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OUTLINE OF AN ESALEN LECTURE ON PERSONALITY SURVIVAL AND TRANSPHYSICAL WORLDS

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- I. The problem of personality survival
 - A. Reincarnation and personality survival are logically separate issues, i.e., that either one is possible without the other. We can come back to that later, if we choose. I know that a number of you here have been engaged in gathering evidence to support the reality of personality survival. I have, for a long time, taken that possibility very seriously. I have also been very interested in other phenomena, such as lucid dreaming, out of body experiences, psychedelic experiences, UFO encounters and so on, all of which I take to be closely interrelated with the issue of personality survival.
 - B. But, for now, let's just stay with the particular problem with which we are engaged, the problem of personality survival. So let us imagine that we are working with a medium. That medium claims to be in touch with a disincarnate human personality. Let us say that that disincarnate personality provides information that the medium could not have known. Let us say that this same disincarnate personality has successfully contacted, and provided information to, other mediums.
 - C. If we take all of this seriously, then we must conclude that this disincarnate personality is a real being – and what I mean by a “real being” in this case is an entity that:
 1. It is sufficiently objective to be recognized as the same entity by more than one observer
 2. And that it can and does have causal effects in the real world.
- II. What are the ontological and cosmological implications of personality survival?
 - A. If we mean less than this, then I don't know what personality survival means. But if personality survival does entail a real, recognizable, causally effective entity in the natural world, then a very important question arises: *where is that being and how is it able to have causal effects here in the physical world?*
 - B. This question is important for us if we want to know how to treat these entities in a more or less scientific way. Everything that is scientifically real is something that we can point to, we can say where it is, and we can analyze the networks of causal interactions in which it participates. Where is a disincarnate personality? How can it interact causally with material beings?
 - C. This question is complicated by the descriptions of their own environments that we get from disincarnate personalities. They often suggest that they are in a

- kind of world, a world in which they have interactions with other disincarnate beings. But if they are in another world, where is that world?
- D. We know, from centuries of work, they we can describe interactions among physical things perfectly well, thank you, without referring to disincarnate personalities. As far as we know now, they are nowhere in physical space. We often think of them as being, for example, “subliminal,” or “in the collective unconscious.” But we miss the ontological dimensions of these formulations. If there is, let us say, a collective unconscious, and if there are complexes in that consciousness that transcend any human individual and yet have causal effects on various individuals, then the collective unconscious becomes a kind of world. What I want to do is to take the collective unconscious seriously, as a world, and to figure out where that world is and how that world works.
 - E. I am suggesting the various worlds discussed in the occult traditions, the astral world, the mental world, the causal world and so forth, are a cosmological approach to what we treat as a psychological domain.
 - F. The principal question that I am addressing in my paper is this: if there are disincarnate personalities, where do they live, move and have their being; and how can they have causal effects here in the physical world.
- III. The Doctrine of the Transphysical Worlds
- A. What I want to claim is that there are worlds outside of the physical world, that are systematically beyond the reach of scientific measurement, and that are nonetheless involved in important causal interactions with events in the physical world.
 - B. This idea is very radical. It involves a cosmological shift that dwarfs the Copernican revolution. The Copernican revolution involves a shift in our perspective on the place of the Earth in the physical cosmos, but the cosmological shift that I am suggesting involves a shift in our understanding of the place of the physical world itself in a much larger and much more complex system of worlds. If my ideas seem unfamiliar, it is because they *are* unfamiliar.
 - C. I am asking you to let go of what I take to be the most drastically limiting concept of modern times – the assumption that *the physical is the actual*.
 - D. This assumption has become so ingrained, that it is almost unconscious, and if we are going to form an interesting understanding of personality survival, we have to get beyond this assumption. *The physical is only a small part of the actual*. We have fallen in to the idea that *what is ultimately real is that which scientists can measure*. We have learned how to perform more and more elaborate measurements, and on the basis of those measurements we can construct interesting technological devices. This is all well and good. But we have gotten so carried away with this activity that we have assumed that what is ultimately real is just what this method reveals.
- IV. Scientific method, misplaced concreteness, and the fallacy of materialism
- A. On the other hand, there is so much in the real world that is entirely beyond measurement. We can’t measure the experience of consciousness, we can’t measure the texture of aesthetic appreciation, we can’t measure love, and we can’t even measure (in the strict, hard scientific sense) the feeling of hunger. Amidst the profusion of our experiences, we can isolate out the physical senses, and within the data of the physical senses we can isolate out that portion of the

sensory data which pertains to operations of scientific measurement. But to assume, on that basis, that measurements reveal the ultimate foundations of reality is foolish. The world that science describes is *not* the *real world*, rather is an *abstraction from* the real world. It is important, but it is far from ultimate. And if we pull out of the scientific trance, and actually look at the real world of our experience, we can see that it is pervaded through and through by transphysical worlds.

