

# The Mystery of Individuality: Grandeur and Delusion of the Human Condition

El Misterio de la Individualidad: Grandiosidades y  
Engaños de la Condición Humana

**Samuel Bendeck Sotillos**

Institute of Traditional Psychology  
Chicago, USA

## Abstract

This extensive review explores the nature of human individuality through a broad spectrum of themes which all relate in an unwavering manner back to the fundamental question of “Who Am I?” The paradox of being fully human is that it depends on transcending the human condition itself. Integral individuality exists at the intersection between the horizontal and the vertical or the human and the Divine. Modern psychology, especially humanistic and transpersonal psychology has, much to its credit, done a great deal to facilitate the rightful place of the human within the spiritual dimension; yet, to date, it has been unable to situate what human individuality is. In fact, modern psychology has grossly overlooked that each of the spiritual traditions of the world has its own corresponding and complete psychology or rather pneumatology (“science of the Spirit”). It is by turning to the integral psychology of the perennial philosophy that human identity can be recovered.

**Key words:** individuality, identity, psychology, heart-intellect, perennial philosophy

## Resumen

Esta extensa revisión explora la naturaleza de la individualidad humana a través de un amplio espectro o análisis de temas donde todos se relacionan de manera inquebrantable con la cuestión fundamental de “¿Quién Soy Yo?” La paradoja de ser plenamente humano es dependiente de la transcendencia de la condición humana misma. La individualidad integral existe en la intersección entre lo horizontal y lo vertical o lo humano y lo Divino. La psicología moderna, especialmente la humanista y transpersonal tiene mucho crédito al haber contribuido mucho para facilitar el lugar legítimo que le corresponde al ser humano dentro de la dimensión espiritual; sin embargo, hasta la fecha, no ha sido capaz de situar qué es la individualidad humana. De hecho, la psicología moderna fue gravemente negligente en no reconocer que cada una de las tradiciones espirituales del mundo, tiene su propia psicología correspondiente y completa, o más bien su pneumatología (“ciencia del Espíritu”). Es cuando nos referimos a la psicología integral de la filosofía perenne, que podemos recuperar la identidad humana.

**Palabras clave:** individualidad, identidad, psicología, corazón-intelecto, filosofía perenne

Received: 13<sup>th</sup> October 2012  
Accepted: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2012

This article is a book review of *The Mystery of Individuality: Grandeur and Delusion of the Human Condition* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2012) written by Mark Perry.

### Introduction

“You see yourself as the drop in the ocean, but you are also the ocean in the drop.” – Rumi

Seldom does one come across a book that so completely plumbs the depths and heights of the human condition as does this recent volume by Mark Perry (born in 1951), the son of American Perennialist author Whitall N. Perry (1920-2005).<sup>1</sup> In articulating what human individuality is in light of the universal spiritual heritage of all times and places—Perry uncompromisingly exposes the contemporary wasteland in its various nuances and fearlessly enters into divisive and taboo topics.

This book reminds us that we are living in a time where the human microcosm is not only under attack from within modern science known as scientism (the reduction of Reality to what can be exclusively verified through the five senses) and its derivative modern psychology or psychologism (the reduction of Reality to psychological criterion), but also from the movements within contemporary spirituality that zealously seek to undermine the way that the plenary traditions were interpreted by the saints and sages of those traditions. What comes to mind are not only the common New Age parodies, but their less simplistic and more sophisticated forms that appear to be anything but New Age and are for this reason more dangerous. The following are examples of this more refined presentation of New Age thought: the alleged “integralization” the World’s Religions and the call for the “democratization” of enlightenment.

If we were not living in an inverted era known as the Kali-Yuga or “dark age” where everything is turned on its head, these fundamental errors would be clear as day and would not require further reflection, for they would be seen in their transparency as a promethean attempt to relativize the Absolute, in order to not only make gnosis or transcendent knowledge available for mass consumption, which by its very nature it cannot be, but attempts once and for all to lower Spirit to the dictates of the terrestrial masses. The assumption that the plenary revelations need updating or that they can even be updated by the conjectural whims is a negation of their supra-individual origin; this is to say that neither religion nor its inner corollary spirituality is man-made. On the contrary, it is the human individual that needs to adapt him or her to the terms of the timeless truths of the sapiential traditions and not the other way around. To assume that the world’s religions are not integral is a fundamental oversight as to what religion is and is a betrayal of the Spirit as religion and spirituality are integral in divinis, if they were not so they would be incapable of not only saving but liberating souls throughout the ages. At the core of this outlook is none-other-than the old bugbear of evolutionism (the notion that the greater can derive from the lesser) coupled with syncretism (the indiscriminant mixing of heterogeneous ideas in an attempt to fashion a synthesis).

