

# THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICES

An excerpt from chapter 25 in *The Future of the Body*

by Michael Murphy



Stoic philosophers of antiquity held that every virtue requires other virtues to complete it. They believed, for example, that courage without moderation is a bestial imitation of the real virtue, and that prudence without justice is not prudence. This view was put forth by Plato in *Gorgias* (507c), by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1144b32ff), and by earlier Greek thinkers such as Xenocrates, though the Stoics seem to have been the first to state it formally. The Stoics' term for this mutual entailment of the virtues, *antakolouthia*, was used by philosophers of many persuasions in ancient times, including Platonists and Aristotelians. That courage, moderation, justice, wisdom, and other prime character traits depend to some extent on one or more of the others was a fundamental tenet of much Greek philosophy.

The same idea, adapted to include the many virtues and traits we now value, might help us understand the complexities of transformative practice. To develop awareness, for example, we need a measure of courage. To achieve lasting control of autonomic processes, we need sensitivity to somatic activity. The essential elements of practice discussed in this book always require others. Indeed, the interdependence exhibited by transformative methods is evident in the difficulty of classifying them. It is sometimes hard to differentiate them because they are so closely interwoven. Helpful understanding of others requires both empathy and detachment. Meditation requires both concentration and relaxation. Strengthening of will sometimes involves a yielding of ordinary volitions. Each potentially transformative method, each result of transformative practice, involves others. Their mutual entailment reflects the psychological integration Greek philosophers represented by the doctrine of *antakolouthia*. We must grant that interdependence, it seems to me, even though (1) extraordinary virtues and traits can exist side by side with great emotional, intellectual, or moral deficiencies; (2) different physiological systems, though interdependent, operate with considerable autonomy; and (3) much human functioning is affected by dissociated motives, attitudes, and feelings. Though our many psychological and somatic processes operate with a certain (sometimes large) degree of independence, they affect one another either directly or indirectly.

Psychologists Carl Jung and James Hillman, philosopher James Ogilvy, mythologist Joseph Campbell, and others have explored the polytheism of human nature, showing that our inner life is many-dimensional, multilayered, and teeming with presences of various kinds. This rich complexity, they

have argued, is inescapable. If we do not accommodate the many powers in which we are secretly rooted, they come to us anyway, as physical sickness, depression, obsession, or unexpected epiphanies that disrupt our everyday functioning. We are led, gradually or suddenly, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, to live in many dimensions at once. In his book *The Myth of Analysis*, Hillman claimed that

*each cosmos which each God brings does not exclude another; neither the archetypal structures of consciousness nor their ways of being in the world are mutually exclusive. Rather, they require one another, as the Gods call upon one another for help. They supplement and complement. Moreover, their interdependence is given with their nature. Jung said at Eranos in 1934: "The fact is that the single archetypes are not isolated . . . but are in a state of contamination, of the most complete, mutual interpenetration and interfusion." In his statement Jung voiced the Neoplatonic tradition. As Wind says, "The mutual entailment of the gods was a genuine Platonic lesson." For Ficino, "it is a mistake to worship one god alone." For Schiller "Belonging to one God only, any single cosmos, any single way of being in the world, is itself a kind of hubris."*

An analogous idea was developed by the Indian seers Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo, who described their experiences of the personal and impersonal, transcendent and immanent, silent and dynamic aspects of Divinity. The transcendent order is immensely complex, the three claimed, and thus cannot be revealed through narrow ideas or practices. With mystics such as Rumi and Kabir, they bore witness to the richness of our developing humanity. Indeed, the testimony of many religious adepts suggests that the interdependence of transformative methods reflects the integrated complexity of our emerging capacities. To recognize and embrace the complexity of metanormal experience, we need to expand most notions of it. In chapter 7.1,<sup>1</sup> I criticize narrow ideas about grace, arguing that they limit receptivity to some of our greater possibilities. If our philosophic frameworks exclude particular attributes (whether normal or metanormal), those attributes are likely to be neglected or suppressed. By limiting ourselves to just part of the spectrum of grace, we will not open to all the life that awaits us.