V. Finding the transphysical worlds in our own experience

A. I want to see if I can make it clear to you where you can find transphysical worlds in your own, everyday experience. So let us now look at the three worlds in which human beings actually exist

1. The physical world

- a) A rough definition: the physical world, the world disclosed by both modern and post-modern physics, is a system of inorganic entities, each of which is outside of all of the others, and which are exchanging causal influences through a common geometrical spacetime.
- b) The physical world is the only world in which measurement is possible.
 - 1) Scientific measurement involves rigid rulers and periodic oscillators.
 - a] The only conditions under which scientific measuring devices can become really rigid or really regular is if they are composed of inorganic entities
 - b] In order for scientific measurement to mean anything, space has to be characterized by a consistent set of parallel lines – i.e., space must be like a grid in which the distance between two lines over here is the same as the distance between two lines over there. Without a system of parallel lines extending throughout spacetime, a measurement conducted *here* will have no significance over *there*.
 - c) We can envision the physical world as a kind of infinitely extended box – no matter how many dimensions it has, it is still a box, and only in such a box is scientific measurement possible.
 - d) We often imagine that this kind of measurable spacetime is the only kind of spacetime there is, but in order to understand personality survival and the worlds in which the personality exists after death, we have to get beyond this limited idea of the nature of spacetime.

2. The vital (astral) world

- a) Now, I want to invite each of you to ask yourselves a question: do you actually live exclusively and entirely in the physical world?.
- b) I want you to consider a sequence of experiences:
 - 1) We start sitting right here in this room, paying attention to this lecture
 - 2) Then our interest shifts, we pick up a whiff of memory or desire, and we begin to daydream
 - 3) At first, that daydream might be “in the back of your mind,” so that it is kind of taking place by itself, and you are more or less aware of what is happening here.

- 4) At a certain point, the daydream might become so engrossing, that you lose any detailed attention on this room at all. At that point you might be “a million miles away,” having a pleasant or an unpleasant dreamy sort of experience, or you might be doing what the Jungians practice as “active imagination,” or what shamanic practitioner’s do when they are doing a drum journey.
 - 5) Now, suppose your attention slips further away from the physical world which we are now sharing. Now you might fall asleep, and you might go straight through to deep sleep, you might dream in the usual way, or you might find yourself instead in a lucid dream, or an out of body experience.
 - 6) Finally, the dream, lucid dream, or oobe might take place in a world that is very much like the physical world, even barely distinguishable from the physical world – or it might take place in any of fantastical places in which we often dream. And, in that dream world we have a body, that body is encountering other bodies outside of it, those bodies are having causal effects on each other, and they are bound into some kind of framework within which those interactions are kept coherent. We have then, I suggest, a transphysical body which already exists in transphysical spacetime. All we have to do to access that body is to shift our attention inwards, without falling asleep.
- c) When our attention is dominated by the data that we are exchanging with the physical body and its senses, then we are awake in a physical world. But when we withdraw our senses from the physical world – particularly if we can do this with our mind awake and with continuity of memory across domains – we actually find ourselves in another world, with an individual body made of the stuff of that world, and we find ourselves interacting with other beings who also inhabit that world.
- d) What is that world like? I want you to remember what it is like to imagine, or to dream, or, if you have the conscious memory, what is it like to do an oobe. I want to offer you a description, and to see if you find it illuminating:
- 1) Whenever I am imagining or dreaming, I find myself in some kind of a scene. I am in an imaginal scene. I can sometimes move within that scene, but measurements are impossible in that scene. I can’t really say how far away things are because there are no rulers and clocks which function with sufficient regularity and independence. We would say that there is a geometry in the astral world, but it is a projective geometry, in which parallel lines are undefined, and the preconditions for measurement are not met. The actual distances in these spaces have do with morphic resonances – i.e., distance is more a matter of a difference in feeling rather than a difference in geometrically measurable distance. If there is some shift in my thoughts or feelings, the scene just shifts, quite abruptly, to reflect my inner change. If we take this to be a characteristic of the transphysical worlds, then we would say that in the transphysical worlds, position is a function of relative resonances of feelings and

meanings between different scenes. I don't move through the astral world by putting my legs one in front of another. Rather I move in the astral world by refocusing my thoughts and feelings. As I understand it, if I am in a lucid dream and I want to find a particular person, I can focus on the overall "feel" of my memory of them, and then I would immediately either be in communication with that person, or else I would find myself in their presence.

