

On Dimensional and Other Misunderstandings *¹

by

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Summary

For several decades now there has been a trend in our society whereby people increasingly assume responsibility for their own health and well-being. This undoubtedly offers numerous advantages, for example with respect to self care and spiritual development, but it also entails certain risks. **On Dimensional and Other Misunderstandings** takes a critical look at a few New Age commonplaces such as: ‘You’ve got to let your ego go’, ‘You create it all yourself’, ‘You can heal your life’ and ‘All opinions are equally valid’.

The article points to some of the pitfalls with reference to examples drawn from real life and examines how such misunderstandings arise.

INTRODUCTION

(...)

Just like you I am deeply interested in everything that has to do with the spiritual, the subtle, the unseen, the transpersonal or whatever else you wish to call it.

Nonetheless in recent years I have caught myself finding it necessary to pull on the reins and warn against exaggeration and illusory ideas of all kinds. So much so that I decided to collect some of these pet peeves together and to make a selection of them entitled **On Dimensional and Other Misunderstandings**. Exactly what I mean by this description will become clearer during the course of this talk.

(...)

By way of getting to grips with my subject I would like to start with the observation that, in Europe, our modern critical dialogue with other cultures and religions sooner or later confronts us with our enlightenment roots. Here I am not talking about mystical enlightenment, but rather to the shape that European thinking assumed in the 18th century and which in essence says that humans no longer have to accept passively and uncritically ideas that have been handed on to them but rather must approach reality in a rational way and enter into the struggle against prejudice and superstition in a critical spirit.

I am firmly convinced that an open mind lacking a critical spirit in this day and age is an open door to new forms of deception and superstition. So it's not for nothing that my favourite quotation comes from the philosopher Jacob Needleman: "You should be open-minded, but not so open-minded that your brains fall out."

I hope then that nobody will object to me taking the same no-nonsense approach to my own transpersonal field of inquiry by appending a few critical comments to some well-established points of view. Please, however, don't expect a harshly scientific approach accompanied by figures and diagrams. I view this presentation more as a postprandial discourse, in which I will attempt to share some experiences, thoughts and hunches with you.

1st Statement: YOU'VE GOT TO LET YOUR EGO GO

Robert Vandewalle, a judo champion who won a gold medal for Belgium at the 1980 Olympics, is now past 50 and a TV documentary showed him reminiscing about the training and internships he experienced in Japan. He recalled the immense dojos, huge halls used for training, where the best of the Japanese judo world would meet, and where there were always dozens of advanced judokas on the mats. He mentioned a telling detail, namely that near the entrance to one of these dojos, just before you stepped onto the mat in fact, there was a sign reading, 'Leave your ego with your shoes'. A clear hint to all the highly talented judo practitioners there reminding them, 'Even if you have established your reputation, even if you are a great champion, don't put on airs and be modest, because you can always learn something from somebody else'. In the West we understand this in the same way. By ego we usually mean 'the sense of self worth', and this understanding is reflected in expressions such as 'His ego took a knock', or 'He's got a big ego'.

Even so I often notice that in certain spiritual circles the term is often made to mean more than this and people are often pushed into putting aside, in the most literal sense, their ego, self-awareness, sense of separate identity, or failing that, others will put it aside for you. As a psychiatrist I am not sure how I should understand this advice. And if it means what I think it means, this is not a very attractive idea and makes me think mainly of psychotic situations, but –why should I worry about it after all – usually the explanation is somewhat simpler. For example take Frieda, a woman in middle age. Somewhat upset, she told me about her experiences of a spirituality workshop. The workshop leader started the session off with the memorable words: "My ego is no more ... my being is one and all unconditional love". Exactly what this meant soon became clear during the course of the same workshop, when Frieda dared to pose one or two critical questions. A wave of unconditional love was immediately launched in her direction ... and she was swamped by a flood of cutting remarks. She was given a very public reprimand and was told that she was still troubled by her ego, that she still had a lot of self-examination to do, and so on and so on. Losing disciples is apparently not a pleasant experience, not even for leaders without an ego, that much is clear.