Readers may be interested to know what others have said of this work. Doyen of the World’s Religions, Professor Huston Smith (born in 1919), who is no stranger to those within psychology—especially transpersonal psychology and humanistic psychology—wrote a powerful and memorable endorsement for Perry’s work:

“Few writings in recent years have done as much to further—in ways that make life feel different—my *understanding of the ultimate nature of things*. *Perry’s thoughts are as advanced as one will find anywhere—this is clearly the higher mathematics of the human spirit.*” (Smith, 2000, pp. 11-12) A lesser known figure to

those within transpersonal psychology, yet widely known as a representative of the perennial philosophy, William Stoddart (born in 1925) writes: “*I know of no other author who expounds and reflects the specifically spiritual teachings of Frithjof Schuon [1907-1998] as intimately and authentically as does Mark Perry, who, all his life, had the advantage being a close associate of Schuon.*” (p. x)

This book is an in-depth inquiry into the paradoxical nature of human individuality, consisting of twelve chapters. While the term “individuality” is commonly used in our day-to-day lexicon its deeper significance is not properly understood in its metaphysical, philosophical and spiritual context. On one extreme, the human individual is an autonomous entity possessing its own existence separate from others and on the other hand the human individual is mysteriously connected to all humans, including the natural world which is rooted in the supra-individual or Divine. Our apparent separateness as individuals is the quintessence of what is destined by the manifest world, yet it is the unmanifest that underscores and presupposes the manifest order—as everything originates in the One, so It returns to the One. The traditional or perennial method that Perry expounds takes into consideration the environmental factors that shape the human being and the temporal cycles that in turn shape the atmosphere in which the individual lives. To not do so creates a detrimental disconnect between the human individual and the social milieu which skews all one’s ability to understand these subtle and complex matters. Human individuality and all of its nuances becomes intelligible when viewed through the lens of spiritual anthropology and the guiding image of archetypal man and woman, created in the image of God. “Although the subject matter of this book deals with man created in the image of God, we are not speaking in the name of a single religion, or of a single spiritual credo, but in that of the *philosophia spiritualis* which is timeless gnosis.” (p. 13)

Although modern psychology has painstakingly attempted to establish what human individuality is, it has been unable to do so because of its own theoretical underpinnings which have cut itself off from the Sacred. While behaviorism has precariously cast-off both the Spirit and the soul from modern psychology, psychoanalysis has discarded Spirit and salvaged in its place the human psyche, humanistic psychology has endeavored to reclaim what is human after its disfigurement, while transpersonal psychology likewise acknowledged the key role of the human being, it emphasized the primacy of Spirit. Yet as long as transpersonal and humanistic psychology accepts the principal errors of behaviorism and psychoanalysis, which they are a logical derivative of, they are enabling theoretical positions that fundamentally contradict and undermine their *theoria* and *praxis*. For this reason contemporary psychology in all of its forms cannot afford to ignore or hastily gloss over the critique presented by the perennialists or traditionalists, nor can it not take seriously its prognosis: the impasse of modern psychology.

To explain man through [modern] psychology when what is really needed is a pneumatology or a “*science of the Spirit*”, without which psychology—or the study of the soul—can only amount to the blind leading the blind because no matter how erudite or subtle our analysis will be we cannot escape the conundrum of the mortal attempting to define the Immortal; we cannot escape by our own means the narrow labyrinth of human observations and speculations unless we can appeal to a higher principle. (Perry, 2012, p. 2)

## Chapter One: The Wound of Duality

Inseparable from the question of human identity is the essential longing for what resembles us most, although we are rarely aware of this process. This core impulse underscoring human identity is what the author indicates can lead us back to the Absolute and is what makes the human state the grandeur that it is:

The whole basis of spiritual realization is the doctrine of identity, of like being attracted to Like, or of the Divine One and All repossessing Itself of that which It really never lost. This is the vertical and essential perspective, that of pure ontology, or that of our supra-individual core. However, seen from the perspective of the individual, it is also true—though not equally so—that we are attracted to what is opposite to us because the individual is a fragment and therefore seeks *completion in his missing portion...* (p. 19)