- 2) Furthermore, because the objective stuff in this astral world is so much more attuned to the intelligences that inhabit it, because even the furniture of that world is responding to feelings and meanings, the boundaries of the body there will be more fluid. The border of the body in astral space will be more diffuse than it is in physical space.
- 3) Transphysical bodies are much more transparent to others transphysical bodies than are physical bodies. We divide the world into two regions – the inside of the body and the outside of the body. I want to suggest that what we experience as the inside of our bodies is a little bubble of astral space. Thus, within the body, there is a wondrous field of empathic and telepathic interactions taking place. If my little toe hurts, my whole body can be miserable. My arms and my vocal chords are taking telepathic instructions from me as I speak. So what I call the inside of my body is the experience that my astral body has when it is tuned in to the physical world through the physical body.
- e) There is no reason whatsoever that such a world is impossible. One of the great merits of Whitehead's understanding of spacetime is that it gives us a conceptual apparatus in terms of which we can articulate the nature of this world, and of its relations to the physical world, rather clearly.
- f) And with the positing of such a world, the idea of personality survival becomes entirely intelligible. Dying, from this point of view, is very much like falling asleep. Depending on our own level of development, we might find ourselves after death in a sub-conscious state, as in our familiar nighttime dreams, or we might find ourselves awake and lucid as in lucid dreams and oobes.
- g) If we can establish continuity of memory across the River Lethe, if we can remember our lucid dreams and oobes; and if, in our lucid dreams and oobes we regularly have commerce with disincarnate human personalities; then we will have personally convincing proof of personality survival.
- h) Now, we come back to this room. We are not on the astral plane, and we are awake in our physical bodies. Where did the transphysical body go? I want to suggest that it is right here, and that each of us is inhabiting it at this moment. It is when the astral body is focused *in* the physical body that we say we are awake.
- i) As Wilber would say, reality consists of holons, and holons are arranged into successively higher levels of complexity. The complexity, and the

richness of inner experience, that belongs to me as a high grade holon is in stark contrast with the relative simplicity and poverty of a holon comprising a physical atom. An atom, assuming (as Whitehead and Wilber both do), that it *feels* the causal impact of the past, experiences its world as a stark array of naked forces. I, on the other hand, experience the world as a richly meaningful field of interactions suffused with meaning and with complex emotions, values and motivations. When I am lucid dreaming, I am seeing a rich, very free and highly fluid field of meaningful interaction. When I am awake, I have imposed limits on my ability to dream. I am now able to perceive and to effect only those situations that are permitted by the largely automatic activities of the inorganic occasions that exist in the box of the physical world.

- j) A great analogy for this is the experience of playing a computer game, or of entering into a computer generated virtual reality. In real life, my possibilities of interacting with you are very rich. When we meet in a virtual environment, we meet in a vastly simplified world. Our interactions are structured by the nature of the hardware and software comprising the operation of the machine. In a similar way, when I wake up, I limit my interactions with other beings to those permitted by the laws of the physical world. But I don't live in that world any more than I actually live in the virtual environment of a computer generated scenario.
- k) Let us imagine the physical world as a giant grid buzzing with holons, or actual occasions, all of whom are low grade, inorganic holons. We have our transphysical bodies *outside* of that grid. But we are not outside spatially, not outside dimensionally, we are rather outside by inhabiting a world of immensely rich possibilities, possibilities of which the physical world is a tiny abstraction. There is some mechanism by means of which we can interface with a system of holons in that grid, the inorganic components of the physical body, and both infuse them with our feelings and meanings, and also allow ourselves to be hypnotically fixated on that interaction, putting the rest of ourselves into the background.
- l) I am not saying that the physical world is an illusion, and that we need to awaken from the illusion. Far from it. I am saying that the physical world is a real world. It is the world explored by physics. And that there is another world, an astral world, which is outside of the physical in that it is not restricted to patterns of interaction that take place in the world of physics. I am saying that we actually live in that astral world, and that the time we spend awake is the time that we are engaged with events taking place in the rather rigid, inorganic box of the physical world. Our task, in this context, is not to awaken from an illusion, it is rather to learn to expand the attention we already pay to the physical world by also paying attention to the transphysical world in which we already live.
- m) We are already transphysical world beings, and that is why we can feel each and understand each other so much more deeply than atoms and molecules and feel and understand each other. And, as transphysical

beings, we are already in constant contact with other transphysical world beings that are not occupying physical bodies.