What I mean is don't check your mind at the door. Anybody who says that he knows what it means to function without an ego, is probably parroting texts inspired by oriental mysticism and has just as little experience with them as you. He -I am deliberately saying he, because most such leaders are indeed men- probably has just as much ego as you, only he's read different books ... and quoting them creates a good impression. But occasionally, as you have heard, the teacher not only tolerates no other opinion, if you don't agree with him you will quickly discover that your ego is out of control. A good example of offensive spirituality! My advice to this teacher would be to drop all the false

modesty and grow himself a nice big ego. A large, hairy, gutsy ego that everybody can see, an ego as big as a house, but one that he himself is aware of. For that matter, and completely besides the point, it's perhaps not so much the size and strength of our egos that's the problem, but more that the 'heart' fails to keep up with the growth of the ego. Like every big imbalance this creates problems, both for ourselves and others. If such an imbalance is not held in check by self-knowledge, and narcissistic egocentricity overflows its confines, we end up in situations like the above. The longing to be special and different, and the need to convince others of this, is of all time and can indeed assume embarrassing proportions.

For the sake of clarity I should add that 'ego' and 'egoism' are two quite different things. The ego is not the enemy of the spiritual, rather it is the servant. In fact you need a solidly structured ego if you are to bear the weight of spiritual development. If you don't have it, you might even be at risk of a psychotic episode. If you are to be able to function in a mentally healthy way, and absorb the impact of mystical experiences, you must indeed have a healthy mind with good neuronal wiring that can stand up to a mild knock. For those who prefer to have it in computer terms: spirituality is a demanding program to run and if you want to avoid crashing your system you need a good computer.

One of my clients, let us call him Eric, recently visited a well-known channel (or medium if you like). During the session he asked about the ego, how one should deal with it. His exact words were: "Some people say that you should suppress the ego and ignore it". The answer came immediately (I quote), "*Get this clear, this view is unrealistic. The ego is a feature of personality. What you should try to neutralize are the compulsive behaviours, the conditioning factors that are burdensome for the ego, so that (after neutralization) this (ego) can exist in the free movement of the spiritual element.*"

I am not trying to advertise the virtues of mediums here, after all there are quite a few of them... Even so Eric was obviously in touch with a good one, because I think the simplicity of this answer is a major virtue.

For those for whom this is not clear enough I could paraphrase it as follows: "As a human being you have an ego and there's nothing wrong with that. It's not our ego, our sense of self, that we must leave behind, but the limitations that become attached to it, limitations that prevent ourselves from developing fully." In other words, the ego is like a room surrounded by a window. Don't brake the glass, just clean the window, so that you get more light and a better view.

Aren't there any spiritual experiences of oneness, I hear you asking, that can temporarily release people from their limitations and ego restrictions? And you have already given me the answer with that 'temporary'. Moreover – and now I'm being ever so slightly mischievous – even after his mystical experiences the mystic likes to see his picture on the front or back cover of the book published

about him, and that of all possible photographs it just happens to be the picture that's the most flattering that's selected. If you get what I mean ...

2nd Statement: YOU CREATE IT ALL YOURSELF

If by this you mean that everybody has their very own subjective view of the world around them and see events as conditioned by their own view of people and the world, you are of course perfectly correct.

Sometimes too the statement ‘you create it all yourself’ is meant as an allusion to the principle of karma and reincarnation, whereby life after life people are confronted with the consequences of their actions, and as a result of this confrontation are stimulated (usually unconsciously) to act in ways that have better consequences, namely that create more joy and harmony in themselves and in their environment. Karma in other words as an educational principle, part of an ongoing cycle of action and correction, creation and recreation, whereby the person ultimately stabilizes and deepens his/her sense of unity in the overall structure. If this is what is meant by ‘you create it all yourself’, I have no objection to it either. To the contrary I find it an enlightening and challenging prospect.