But there is another source of our *antakolouthia*. Since transformative practice has multiple roots in our animal and human ancestry, the interdependence of its methods reflects the integrated complexity of ordinary functioning. For whenever we alter a mental, emotional, or physical process, we affect our entire organism, which is governed by homeostasis and informed by feedback from all its parts. That is why proven disciplines cultivate balance as they provoke dehabituating changes. Arousal is complemented by relaxation in (successful) yoga. Painful recognitions are supported by self-acceptance during (successful) psychotherapy. The release of certain muscles is accompanied by their realignment in (successful) somatic training.<sup>†</sup>

† The following studies suggest other ways in which various disciplines can complement one another.

- Meditation researcher Herbert Benson and his colleagues showed that meditation reduces oxygen consumption during fixed-intensity tasks such as running on a treadmill; and sports psychologist Richard Suinn found that distance runners significantly improved their performance while "running relaxed." These experimental results suggest that deliberate relaxation improves performance in aerobic sports by reducing muscular stress and improving the body's general efficiency (Benson et al. 1978; and Suinn 1976).
- Research psychologists R. J. Davidson and Gary Schwartz have presented evidence that meditation and aerobic sports complement one another in reducing anxiety. Meditation, they suggested, reduces cognitive anxiety, which has psychological causes, while aerobic sports reduce somatic anxiety, which is physically stimulated (Davidson & Schwartz 1984).
- By reducing the distractions of sensory stimuli so that kinesthetic impressions are more easily apprehended, sensory deprivation can facilitate biofeedback training (Yates 1980, pp. 79-80).
- By selectively relaxing unnecessary tension during movement, Progressive Relaxation has improved performance in dance and sport (Jacobson 1974, pp. 47 - 57).

Normal functioning and our latent supernature intersect during high-level change, but we can foster or subvert their integration by the kinds of practices we choose. As I have said, certain flaws in our discipline can lead us away from integral transformation. Practices can be used to ends for which they were not designed; they can reinforce limiting traits or beliefs; they can give certain kinds of spiritual realization destructive sway over all the others. To avoid such dangers, we need to be wise mediators between our normal functioning and the metanormal activities emergent in us. The analogy that systems theorists make between organisms and societies, enlarged to include ego-transcendent realities, might help us think about such mediation.

Picturing our many structures and processes to be members of a single society, for example, we see that they operate with multiple controls in a multitudinous hierarchy, for the most part without our awareness or guidance. They know how to do this through programs inherited from our animal and human ancestors and by further training in this lifetime. Conducting their business in working harmony with other members of our organism-as-society, they accept a certain amount of in-fighting among competing factions, seek help from other groups when they need it, warn each other of dangers when necessary, and take all sorts of initiatives to ensure our survival.

Now if we want to introduce a transformative program into this complex hierarchy, we can do so clumsily, stamping out entire working groups (by ascetic practices, for example, that diminish particular senses), or isolating certain groups from the whole by the persistent denial of feedback from them, or failing to recognize or surrender to agencies beyond ordinary functioning. If we operate in this way, we will suffer accordingly, from self-mutilation, dissociation, or lack of help from our secret resources. Though we might institute new kinds of functioning, we will cut ourselves off from many of our creative attributes.

On the other hand, we can introduce our transformative program with balance and skill, gradually leading our working groups toward new routines without stamping them out, maintaining intramural communication, opening to help from metanormal agencies (which seem to have their own processes, their own kinds of energy, their own abilities to enhance our present activities). Thus, we can preserve our rich society, enhance its internal cohesion, and bring its multitudinous hierarchy into resonance with new sources of harmony, goodness, and power.†

But perhaps I have worked this metaphor enough to illuminate my central suggestion, namely that creative practices draw upon our entire organism, sensitively guiding its various processes toward new efficiencies, enhancing contact among them, bringing them into resonance with metanormal activities. To do this, our practices must promote perceptual, kinesthetic, communication, and movement abilities; vitality; cognition; volition; command of pain and pleasure; love; and bodily structures. All of this involves social creativity, as none of us can develop without considerable help from our fellows. Indeed, we need many virtues and traits that help produce good societies in general, among them charity, courage, forgiveness, and balance. In chapter 26.1, I list some of these virtues and practices to cultivate them. Comprehensive disciplines, in short, need all our parts, all our processes, and creative social support.