- n) Our job is to wake ourselves up to the transphysical world existence that we already enjoy

VI. Learning to wake up in transphysical worlds

- A. Before I discuss this topic, I want to complexify what we have been saying by suggesting that there is not just an astral world, but also a mental world. The relation between the mental world and the astral world is roughly analogous to the relation between the astral and the physical. The occult traditions, and everyday life as well, suggest that the core of our ego identity is the central pole of the mental body, and that the place we are awake is the place at which our mental attention is focused. Thus, when we are awake, it is because our mental attention is focused, though the astral, in the inorganic box of the physical world.
- B. The general cosmology that I am trying to develop here is a cosmology in which there is some kind of reincarnating entity, call it the Soul, that somehow transcends all three of the worlds in which we live, move and have our being.
- C. The Soul, when it reincarnates, starts with an entirely fresh body – a fresh mental body, a fresh astral body, and a fresh physical body.
- D. By the direction of the Soul, the primary focus of mental attention is in the physical body. At first, the mind finds itself in the physical world, but is unable to distinguish itself from the environment in which it is existing. Psychologists have convincingly demonstrated that infants can't tell, at first, where the boundaries of their bodies are.
- E. Having accomplished that differentiation, the three bodies all develop largely in response to the inputs of the physical senses. Thus the whole personality develops throughout physically embodied life.
- F. While we actually have existence in all of these three worlds (mental, astral, physical), by and large we are not taught to differentiate self from other in the transphysical worlds. Thus, in the physical world, we know quite clearly where we end and the world begins, in the transphysical worlds we appropriate the whole of that world as being somehow part of "me." We thus come to imagine that the transphysical worlds are somehow contained within our physical bodies, and are private to ourselves.
- G. Nothing could be further from the truth. Any of us who are married, or who function as psychotherapists, know quite well that the psyche is entirely porous. Jung knew this very clearly. You are a complex in my unconscious, and vice versa.
- H. The crucial step that we have to make if we are going to have a true science of the subliminal is for us to learn to focus our clear mental attention in the transphysical body, and to use that mental attention to make a clear discrimination between ourselves and the rest of the transphysical worlds.
- I. What I am trying to do in my work is to develop a clear, mental understanding of the spacetime of the transphysical worlds which can help us to awaken there and to orient ourselves to the possibilities that those worlds present.
- J. My hypothesis is this: if we can awaken in the transphysical worlds, then personality survival will become self-evident. And we can help ourselves to

awaken in the transphysical worlds by realizing that they *are* real worlds, with their own spacetime, and their own causal logic.

VII. The logic of transphysical worlds

- A. The great discovery which underlies all modern science is the realization that all causal interactions among inorganic occasions take place in a geometrical spacetime in which measurement is possible.
- B. The great discovery which will open up a science of the transphysical worlds is the realization that causal interactions among organic and thinking occasions takes place in a spacetime organized along entirely different principles.
- C. Understanding the spacetime of a world is the key to understanding its causal interactions, and thus is the key to forming a scientific understanding of what is happening there.
- D. Because measurement is systematically impossible in transphysical worlds, the specific current methods of the hard sciences will not work there.
- E. If we can rationally articulate the logic of transphysical spacetime, then we can understand causal interactions in transphysical worlds. And if we can understand how beings from the various worlds interact with each other, we can rationally comprehend the effects of transphysical world beings here in the physical world.
- F. In my longer paper, *Embodiment: An Explanatory Framework for the Exploration of Reincarnation and Personality Survival*, I am suggesting that autopoiesis is, already, an interaction among beings from different worlds. I am suggesting that a self-organizing system is a place in the physical world where a transphysical world being is finding physical expression. And I am suggesting the beginnings of a logic of transphysical world spacetime which may, with sufficient work, develop into a framework for true scientific work in and among the various worlds of human experience.