But now and then people go much further than the above and see themselves not only as the centre of their own lives but also as the creator of the entire reality around themselves. This form of personal over-estimation, ‘I create it all myself’ may be indicative of manic disinhibition, but sometimes it is merely a misunderstanding that has got out of hand. This happens as follows. Esoteric literature contains numerous references to the fact that in some dimensions, also known as the astral planes, entire realities can be quickly created and dismantled by a conscious act, or, if you will, by the power of thought. People who take this idea seriously, or more uniquely have direct experience of it, may well start to think that also in this dimension they are the creator of their own universe, including the material reality. Here the verb create is not meant in the sense of designing and assembling one’s own furniture. Far from it, this is creation in the purest possible (i.e. the divine) sense, namely as an act of consciousness. Of course a belief such as this cannot be maintained for any length of time, and certainly not in practical and material terms. I have met people, both in my practice and outside it, who have perfectly seriously asserted – albeit in rather hushed, conspiratorial tones – that they have discovered, or have at least a very strong suspicion, that they create everything, absolutely everything, themselves. And that as soon as they shut their eyes and think of something else, objective reality has also completely disappeared. My reaction to such assertions is then: “What a brilliant idea. My advice would be to think about it profoundly with your eyes shut ... preferably while taking a long walk in the woods”. The person concerned will then look at me with an astonished expression, only to wake with a start when he/she bangs into an imaginary tree.

Declaring the non-existence of something that falls beyond the range of the personally observable, literally or figuratively, is in fact a mechanism that cuts both ways. There are for example information sources on the other side that consistently maintain that earthly reality is not essentially real. From their position tangible reality is experienced as an unreal world, an unreal phenomenon whose illusoriness can be seen. Until, so it is said, they are incarnated once again by force of circumstances and they suddenly have far less to say. Once they are 'dressed' in a new body they find that this material world suddenly does not seem to be so flexible, transient and illusory as they first thought. In other words they come to the sobering discovery that every dimension has its own laws and that within each dimension these laws are a harsh reality.

This makes me think of the Sufi story about the village sage who would endlessly harp on the illusory nature of the material world. Eventually the villagers got so fed up with him that they imprisoned him in a deep well. And when he was weeping and wailing and complaining that he could not understand why they were doing this to him, the villagers calmly responded that he shouldn't make such a fuss, after all the well was merely an illusion. The sage let out a profound sigh, and called back that he saw what they meant, whereupon the villagers hauled him back up to the top. Even so after a while the villagers found that whenever they went to him for advice about one or other setback he would start sermonizing about how they shouldn't let themselves be so affected by events and that they should at all times see through the illusory nature of human existence. This time the villagers had had enough. Back down the well he went, but on this occasion they put the cover on and ignored his prayers and wails of distress. Finally once his whimpers and wails had entirely faded away and he stood at death's door, they hauled him back to the surface and nursed him back to health. From that moment on he was filled with compassion for the small dramas of his fellow villagers and never did he ever use the word illusion again.

It is not my intention to raise a few laughs at the expense of certain esoteric publications. As far as I'm concerned you're welcome to regard the material world as an illusion, as long as you agree with me that it is a tangible illusion, where the creation of reality is a very broad concept and not merely a personal question.

So if you really want to influence the results of the weekly lottery draw, I won't try to stop you, but remember that you're not the only one and that the 'pulse of your creative thought' might well be submerged in the millions of other thoughts trying to do exactly the same thing at precisely the same moment.

3rd Statement: YOU CAN HEAL YOUR LIFE

Louise Hay's book 'You Can Heal Your Life', which came out in the early eighties, was the first of a flood of New Age literature that examined the psychological roots of disease, and the appropriate corrective affirmations. The merits of the book were that it opened up the notion of 'psychosomatic' so that it became far more inclusive than the old idea of the stressed executive with heart disease and stomach ulcers. In these books you can find tips and suggestions that help you to view numerous physical disorders in a different way and to work creatively on improving your health. As long as the suggested links are experienced as 'eye-openers' and you apply the recommendations in a relatively mild fashion to *yourself*; there's nothing wrong at all.

Unfortunately all too often the suggested psychosomatic relationships are not viewed as possibilities that may *sometimes* be true, but as certainties which are *always* true, graven in stone even. Instead of using them as an aid to *personal growth* some people wield them like a medical dictionary in support of their own views that they, unasked, present as the underlying cause of other people's symptoms.

"Don't you know that your breast cancer means that you crop up all your negative feelings too much?" or "You know that sciatica is caused by money worries, don't you? Just look it up on page 195 in Louise Hay" or "It's a shame that you can't just admit that your MS is the result of your total inflexibility."

People in the alternative circuit complain endlessly about the poor communication skills of the practitioners of conventional medicine, but the pronouncements quoted above are equally crass. You might think this is caricature, but such things are said. As far as I'm concerned such remarks cannot be regarded as therapeutic interventions and are simply *spiritual vandalism*. Therapists who are in relatively good physical health and have never cured much more than their own colds are the often the worst offenders. Whereas those who suffer from a serious disease, which they try to combat using all the means available to them, are generally far more careful and nuanced in their pronouncements.