† Analogies between organisms (or minds) and societies have been developed at length, though to support different theories, in Miller, J. G., 1978; in Minsky 1986; and in Bateson 1975. Using a metaphor about learning we might adapt to my analogy above, Minsky wrote:

Human minds don't merely learn new ways to reach old goals: they also learn new ways to learn new goals. If we did that without constraint, we'd soon fall prey to accidents - both in the world and in the mind. At the simplest levels, we need protection against accidents like learning not to breathe, at higher levels we must not acquire lethal goals like learning to suppress our other goals entirely - the way that certain saints and mystics do (Minsky 1986).

### [25.3]. THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICES

Among the advantages we enjoy today in creating integral practices is the proliferation of disciplines for cognitive, emotional, and bodily development. General semantics, linguistics, and related disciplines, most of them influenced directly or indirectly by the analytic philosophy that has flourished in British and American universities, give us new understanding of mental process. Never before have the foibles of thought, the good and bad habits of mind, the means of clear intellectual activity, been so thoroughly examined. Any comparative study of transformative practice, and any such practice itself, needs the lessons such disciplines offer. The education of emotions, too, has developed in recent times. Modern depth psychology has increased our understanding of repressed or dissociated feelings, unconscious motivations, and psychodynamics in general, while offering new approaches to health and exceptional functioning. By their insights into the effects of unconscious volitions, and by their discoveries about culture's formative influence on each person's makeup, the human sciences complement the transpersonal perspectives embedded in the religious traditions. (Note that some Christian orders and Eastern meditation schools employ psychologists to counsel their members.) Since Freud, the modern West has produced a yoga of the emotions that can support other transformative disciplines. Contemporary psychotherapy, and the affective education it informs, give us many ways to cultivate our relationships, volitions, and feelings to enhance integral practices.

At the same time, medical science, contemporary sports, and somatic education give us the basis for a physical training with unprecedented variety, richness, and robustness. Never before have so many athletic abilities been cultivated, nor have so many people tried to stretch their physical limits in so many ways, nor has human physiology been so thoroughly understood. As I have suggested, modern sports and the attendant fields of sports medicine and sports psychology constitute a vast laboratory for bodily transformation (see chapter 19). The discoveries by athletes and their trainers of optimal methods for superior performance; the growing lore among somatic educators about sensory, kinesthetic, and motor skills training (see chapter 18); and the developing insights about bodily functioning provided by medical science can assist any practice oriented toward metanormal embodiment. The cognitive, affective, and physical aspects of human functioning, in short, can be improved by numerous discoveries that few, if any previous culture enjoyed. These discoveries and the transformative disciplines they inform could comprise a yoga of yogas, as it were, to embrace our many capacities.

But there are also difficulties for integral practices in those countries that otherwise provide enough leisure and wealth to support them. There isn't much dialogue, for example, between the various organizations that promote athletic, therapeutic, and religious disciplines. The gulf between such disciplines, and the distance between them and academia, impede the cooperative study of high-level change. Furthermore, contemplative practice is not vibrant in Europe, the Americas, or most nations today. Indeed, much of its lore has been lost. The distractions of modern life, the widespread academic distrust of educational programs that embrace metanormal phenomena, and the lack of philosophic support for the cultivation of capacities that do not seem useful to society's immediate needs have produced a social climate not wholly propitious for the enterprise I am proposing. In many ways, integral practices have to work against the cultural grain. Nevertheless, they can incorporate the discoveries noted above, and they will inevitably be pursued by adventurous people. Like outer space, possibilities for extraordinary life beckon, and some of us will accept their challenge.

Given these opportunities and obstacles, then, how might we organize integral practices? One way to begin, I propose, is to compare those transformative methods that promote particular kinds of healing or growth. Theravada Buddhism's *vipassana*, Samkhya yoga, Zen Buddhist *zazen*, Psychosynthesis, and Gestalt Therapy, for example, rely on the noninterfering observation of thoughts, emotions, and sensations. These five practices, three of them ancient and two of them modern, use some form of witness meditation. Similarly, many yoga systems, martial arts, and somatic disciplines rely on slow



stretch- ing movements to articulate the functioning of particular muscle groups; while many therapies and contemplative schools employ visualization. A comparative study of transformative practices would re- veal many methods that facilitate specific kinds of development.