With this said, the search for wholeness in the world of multiplicity has its many trappings: “However what is much less obvious is that, owing to the Fall, far from being attracted we can also be repelled by what most corresponds to us archetypally, as the medieval motif of the “loathsome bride” illustrates, or the drama of the soul, unwilling to give up its illusory freedom, fleeing the Spirit.” (p. 19) Additionally, it is the obscuring of the heart-intellect or intellect (Sanskrit: buddhi; Latin: intellectus; Greek: nous; Arabic: 'Aql), the noetic faculty within the human individual which defines the human condition itself, it is this obscuring that gives rise to the wound of duality itself. “In primordial man or man of the Golden Age [Krita-Yuga or Satya-Yuga], the heart as a divine faculty was one before becoming polarized into heart and mind” (p. 25). This is why the traditional understanding throughout the ages, has designated that the seat of consciousness is in the heart and not the head, but as a result of the eclipsing of the intellect these faculties became fragmented. Modern psychology not taking into consideration traditional cosmology and temporal cycles and its effects on the human psyche is limited to the: “accidental predicament of man in the modern world” (p. 31). Although contemporaries attempt to innovate anything and everything under the sun to expand consciousness, to escape the wound of duality, the author points out: “Just as man cannot create life, he cannot produce enlightenment, for the source of both life and enlightenment belong to a transcendent order of reality; no man can approach the Real purely by his own means or purely on his own initiative.” (p. 36)

## Chapter Two: Who Am I?

Perhaps no question has been asked more continuously in the passing of time than “Who Am I?” “One of the greatest truths, and yet most fatal of illusions, is the notion that man is created in God’s image or, in Buddhist terms, that every man has a Buddha nature, or in Vedantic metaphysics, *tat tvam asi*, “thou art That”—the “That” being the unnamable essence of Reality.” (p. 39) And yet the inverse relationship is also true—you are not That, at least, as long as the identification with the empirical ego has not been curbed or integrated into what is higher than itself. While contemporary forms of spirituality make every appeal to suggest that everything is within you and while this is true in essence, it neglects the paramount recognition that: “There can be no immanence without prior transcendence” (p. 50).

A major stumbling block for modern psychology in all of its schools and forces—behaviorism, psychoanalysis, humanistic or transpersonal—is its apparent incomprehension of the existence of the noetic faculty within the human individual, which cannot but profoundly obstruct, if not derail altogether the inquiry of “Who Am I?” “Even though this doctrine of the ‘Eye of the Heart’ is the key of keys for understanding what man is, modern psychology finally knows nothing of it.” (pp. 57-58) The author summarizes the interrelatedness of the Divine and the human: “In essence, the mystery of individuality touches upon a triple mystery: we in God, God in us, and God in Himself.” (p. 59)

## Chapter Three: The Iconic Figure

In order for the human individual to contextualize him or herself within the Sacred, requires the representation of the Sacred to be included into all facets of the human collectivity. A striking and yet no less morbid feature of the modern and postmodern era is the virtual absence of the Sacred. While traditional

societies in the premodern world were diverse and often spread out over large bodies of water and land they nevertheless had a unanimous sense of the Sacred. Perry writes: “The sacred imprint of this prototype is projected onto society and assimilated by the masses in the measure that a collectivity can still do so post the Golden Age.” (p. 61) While the iconographic figure takes on a human form and thus becomes a model for the true man or true woman, this model is also reflected in the theomorphic essence of each human being. To have a sacred symbolism reflected in the collectivity instills an integral psychology, which in a traditional society is rooted in principial knowledge that has very different implications on the idea of mental health than are currently represented: “Man’s earthly wellbeing was always premised on, if not subordinated to, his everlasting wellbeing” (p. 66).