Conventional therapists rightly complain that their patients are not helped by one-liners of this kind, to the contrary they are often saddled up with feelings of guilt that, quite needlessly, makes their personal pain worse. As a result terminal cancer patients are dying with the visualization manual open on their laps, victims of a double sense of guilt: "Apparently anyone can cure himself, but I just can't do it. Apparently I'm too stupid. Not only is it my fault that I have become ill, it's also my fault that I can't shake it off".

Likewise at many spiritual healing events – to take another example – communications are often likely to go deeply wrong and the organizers create exaggerated expectations which can of course not be met and leave those attending the event with a sense of failure or guilt. Such situations could be

avoided if the prayer healer heading the meeting were to give rather more objective product information, and for example say that “under the influence of healing energy (such as love, forgiveness and reconciliation) old energy blockages may be resolved so that people feel happier and more energetic, and that *sometimes* the psychosomatic liberation may be so profound that the recovery from some diseases is indeed faster, but that miracles – such as deformed limbs suddenly returning to their normal shape – are very rarely reported, and that participants should in general not expect them”. Even so I doubt that any communication of this sort is likely to be widely adopted. Playing down the potential therapeutic effects is not an obvious approach and it perhaps may not even be desirable in all cases: no therapist wants to cripple him or herself by suggesting at the outset of the session that the effects of the session are perhaps not going to help as much as have been suggested. Even so, greater balance in the pattern of expectations would not be amiss. At present the pendulum seems to have swung too far the other way, and an atmosphere is created at these healing sessions or prayer meetings that incorrectly suggests that if you are ready for it, or sufficiently open, the healing of all ills is possible, congenital defects included. Take note, you won’t hear me saying that nothing of this kind has ever happened in the world. I mean, miracles do happen now and then in Lourdes (or elsewhere), but clearly far too rarely for me to send all my patients there. Usually the miracle does not occur: the blind do not see, and the lame do not walk, to the disappointment or sheer despair of the person in the wheelchair, who once again thinks that it’s all his/her own fault, that he/she simply didn’t try hard enough, or that he/she was lacking in faith. Of course people can do far more than they ever thought possible and of course they should be encouraged to push back their limits. But ... then preferably without spiritual therapists giving them the illusion that everything is possible for everybody in virtually no time at all. At least not with the sort of bodies that we’ve got in this day and age.

Yes, I know, I too have read the spiritual books, that perhaps at some stage it will be different, when the human material acquires a different structure, becomes ‘supramental’ for those who are at home in the jargon, as a result of which, who knows, it will react faster and more completely to healing impulses, but not now, not yet. Healers who say they are in touch with the ‘other side’ and concern themselves with what we might term the ‘high technology’ of consciousness are supposed to have some understanding of this, and are at least supposed to know that the ability of the body to react to energetic impulses differs immensely from person to person, and where this ability may perhaps be subject to limitations imposed by karmic-genetic heritage. I will not deny that physical limits can be pushed back under the influence of spiritual-energetic input, but the degree to which this can be done is limited here too.

An example from alternative spiritual practice can be given here: a man with a severely arthritic hip joint once asked a reliable channel (the same one as

