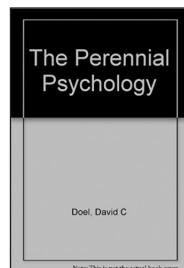


The Perennial Psychology

By David C. Doel, London, UK: Lindsey Press, 1990.

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos



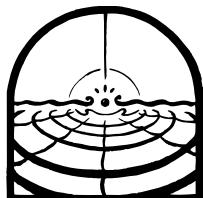
Long before the advent of contemporary psychology, to the surprise of many, there existed a complete and integral ‘science of the soul’ that was known in all times and places among the diverse cultures of the world. These integrative and healing modalities incorporated the whole human being consisting of body, soul and Spirit, and both the inner and outer dimensions of the human being. Psychology in the present day is understood to mean modern Western psychology, a byproduct of the scientific endeavor that originated with the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution and that so-called Enlightenment that negated its metaphysical roots, making it a parody of a ‘science of the soul.’ Modern Western psychology is in fact a soulless science without reference to the Spirit. It is not only reductionistic, but also dehumanizing. Its core blind spot is its totalizing worldview, one that privileges its own ways of knowing above all other modes of knowing and its erroneous theoretical presuppositions. It has in fact colonized the human psyche, establishing a monopoly on defining psychology to the degree where anyone wanting to study psychology or the mental health sciences is exclusively directed to modern Western psychology as if no other psychology, or any other ‘science of the soul,’ existed. This situation is unacceptable; we need to urgently rethink how to decolonize the ‘science of the soul’ to correct the historical record and resuscitate sacred psychology in the contemporary world.

A true and integral psychology, or what has been termed *perennial psychology*,¹ would provide a cross-cultural framework rooted in metaphysics and would inform the ontologies and epistemologies that correspond to the diverse human collectivities and their religious and spiritual traditions. Human consciousness, or the mind and behavior, would be understood in this context as they have always been since time immemorial. This integral approach draws upon universal principles underlying all modes of knowledge and levels of reality, from the horizontal dimension of sensible perceptions of the contingent to the vertical dimension of direct or non-dual perceptions of the Real. Any true psychology or ‘science of the soul’ requires the spiritual domain to ensure its efficacy.

The Perennial Psychology was written by David C. Doel (1931–2018), a clergyman deeply interested in the connection between religion and psychology, especially the relationship between the ancient forms of the ‘science of the soul’ and modern psychology. Doel, from the outset, illustrates the complementary nature of the ‘science of the soul’ and the perennial philosophy; he regards perennial psychology to be ‘an attempt to elaborate the psychology which complements that philosophy’ (p. 1). The ‘science of the soul’ recognizes the interdependence and inseparability of religion and spirituality, factors not recognized by psychology as it is known today. Thus, Doel argues, ‘The goals and techniques of the contemplative traditions belong to the Perennial Psychology’ (p. 2). However, the diverse and integral modes of knowing and healing cannot be utilized outside the context of a revealed religion or spiritual form without limiting or undermining their efficacy. It is metaphysics, the sacred sciences and the spiritual domain alone, that provide efficacy, and this is what precisely distinguishes perennial psychology from contemporary psychology. Perennial psychology which is rooted in the universal and timeless wisdom of the sapiential traditions ‘enables us to look at the same phenomenon from different points of view.’ (p. 3) The human being exists as one of many states of consciousness, each of which correspond to a different level of reality, and this multi-perspectivism allows for a more complete understanding of the psyche and its connection to the Spirit.

¹ See Samuel Bendeck Sotillos, ‘The Perennial Psychology and the Search for a Common Lexicon,’ *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 32 (Winter 2013), pp. 111–120.

To read the balance of this article, please [subscribe](#) to this volume.



SACRED WEB

A JOURNAL OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

www.sacredweb.com