom's Journey* (2009), *The Essential René Guénon* (edited; 2009), *Islam for Our Time* (out of print; 2012), *Holy Qur'an: An Intimate Portrait* (2014), *Living a Muslim Life* (2015), *Feathers in the Dust* (2015), *Distant Islands and Sea Light* (2016), *Somewhere A Flower Blooms* (2016); *Wisdom of the Senses* (2017), *Journeys with Soul* (2017), *Earthrise* (2017), *In Darkness Be Light* (2017), *If Birds Could Talk* (2018), *Simply Sonnets* (2018), *Way of the World* (2019), *Wind and Rain* (2020), and *A Second Heart* (2021).

The Reviewer

Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, PsyD, LMFT, LPCC, CCMHC, NCC, CPRP, MHRS, is a practicing psychotherapist who has worked for years in the field of mental health and social services. His focus is on comparative religion and the intersection between culture, spirituality, and psychology. His works include *Paths That Lead to the Same Summit: An Annotated Guide to World Spirituality*, *Dismantling Freud: Fake Therapy and the Psychoanalytic Worldview* (previously published as *Psychology Without Spirit: The Freudian Quandary*), and *Behaviorism: The Quandary of a Psychology without a Soul*. He edited the issue on "Psychology and the Perennial Philosophy" for *Studies in Comparative Religion*, and his articles have appeared in numerous journals and magazines including *Sacred Web*, *Sophia*, *Parabola*, *Resurgence*, and the *Temenos Academy Review*. He lives on the Central Coast of California.