referred to above) if his arthritis could still be fully cured. The answer he received was, “ *No, you need to be realistic about this. You can slow it down, delay the process. Improved function may be achieved with exercise, but complete recovery is no longer possible.*” This man did not let the matter rest, and a few months later he posed a reformulated version of his query during another channelling session as follows: “If I am a creator, can I create the regenerative ability in my hips?” I was as curious to know what the response would be as you, because the form of the question creates a dilemma. Should the answer be ‘Yes’, we might reasonably wonder why not more people report the complete renovation of their bodies after a weekend of creative visualization, just as somebody else can show tangible results after a day in the garden or weekend spent redecorating a room. (Or at least that a few people could show this, preferably with reference to ‘before’ and ‘after’ photographs). If the answer is ‘No’, we might just as well forget about the principle of the healing power of thought, visualizations and affirmations. What is it then, Yes or No? The answer that came through was as follows: “*You should realize that there are reactions within the laws governing material form. Theoretically and in principle what you suggest is possible. Practically and technically because of the laws governing material form this requires too much time and excessively large deconditioning reactions in cell memory. This would require several of your lifetimes and in view of the duration of a lifespan it is not feasible. Nonetheless it is beneficial to create a positive restructuring in the mental consciousness and to use affirmative exercises and visualization techniques from (a state of) total awareness in order to implement the best possible structure.*” End of quote. Freely interpreted the general answer was thus that the rate of degeneration could be slowed but not to the extent that his hips would in fact heal in full, because of a lack of time. In other words: “Of course you can heal your hips by visualization, only you are never going to be able to benefit from this because of the amount of time that you will need. Indeed by then you will already have been dead for several decades of an unrelated illness.”... Now, whether this sort of explanation comes from ‘on high’ or ‘from below’, from a colleague or from the ‘other side’ is not really important to me. As long as it makes sense and the information does not run counter to basic reasonableness and clinical findings, they can keep talking as far as I’m concerned.

If you cannot easily cure a serious physical condition such as breast cancer, leukaemia, or multiple sclerosis, at least not in most people, what about reversing mental problems? Well as the brains are part of the body, the same message applies: a lot is possible, but not everything, not for everybody and certainly not with a snap of the fingers. Psychotherapists lacking any medical training sometimes forget that the brain is an organ and that every organ, the brain included, can become seriously ill. They tend in their therapeutic

dedication to overlook that there is such a thing as mental illness with a biological basis. For example not every depression is a beneficial opportunity for mental growth. A client's tendency to depression may be 'constitutional', i.e. an inborn weakness of the organism and such an inborn shortcoming may range from the very mild to the impressively alarming. Research has shown that some mental disorders are not only biologically determined but are even genetically preordained and appear only in later life. Examples including bipolar disorder (manic depressive illness) and schizophrenia, which are regarded as polygenic hereditary disorders. (Schizophrenia has roughly the same incidence of occurrence in all cultures. The likelihood of developing schizophrenia during one's lifetime is roughly 1 in a 100. If one of your parents suffered from the disorder the likelihood becomes 1 in 10, and if both parents were sufferers the likelihood becomes almost 1 in 2.) Studies of twins yield comparable results: when one twin suffers from schizophrenia the chance of other the twin developing it is 1 in 10 in non-identical twins and between 2–4 in 10 in identical twins, and studies of adopted children have likewise confirmed the existence of a genetic factor. (The children of schizophrenic parents who have been adopted by non-schizophrenic parents, continue to be as likely to develop schizophrenia as the children of schizophrenic parents who grow up in the family of birth. Vice versa children of non-schizophrenic parents adopted by schizophrenic parents have the same risk of developing schizophrenia as the general population). It is therefore useful in our approach to people requiring help to make a clear distinction between problems that need to be resolved and diseases that need to be treated. Similarly the literature of transpersonal psychiatry resolutely takes the view that a therapeutic approach that does not use medication for serious psychiatric disorders such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia constitutes malpractice, if only because of the unbearable suffering of the patient, which not infrequently ends in suicide. (The difference between diseases that must be treated and problems that must be resolved was not always made so clear. A good example is compulsive obsessive disorder. Freud once analyzed a man with a serious compulsive neurosis, what we would classify as OCD or obsessive-compulsive disorder. The analysis was rather demanding and Freud even wrote a book about it. According to the tradition, this patient was also analyzed by Freud's disciples and eventually would come along with them to conventions and seminars, so that by the time he reached a ripe old age he had become a sort of mascot of the psychoanalytical movement. Upon being questioned about the therapies he had undergone he described Freud as a careful and dedicated physician but that he still had his compulsive neurosis.

Of course psychotherapeutic intervention can be useful in treating compulsive neurosis and it has been shown that simply reducing stress can cause the symptoms to recede. Even though I admit that the drugs used for OCD, the classic SSRIs, are in themselves not the answer as 30% of patients do not respond to them and full remission is rare, but I diverge. What I wanted to say is that the ultimate cause of OCD cannot be determined on analytical lines. After all the cause lies not in the life experience of the client but in the brain. Nowadays, a hundred years later, there is little room for discussion –modern medical imaging techniques are rather convincing – and it appears that in OCD it is a matter of a partially hereditary disorder that usually affects the frontal area of the brain.)