The author informs us: “To remove the sacred is to abolish at one fell stroke all true scale of perfection.” (p. 80) This is why each civilization had its own archetypal symbolism that established a supra-individual ambiance so that religion and spirituality could be made palpable in every activity done throughout one’s day. Perry asserts: “Yes, indeed, ‘The Spirit bloweth where it listeth’, but this does not mean ‘It bloweth just anywhere’, and certainly not at our beck and call.” (p. 81)

#### **Chapter Four: Kingdoms and Nations**

Due to the large disgruntlement of the masses with both—the Republican and Democratic parties in America, which have been termed by some as the “Two Party Dictatorship”—resulting in the choosing a lesser of two evils, calls into question the very principles underlying democracy. Some propose that what is needed is to go beyond the bipartisan political paradigm and insert a third party option. In Europe, the social unrest is a very severe issue, as the masses are swayed to-and-fro in the attempt to back whichever political party that promises to improve the current crisis, if not only to halt the current infrastructures from total collapse. And while there are many interesting discussions to be had in the various forums of the public domain, Perry is concerned with a much more urgent query given the corrosive political milieu, the very idea of government or temporal power and what its implications are for integral individuality.

Perry makes an interesting observation which will likely perplex contemporary minds when taken at face value: “God cannot be likened to a president or a prime minister, assuredly, but He can be likened to a king or an emperor.” (p. 83) The author raises an imperative question, which many today are also asking: “In what social setting can a human being best fulfill his integral vocation?” (p. 83). Perry presents an interesting quandary regarding the notion of civil liberties that is seldom pondered: “Freedom cannot be unconditional otherwise it is self-cancelling.” And likewise: “Indiscriminate freedom benefits counter-forces that exploit its generosity against it.” (p. 83) In the traditional or premodern world spiritual authority did not function in a vacuum, it also played an essential role in the directives of government as saints, wise priests, monks and/or hermits provided guidance to those in power. “The prevalence of such spiritual men deeply influenced the run of society in all epochs and, of this, right up to the threshold of our modern world.” (p. 90)

The author clarifies why it is so challenging for the modern and postmodern mind to comprehend the pervading sense of the sacred that existed in the traditional or premodern world and how the role of integral government assisted in these efforts: “The Divine imbued the air, so to speak, and all the social customs were laced with sacred formulas; buildings and homes were adorned with icons, possibly sacred statuettes or effigies, not forgetting sacred inscriptions, and people might wear amulets that had been consecrated or blessed at sanctuaries, or they might own talismans.” (p. 91)

Some might suggest that the above is an exaggeration or a nostalgic position that seeks to make a utopia of the past and therefore regress to any era other than this one, but this is not the case, as Perry points

out: “Traditional civilizations—all questions of their very real problems notwithstanding—were premised on the reality of the ‘next world’” (p. 95). The author makes a key observation:

*Issues considered to be “social problems” today and that modern man believes have to be solved imperatively and on a massive scale—such as food, wealth, education, health, and the like—were never viewed traditionally as intractable problems to be permanently overcome, but rather as unavoidable imperfections, the wound and scar of life on earth; such problems were cosmologically “necessary,” hence irresolvable in their root, because, quite simply, earth can never be Heaven. (p. 96)*

Paradoxically it is the notion of unrestrained progress and immeasurable material comfort that in turn feed the endless torrent of consumption, not to mention underscores exuberant deficiencies as there is always more to be acquired. In the traditional world one found solace in the remembrance of one’s transcendent origin, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), coupled with the remembrance of its analogous immanence “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). The author offers a valuable insight: “Modern solutions rarely do more than displace ancient problems, or modify modalities, without solving the fundamental issue of the world not being Heaven.” (p. 98)

### **Chapter Five: Individuality is not Individualism**

A predominant error in contemporary spiritual circles is that traditional methods of integration or self-realization obliterate individuality; now it does so if we are viewing individuality through the lens of the empirical ego because it itself is accidental and is not individuality in its truest sense. Integral individuality as Perry informs us is to participate in the transcendent itself, yet it does not conflate separateness with uniqueness as is often misunderstood. The notion of separateness becomes transparent when qualified by an integral spiritual vision which at the same time asserts that the human individual is unique in divinis; this is the unanimous understanding of transcendence and immanence and what this means for human fulfillment in light of the perennial philosophy.