That such methods and their results are analogous to one an- other may not be apparent, however, when they are embedded in different traditions. For example, both Theravada Buddhism's *vipassana* and Samkhya practice depend upon noninterfering self-observation, yet these similar disciplines are characterized in different ways. Theravada Buddhism with its doctrine of *anatta* emphasizes the illusory nature of ordinary selfhood; whereas Samkhya philosophy posits a *purusha*, or observing self, that is liberated by witness meditation from *prakriti*, the observable world. In *vipassana*, the ego-sense gives way to emptiness; whereas in Samkhya yoga *purusha* realizes its own essence more clearly. But in spite of their different supporting philosophies, the two meditation practices require the same close attention to internal processes, and both produce a sense of freedom, mastery, and delight. Furthermore, they closely resemble the choice- less awareness encouraged by Zen Buddhism, Psychosynthesis, Gestalt Therapy, and other programs for human growth. In psycho-therapy, too, the same method or result is sometimes characterized in different ways. The cathartic recall of traumatic events, for example, might be termed "contact with dissociated parts of the self" by a Gestalt therapist or the "lifting of repression" by a psychoanalyst. Similarly, a successful hypnotic induction might be attributed to role compliance or a distinctive cognitive state by different hypnosis re- searchers (15.4). In contemplative practice, psychotherapy, and hypnosis, as well as in other disciplines, similar methods and outcomes are frequently interpreted in ways that obscure their similarity.

A comparative analysis of transformative activities also reveals functional analogies between different kinds of practice. Rolfing, for example, promotes an articulation of bodily movement that is analogous to the articulation of awareness catalyzed by witness meditation. In this somatic discipline, adhering myofascia are separated so that the client's muscles might operate more freely, while in analogous fashion, witness meditation tends to loosen congested mental contents. In these two practices, physical or mental structures are teased apart so that the entire organism might function more freely, with improved articulation of its various parts. Their methods are not identical, but functionally analogous.†

Given the immense number of approaches to human development, it would clarify our understanding of them if we were to find that some of them depend on certain widely used methods. It would be useful to see whether we could break their molecular structures down into commonly shared elements. If we could thus identify the most effective methods for achieving particular kinds of change, we would be better able to formulate integral practices.

The methods that constitute therapeutic, somatic, athletic, and religious disciplines cannot be exactly mapped, since they change from place to place and over time, but a comparative analysis of them would be useful in several ways. We might see, for example, which have been used in different cultures, and which are culture-bound. By comparing their stated aims and outcomes we might find which human failings they do or do not address, and discover where some are weak and others strong in relation to particular human attributes. Indeed, we might uncover dimensions of transformative practice that are little known today and incorporate once-esoteric insight into a publicly available body

† Psychologist James Hillman has described a similar articulation of psychic functioning through the personification of various experiences or complexes as gods or archetypes. By the heightened awareness of inner complexity that such personification produces, we become internally more separated, we become aware of distinct parts. Even should unity of personality be an aim, "only separated things unite," as we learn from the old alchemical psychologists. Separation comes first . . . [it] offers internal detachment, as if there were now more interior space for movement and for placing events, where before there was a conglomerate adhesion of parts or a monolithic identification with each and all (Hillman 1975, p. 31).

of knowledge. To begin such a study, the most enduring and prominent practices from ancient and modern times might be listed and their methods identified. These methods could then be grouped according to their essential modalities and results. The psychological and somatic processes they affect, the capacities they facilitate, the virtues they promote, the cultural norms, expectations, and belief systems in which they have been embedded could be compared and analyzed. Such an enterprise would be a fertile adjunct to many fields of inquiry, including philosophy, psychology, and medical science.

But there is a simpler way to begin this comparative study, namely to list the capacities, virtues, and traits that balanced development involves, then identify methods that promote them. I will attempt this approach in the chapter that follows. Since, however, my purpose is simply to be suggestive, I will frame practice outcomes in quite general terms and will not attempt a comprehensive inventory of methods to realize them.

Carl Jung, too, wrote at length about the dual process of *solve et coagulo*, separation and coagulation, by which the European alchemists symbolically projected the articulation of psychic process into their distillation of the physical elements.

The alchemist saw the essence of his art in separation and analysis on the one hand and synthesis and consolidation on the other. For him there was first of all an initial state in which opposite tendencies or forces were in conflict; secondly, there was the great question of a procedure which would be capable of bringing the hostile elements and qualities, once they were separated, back to unity again (Jung 1970b, p. xiv).