What I'm trying to say is that if there is a biological/genetic basis to the psychological problem you, the therapist, are (just as Freud did) going to come up

against a wall. The same applies to transpersonal therapists, who are inclined to seek the ultimate cause of serious mental disease on a higher plane, somewhere in the soul rather than the body, and they too come up against this biological barrier. Even so if they do not regard the biological limit as the ultimate cause, they view it as a restrictive and immobile halfway station. An organic defect in the brain might appear to be bad news. But here we must be cautious: you shouldn't assume that just because a disorder appears to be organically rooted, it actually is. Intensive psychotherapy (including EMDR, but also energy therapy and reincarnation therapy) can sometimes free up a logjam that very much gives the impression of being biologically based, but which in reality is a reversible functional disorder of the brain.

However, even when the problem is governed by biological aspects of the brain, incremental change may be possible, simply because the brain too has an ability to grow and to change. Such change may be physical, as brain cells are able to make new connections, also as a result of psychotherapy, and areas of the brain can learn to partly assume the functions of areas that are no longer active. The technical term for this is plasticity. Contrary to what used to be thought, certain brain cells are capable of replicating and then migrating to other areas of the brain. But, even if there is a possibility that the brain can be transformed, the changes are never great and more importantly are slow. Just as an amputated leg does not start regenerating after a successful course of (spiritual) psychotherapy, a small residual clump of brain cells will not suddenly start growing into a fully functional brain.

Generally speaking it may be assumed that the average human body, and the brain is part of it, at this stage of human evolution, is relatively limited in respect of its biological ability to transform itself at the instigation of psycho-energetic inputs. For this reason healers should be modest in their claims and above all not delude people by arousing exaggerated expectations. After all it is definitely unethical to tempt people with a promise that in 99% of cases will not be redeemed. In this connection I would also like to warn for the increasing 'Americanization' of spirituality, whereby spiritual development programmes are offered for sale and where it is assumed that anybody can develop all their benefits in no time at all as long as they give it their best shot. Clairvoyance, clairsentience, tapping into information from previous lives..., in short all those things which are generally associated with the spiritual are far from being within reach of everybody. In certain esoteric circles it is moreover often assumed that spiritual development is linear. You start off leading the life of a savage in the jungle, halfway along you become a farmer or a warrior and ultimately you end up as meditating abbot somewhere in a Tibetan monastery. Forget it!

Reincarnation therapists will tell you that human development is less like a line and more like a blanket which you now and then weave different coloured

threads into, or if you want a simpler analogy, like a pizza that you can't eat all at once, and you leave a few slices in the fridge for later on. The idea that people should concern themselves with the 'higher' and not permit themselves a moment's peace until they find an answer to the larger questions of life is a reflection of this naive idea of linear development. For many people the spiritual does not fall within their scope of interests, and similarly it is not part of the mission of their soul in this life. Consequently there's no point in shoving this kind of idea down their throats, or worse still, not regarding them as complete people, if they are currently not engaged in a spiritual quest.

4th and final Statement: ALL OPINIONS ARE EQUALLY VALID

Now and then it happens during the course of panel discussions of things of a spiritual nature that voices get louder and louder or that one of the participants starts to speak and refuses to pipe down much to the annoyance of the rest of the company. A friendly intervention from the chairman of the panel to the effect of “Perhaps we might hear from X, all opinions are equally valid after all” is usually enough to restore order and for other voices to be heard. After all we want to behave in a friendly and respectful way towards each other and of course there’s nothing wrong with that.

But sometimes the banal ‘All opinions are equally valid’ is taken a step further and promoted as a sort of credo, as a sort of desirable basic assumption, but one which that may cause an eyebrow to be raised here and there: “Tastes and colours, yes, okay... but opinions, isn’t that a bit different? If one view is worth just as much as another, where does that leave our scientific aspirations? Is that the right attitude to take in these days of evidence-based medicine? Of course everybody may contribute to the debate in his/her own way, and of course nobody has a monopoly on wisdom. That much is evident. But isn’t saying all opinions are equally valid a bit drastic? Aren’t we then being a little too friendly towards each other?”