The author informs the reader that the word “individuality” in the fullest sense rests on principle of indivisibility. Perry writes: “The mystery of existence is that each individual self can be ‘one-self’ in the virtually supreme sense in that each creature is insuperably absolute: unique, non-duplicable, occurring only once in eons of history, never to be repeated again, because that is why an individual exists.” (p. 104) While individuality is an imperative aspect of the human condition it is also its greatest obstacle:

*The uniqueness is really due to the principal uniqueness of the Absolute projecting Itself in a fragmented manner into the relative, rather than through any individual merit; that uniqueness also happens to be the biggest stumbling block to understanding the meaning of our cosmic paternity in the Absolute, so much so that man, engrossed with his individual uniqueness, ends up competing with the Absolute Itself. (pp. 104-105)*

“This principle of non-duplication of individual selves illustrates the inexhaustibility of the Divine Principle expressed through creation. Clearly, however, the illusion of uniqueness—making each one of us feel that he or she is an autonomous self in his or her own right—has to be an illusion.” (p. 105) The diversity of human appearances are reconciled within the inner unity encapsulating all forms: “He it is Who did create all of you from a single soul” (Koran, “The Heights,” 7:189). One of the most predominant misconceptions in present-day spiritual circles has to do with the Theravada Buddhist notion of “no-self,” which does not

conflate separateness with uniqueness, but is rather an inverse correlation of the notion of the Self that was meant to correct the errors of its time:

*A key concept in Buddhism and Hinduism, namely that of anatta (or anatma), that is “no-self”—a refreshing perspective after the fever of individualism. Taken in its most literal sense, this doctrine suggests that the personality we have is nothing more than an aggregate of impressions, feelings, and thoughts that are temporarily (or accidentally) held together by our physical body in an unstable alliance for the duration of an earthly existence, no sooner than to be completely and utterly dispersed upon death and dissolution of the flesh, with therefore no post mortem individual subsistence. This doctrine is really a reverse variant of the doctrine of the One or sole-subsisting Self, the main difference being that instead of emphasizing the absoluteness of the Self (Atma), it takes the opposite point of departure by emphasizing the nothingness of individual experience. (p. 122)*

With this said, the author also emphasizes that there is an intermediary reality between the doctrine of anatta and the doctrine of the Self alone is real, as he writes:

This definition [that of the complete disappearance of the individual] strikes us as being too synthetic in the sense that it excludes intermediary notions, not least the idea of the sanctified ego which persists in some individual fashion in paradise.... In other words, one would want to specify that an individual, upon attaining spiritual realization, certainly subsists as a recognizably distinct individual (p. 123).

## Chapter Six: Beyond Good and Evil

The author wastes no time in getting to the kernel of what this chapter presents—“to speak of individuation is to speak of choice, and to speak of choice is—vertically—to speak of good and evil.” (p. 127). And the greatest of all paradoxes is that: “The Sovereign Good (the Summum Bonum) cannot have any real opposite since it coincides with Reality and hence with Totality; thus there is nothing, within the metacosmic realm, that is situated ‘outside’ of It.” (p. 128) On the relative plane good and evil are opposites and necessarily so as the very premise of manifestation requires it, but on the Absolute plane all dualities dissipate for nothing can exist outside of the Absolute. With this said there are many abuses of the mystical understanding of the religions by New Age interpretations, which suggest that one can stand beyond morality. Although distinctions can be made in some essential respects between the exoteric and esoteric understanding of morality, the author states: “No human being can legitimately place himself outside the notion of morality as such.” (p. 129)

Perry presents some noteworthy challenges to atheistic critiques of morality. “Even if atheists believe morality can be defined by man, they are still forced to borrow, wittingly or unwittingly, from a heritage of religious morality in order to put this morality into practice; one cannot, after all, reinvent the wheel: religion = morality.” (p. 131) The very notion of a standard that in and of itself can degenerate is, as the author informs us, proof of the transcendent: “Corruption can only occur if there is something that is not corrupt at the origin. The very notion of morality, in fact, is proof of man’s divine origin.” (p. 131)

The idea that “man is fundamentally good” also requires one to see that it is not this individual man or woman that is good, but the theomorphic essence of the human individual that is “created in the image of God.” While some might misinterpret Saint Augustine’s (354-430) formulation, “Love God and do what thou

wilt” and think that one is free of moral responsibility, it must not be unheeded that: “The pure cannot act impurely no matter what he does.” (p. 142)<sup>2</sup>

### Chapter Seven: Satan Is Not an Atheist

What would a world void of transcendence look like? The author provides a glimpse into this bleak reality: “The truth is that a godless world could not long be sustained, for without at least some reference to the Divine, all values would turn to dust or become a matter of pragmatic, if not tyrannical, self-interest; and self-interest heedless of anything but personal needs would lead to the cutthroat disintegration of society.” (p. 149) Perry magnificently illuminates the human conundrum when it comes to the affirming or negating of the divine Reality: “Strange to say it takes a measure of intelligence to deny God; that is, were it not for our God-given intelligence we would not know how to deny Him.” (p. 149)

Perry perpetually affirms the transpersonal identity of the human individual as understood by the world’s sapiential traditions: “Whether man understands this or not, or whether he likes it or not, man is forever homo religiosus and the day this is no longer so is the day the world ends.” (p. 155)

### Chapter Eight: Capital Punishment

Very few will argue against the sheer volume of statistics that document the disproportionality of people of color incarcerated today in America, in what has been termed, the prison industrial complex and this especially goes for those sentenced to death row and those who are finally executed by the death penalty. What has baffled the populace in recent years are the numerous instances where there is insufficient evidence proving that the crime was committed by the alleged perpetrator or the contrary, there was plentiful evidence indicating the person’s innocence and yet this did nothing to overturn the ruling. When innocent individuals can be executed by the same criminal justice system that is in place to protect them—what then is justice?

The author provides much food for thought regarding this heated and debated subject, but does so in a very contemplative manner by way of emphasizing the existential facets of the human condition that challenge the status quo. To begin with: “Justice cannot be properly defined without a proper definition of what constitutes the nature of man.” (p. 180) Perry speaks to the materialistic psychology of modern and postmodern individuals, which refuses to understand the spiritual foundations of the human condition itself:

*“The fundamental trend of modern man to overrate the body with respect to the soul, or to overrate the physical with respect to the spiritual.... If one truly believes in the soul then man’s whole scale of values will shift from the material to the spiritual, and in that case virtue and character—not the unrealistic survival of the physical body at all costs—becomes the decisive element in assessing an individual’s welfare, indeed that of a civilization. (pp. 184-185)<sup>3</sup>*

At the crossroads of life and death there is a fascinating paradox: “if on the one hand there is something absolute about a human life... at the very same time there is something relative in a human death” (p. 188) Perry continues to highlight this ever so important dialectic: “How to do justice to these two dimensions without prejudicing either pole of this scale is the crux of the matter; in other words: how does one value human life without idolatry and how does one relativize human life without dehumanization?” (p. 188)



## Chapter Nine: On Authority

Another impassioned theme of today is how to manage the increasing abuse of power and at the same time deter the increasing social entropy?<sup>4</sup> The traditional cosmologies of the world's religions correlate these corrosive facets with the final temporal cycle, known as the Kali-Yuga. Due to the current unrest that is very much a globalizing phenomenon, one then wonders what authentic government is and what is its role in the day-to-day lives of human individuals? Perry refers to the transitions of the different types of government detailed by Plato (429-347), providing an interesting overview of where we currently are on this trajectory:

Moving from theocracy, to aristocracy, then to timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and finally to tyranny—this axis describing the declining transition of authority going from a truly enlightened rulership, then being appropriated by the noble classes, then by heroes, and later passing through the popular will, before ending in the hands of a tyrant, or a despotic regime. (pp. 197-198)

The author reminds us that we are living in a world where the catchphrase “in my opinion” decides everything when it acquires sufficient critical mass. This speaks directly to Plato's unfavorable assessment of democracy, which is also reflected in the position of some American founding fathers such as George Washington (1732-1799), John Adams (1735-1826) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), and includes Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) and Winston Churchill (1874-1965).<sup>5</sup>

Granted the term “elite” has many unfavorable associations attributed to it today, such as that of class privilege and exploitation, Perry reminds readers that the true elite should not be confused with the economic elite or the ruling class because the term entails a spiritual prerogative. “For an elite to be an elite, it has to be anchored in spirituality.” (p. 212) It is this intellectual elite that can reverse the engulfing confusion that marks this age, as the adage goes: “corruption of the best is the worst” (*corruptio optimi pessima*).

## Chapter Ten: The Primacy of Character

Perry emphasizes that while the foundation of character is determined by a “few simple things” such as—“truthfulness, compassion, courage, loyalty, and patience”—these are not easily realized. Another interesting point that is mentioned in the book is the role of polarities in establishing sound character: “Character depends also on a polarity of virtues, a balance of positive and negative attributes, or energies if one will.” (p. 219) By the terms “positive” and “negative”, Perry is referring to the polarities in nature such as “hot” and “cold”, “soft” and “hard”, etc. and not to “defects”.