Undoubtedly you know the story about the six blind men who encountered an elephant. One of them put his hands on a leg and said: “Just like a tree”, another felt the trunk, another a tusk, a fourth felt the animal’s flank, while the fifth touched the ear and the sixth found the tail. Each of the six told his fellows something else, but in essence they were each telling the others about a different aspect of one and the same reality. A charming story ... perhaps a little too charming! Just suppose, and now I’m being rather a spoilsport, that there weren’t six but a good 20 blind men feeling an elephant, well at least they *think* they are feeling an elephant. One feels a leg, another the trunk, but another one has found a palm tree, and a fourth has found a leg, but it belongs to his neighbour, while a fifth isn’t touching anything but is just listening to what the others are doing and is imagining all sorts of things etc... What’s more all of them are arguing at the top of their voices about what they think. I’m sure I don’t have to labour the point ...

At home I have an expensively produced book about the history of medicine, from ancient times to the present day, containing dozens of coloured plates and engravings. The extraordinary things people have thought about how the body worked, what it looked like on the inside, and what function each of the organs had can hardly be imagined. Indeed this book makes entertaining reading, and visitors have been known to burst out laughing at some of the more bizarre passages. Even so the whole thing suddenly seems less amusing when you

pause to think that people didn't simply theorize about the body in these terms. Far from it, they were actually convinced that this was how the body worked. So convinced were they of their rightness that they spared no expense to have their views committed to writing, and were sometimes regarded as the final authority for centuries on end. 'Checking to see whether deeply held convictions are actually borne out by reality' was something which was not done. That kind of scientific humility was not yet customary. Conviction was enough to carry the day.

When people don't know how things work, they tend to fantasize, furthermore this is still very much the case, and some people's imaginations tend to be more fertile than others.

We can only hope that the current phase of obscured observation of multidimensional reality persists no longer than necessary and that in the not so distant future we will literally have a clearer view and be able to comment with greater precision on the various transpersonal experiences of people, in order to explain these experiences more adequately, confirm, supplement them, put them into context, or to correct certain interpretations of them. And yes, why not correct them? Compare the situation to somebody who has sprained his ankle and has heard something crack. He is groaning from the pain and is convinced that it's broken but is eventually told something like the following by the orthopaedist: "You are in a great deal of pain. I've noticed that and it's perfectly possible that you heard something crack when you sprained your ankle, we don't doubt your experience a bit, but your firm conviction that the bone is broken cannot be confirmed. That is an incorrect interpretation of your experience. We have made a thorough clinical examination, with X-rays and an MRI scan, and yes we can see that the cartilage has been damaged, and it's probably that that you heard crack. But no, the bone isn't broken. I'm afraid you're wrong about that". End of story.

At some stage in the future the same degree of efficiency will be expected of transpersonal therapists. Clients will come to expect that transpersonal therapists will not only have a wider and deeper view of mankind in general, but also that when the specific individual comes to the consultation the therapist will be able to give explanations that make sense. In other words they will be able to indicate exactly what the client has experienced on the transpersonal level, and should the client request a second or third opinion, he or she will hear comparable statements. Something that can be regarded as a beginning of confirmation of findings in the widest possible sense ... The ability to repeat findings is of course primordial when one thinks of the problematic debate that has dragged on for so long between transpersonal researchers and the sceptical scientific world, where one side of the debate specializes in things that

according to the other side do not even exist. Getting new movement into this dialogue is one of the challenges that we currently face.

Maybe the development of new technical apparatus at some time in the future will indeed make a contribution to this: some people even argue that the existence of the soul will be scientifically demonstrated in this way. But perhaps something may also be expected of a gradual increase of the second sight of humans in general and therefore of psychiatrists and psychologists as well. So that we will all know better what we are dealing with and hopefully we will no longer be talking about 'opinions' but about 'observations'.

In closing I would like to stress the following, namely that saying that all opinions are of equal value during a discussion of the transpersonal is often true, however, I would simply add the word 'unfortunately'. Such a situation is certainly not an ideal that one should seek to realize. Nonetheless I am hopeful that it will not persist. And perhaps, perhaps there will come a time, and this brings me to the end of this talk, that my great-grandchildren will listen to me yet again going on about the history of the transpersonal, and while they are enduring me with open mouths and glassy eyes, I will sigh and say: "I know, I know, you can't believe it, but I lived at a time when all opinions were equally valid".

Thank you for your attention.