We are told that in order to delve deeper into the meaning of character, free of biases, we need to return to: “pneumatology—or the reflection of the Spirit in man—which has been our guiding principle from the beginning.” (p. 226) The author upholds that without the Divine character as such could not exist: “[T]he loss of the sense of the Absolute cannot but undermine the whole notion of character” (pp. 242-243).

## Chapter Eleven: The Forbidden Door

Amidst the barrage of practices offered in the spiritual marketplace to experience non-ordinary states of consciousness or expand consciousness through entheogens<sup>6</sup> or otherwise, many contemporaries may resent the idea that certain forms of knowledge are made available only for those who have made themselves eligible, that is for those with suitable preparation, as is definitely the case with esoteric or mystical knowledge. “[T]he Divine requires both a ritual and moral preparation whereby the aspirant learns to ‘die’

spiritually” (p. 248). The author continues: “[S]elf-naughting constitutes the preliminary basis for any sincere spiritual quest.” (p. 248) While this flies in the face of New Age spirituality and will appear to be elitist, this is the way that principal knowledge has been transmitted or acquired since time immemorial.

Perhaps the entirety of this chapter can be summarized within the reflective words of the sanatana dharma: “Fostered by sacrifice, the god will grant the enjoyments thou desirest. He who enjoys these gifts without giving to them in return verily is a thief.” (Bhagavad Gita, 3:12) (p. 245) An analogous point is made in the Islamic tradition: “Or do ye think that ye shall enter the Garden of Bliss without such trials as came to those who passed away before you?” (Koran, “Al-Baqarah,” 2:214) Perry informs readers that no amount of consciousness expansion, whether it be “chakra-kindling”<sup>7</sup> or “kosha-breaching”<sup>8</sup> will bring the human soul one iota closer to the Divine. “Spirituality...is all about moral character and not about experiencing states.” (p. 262) As it is all too easy for the human soul to mistake the psychic reality for the spiritual, the following heed of caution is necessary: “Indeed, it is much easier to open the ‘forbidden door’ than to close it once opened.” (p. 269)<sup>9</sup>

Perry emphasizes that integral spirituality is the rediscovery of simplicity: “If man could take pleasure in life’s beauties, as God intended him to, no restless urge would goad him to pierce the veil of the five senses to seek out extra-sensorial states. He would find contentment in the plenitude of his spiritual possibility here on earth.” (p. 270)

### **Chapter Twelve: Hieros Gamos or the Sacred Marriage**

No book on the mystery of individuality would be complete if it did not address the theme of sacred marriage and its profound symbolism for traveling the spiritual path. In the manifest world of form, polarities are necessary for they provide equilibrium on the plane of manifestation, in fact without them the cosmos would collapse. And while polarities are necessary on the plane of manifestation they are reabsorbed into a principal unity that reconciles the coincidence of opposites. It is through traditional metaphysics that we can understand what is integral femininity and likewise integral masculinity. The common ground between man and woman, the author informs us, is their being anthropos or human beings, which takes precedence over their particular distinctions of male or female.

The mystery of individuality must include an image of it seen through the prism of the masculine and female duality which divides the individual into two incomplete halves, as it were. The universe is ruled by polarities, the essential one being the masculine and feminine polarity—positive and negative, man and woman, themselves personifications of the metacosmic polarity Absolute-Infinite found at the heart of Reality. Though divided, these polarities presuppose an underling unity without which they could not oppose each other; without this unifying factor, they would be complete strangers instead of completing each other. (p. 273)

### **Conclusion**

The Mystery of Individuality is a relentless no holds barred exploration of the paradoxical nature of the human condition. Amidst the thrashing current of the modern and postmodern wasteland that has lost its vision in all regards, but more explicitly with what it means to be fully human. This work requires slowing down and centering oneself and may likely also entail suspending one’s normative thought process that has been conditioned by a hyper-cerebral outlook which fervently opposes anything that evades empirical

verification. This does not however suggest suspending one's "critical thinking," but aligning reason with the transcendent source that fosters an awakening of intelligence. This book pushes us to go beyond the idols of relativism in order to enter another reality, an ancient reality, but nonetheless timeless and accessible—here and now. Those who make the effort to travel through its pages will certainly be rewarded.

## References

Smith, H. (2000). Preface. In Mark Perry, *On awakening and remembering: To know is to be* (pp. 11-14). Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae.

## Endnotes

1.- We do not mention Mark Perry's father arbitrarily as many within the "forth force" of modern psychology or transpersonal psychology are familiar with Whitall N. Perry's encyclopedic anthology *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), recently reissued as: *The Spiritual Ascent: A Compendium of the World's Wisdom* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2008), consisting of more than a thousand pages and praised as the "Summa of the Philosophia Perennis". It was Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), one of the great art historians of the twentieth century who suggested that it was time for someone well-versed in the world's religions to compile in a single volume the spiritual wisdom of the ages, which bore its fruit after a seventeen-year labor.

2.- "If a man is Self-realized he cannot tell a lie or commit a sin or do anything wrong." (Ramana Maharshi, "Self-Enquiry," in *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, ed. Arthur Osborne [New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978], p. 135).

3.- "You attach too much importance to the body." (Ramana Maharshi, "The Guru," in *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, ed. Arthur Osborne [New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978], p. 109).

4.- See René Guénon, "The Social Chaos," in *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne, Marco Pallis and Richard C. Nicholson (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis et Universalis, 1996), pp. 100-116; José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993).

5.- See William Stoddart (ed.), "Democracy," in *Invincible Wisdom: Quotations from the Scriptures, Saints, and Sages of All Times and Places* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2008), pp. 71-73; See also Tage Lindbom, *The Myth of Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996); René Guénon, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001); Titus Burckhardt, "What is Conservatism?" in *The Essential Titus Burckhardt: Reflections on Sacred Art, Faiths, and Civilizations*, ed. William Stoddart (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2003), pp. 181-186.

6.- See Whitall N. Perry, "Drug-Induced Mysticism: The Mescaline Hypothesis," in *Challenges to a Secular Society* (Oakton, VA: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1996), pp. 7-16.

7.- Hindu chakras are subtle centers in the human individual that relate to the many phases of spiritual development. It is important to also note that an analogous concept of the subtle centers or chakras can be found within the diverse spiritual traditions.

8.- "Purusha or *Ātmā*, manifesting itself as *jivātmā* in the living form of the individual being, is regarded, according to the *Vedānta*, as clothing itself in a series of 'envelopes' (koshas) or successive vehicles, representing so many phases of its manifestation; it would be altogether wrong, however, to compare these envelopes to 'bodies,' since it is the last phase only that belongs to the corporeal order. It is important to note, moreover, that *Ātmā* cannot, strictly speaking, be said to be actually

contained within such envelopes, since, by its very nature, it is not susceptible of any limitation and is in no way conditioned by any state of manifestation whatsoever.” (René Guénon, “Envelopes of the ‘Self’: The Five *Vāyus* or Vital Functions,” in *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta*, trans. Richard C. Nicholson [Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004], p. 67).

9.- “It is impossible to be too mistrustful of every appeal to the ‘subconscious’...in a sort of ‘cosmic consciousness’ that shuts out all ‘transcendence’ and so also shuts out all effective spirituality...but what is to be said of someone who flings himself into the ocean and has no aspiration but to drown himself in it? This is very precisely the significance of a so-called ‘fusion’ with a ‘cosmic consciousness’ that is really nothing but the confused and indistinct assemblage of all the psychic influences...these influences have absolutely nothing in common with spiritual influences....

Those who make this fatal mistake either forget about or are unaware of the distinction between the ‘upper waters’ and the ‘lower waters’; instead of raising themselves toward the ‘ocean above’, they plunge into the abyss of the ‘ocean below’; instead of concentrating all their powers so as to direct them toward the formless world, which alone can be called ‘spiritual’, they disperse them in the endlessly changeable and fugitive diversity of the forms of subtle manifestation...with no suspicion that they are mistaking for a fullness of ‘life’ something that is in truth the realm of death and of a dissolution without hope of return.” (René Guénon, “The Confusion of the Psychic and the Spiritual,” in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, trans. Lord Northbourne [Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001], pp. 239-240).

**\*Samuel Bendeck Sotillos** is a Board Affiliate of the Association for Humanistic Psychology (AHP), an Advisor to the Institute of Traditional Psychology and has published in numerous journals including Sacred Web, Sophia, Parabola, Resurgence and Temenos Academy Review. He is the editor of Psychology and the Perennial Philosophy: Studies in Comparative Religion. He lives on the Central Coast of California.

E-mail: [samuelbendeck@yahoo.com](mailto:samuelbendeck@yahoo.com)