

DON'T YOU DARE IGNORE THE TRANSPERSONAL! John Rowan

My understanding of the word 'integrative' is that it is inclusive. Instead of adhering to one narrow school, it opens up the field to much wider possibilities. But what I have noticed is that the *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration* has a curious omission when it comes to discuss the whole field of psychotherapy: it leaves out the transpersonal.

The most striking example of this came in a special issue (December 2005) devoted to training. It featured a special section on the future of psychotherapy integration, and the abstract had this to say: "This article provides a compilation of forecasts on the future of psychotherapy integration from 22 prominent figures in the integration movement." In the introduction the authors say this: "When SEPI was founded in 1983, it was for the purpose of creating a professional community that could help to develop a rapprochement across divided and often adversarial theoretical orientations." This sounds admirably open and unprejudiced, and one would therefore expect the door to be open to transpersonal forms of psychotherapy. But when we look at the actual contributions, something quite different emerges. Contributors were asked for their views on five different questions, referring respectively to practice, research, theory, education and training, and the general appearance of the field in 25 years' time.

Let us look, then, at what they have to say about theory. The first contribution comes from Diana Arnkoff, Carol Glass and Michele Schottenbauer: no mention of the transpersonal. Then we have Bernard Beitman, Angela Soth and Nancy Bumby: no mention of the transpersonal. Next up are Lisa Burckell and Catherine Carter: no mention of the transpersonal. Then come Louis Castonguay, Martin Holtforth and Gloria Maramba: no mention of the transpersonal. Then we have Andres Consoli, Larry Beutler and Geoffrey Lane: no mention of the transpersonal. Next comes Carlo DiClemente: no mention of the transpersonal. The contribution of Larry and Sandy Feldman has no mention of the transpersonal. Marvin Goldfried – no mention of the transpersonal. Richard Halgin – no mention of the transpersonal. Heidi Heard and Marsha Linehan – no mention of the transpersonal. Allen Ivey and Jeff Brooks-Harris – no mention of the

transpersonal. The contribution of Arnold Lazarus has no mention of the transpersonal. James McCullough, Jr. has no mention of the transpersonal. Then we come to the contribution of Scott Miller, Barry Duncan and Mark Hubble, which still has no mention of the transpersonal. John Norcross does not mention the transpersonal. John Pachankis and Alissa Bell – no mention of the transpersonal. James Prochaska – no mention of the transpersonal. Anthony Ryle has no mention of the transpersonal. Robert Sollod has no mention of the transpersonal. George Stricker and Jerry Gold – no mention of the transpersonal. Paul Wachtel – no mention of the transpersonal. The final contributor, Barry Wolfe, still has no mention of the transpersonal.

It may be objected that I have only looked at the answers on theory: perhaps there was some mention of the transpersonal in the sections on practice, research, education and training, or particularly, perhaps, in the section on visions of the future. But I can assure you that there was no mention of the transpersonal in any of these. I suppose the one which surprised me most was the way in which all those who envisaged the field of psychotherapy 25 years hence still had no reference to the transpersonal.

Looking back at the issue of March 2006, for comparison, this is a special issue devoted to people who started in the profession as integrationists, rather than following the more traditional route of 'single theorist gradually turns integrationist'. One might have supposed that at least some of these more recently emerging people would have incorporated the transpersonal into their work. But throughout the contributions of the people contributing to this issue, not one made any mention of the transpersonal.

Obviously there have been some references to the transpersonal in the occasional past issue by some outside contributor. But the people just quoted are the stalwarts of the movement, the inner circle of the club, so to speak.

So that is the present position. (6)

THE TRANSPERSONAL

Now I want to raise the question – why should these people take note of the transpersonal? Is it in the least important?

It can be said that transpersonal psychotherapy has been known from ancient times: there is an Egyptian document of approximately 2200 BCE which contains a dialogue of a suicidal man with his soul. This is quoted in

full and explained at length by the Jungian Barbara Hannah (1981), who makes some very interesting comments on it. More recently, the classic psychologist William James had a great deal of value to say about spiritual experiences of one kind and another, though he never applied this to psychotherapy.

But so far as anything actually named transpersonal psychotherapy is concerned, we can only go back as far as Jung and Assagioli, and the discussions which led to the founding of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* in 1967-69. So this is a recent speciality, in so far as it has an identity of its own. It was Abraham Maslow who inspired the modern movement: Roberto Assagioli says that the term 'transpersonal' was introduced "by Maslow and by those of his school to refer to what is commonly called spiritual. Scientifically speaking, it is a better word: it is more precise and, in a certain sense, neutral in that it points to that which is beyond or above ordinary personality. Furthermore it avoids confusion with many things which are now called spiritual but which are actually pseudo-spiritual or parapsychological." (Quoted in Assagioli 1991, p.16)

It was taken up in various countries in the years after 1969. In the United Kingdom, the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology, under Ian Gordon-Brown and Barbara Somers, was founded in 1973. It put on a series of workshops that combined structured experiential work with some theory. Out of these workshops developed a full training in transpersonal perspectives and techniques, which has now been adopted by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy. A good account has been published by Ian Gordon-Brown and Barbara Somers (Gordon-Brown & Somers 1988) of its work.

The California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology has offered a doctoral programme since 1975, combining professional training in psychology with spiritually focused inner work.

The Belgian Transpersonal Association was formed in 1984, and it was this team which put on the first European Transpersonal Conference in the same year. Following on from this, the French Transpersonal Association (AFT) was founded in February 1985. It emerged from various currents, and in particular from a Commission on the Transpersonal which existed within the French Association for Humanistic Psychology from 1978 to 1984; this

included people like Allais, Barbin, Biagi, Descamps, Donnars, N'Guyen, de Panafieu, Philippe, Sandor, Sée, Stacke and others. There was also the Society for Psychotherapy Research with Pélicier, Descamps, Guilhot and others, which put on a colloquium as early as March 1980. Other currents of the transpersonal in France flow from Marie-Madeleine Davy, Graf Dürckheim, Lilian Silburn of the Hermès review, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, the Yoga Federations and the Buddhist Centres, etc. This shows rather clearly how, in Europe as in the USA, the personnel involved in the early days had a good deal to do with the AHP, and that in both cases transpersonal psychology emerged out of humanistic psychology, picking up a good deal of Eastern material along the way. Marc-Alain Descamps is a prominent member of the AFT, and has brought out, with other members, several books in the area (Descamps et al 1987, Descamps et al 1990).

Also in 1985 the German Transpersonal Association was established, and another early entrant was the International Transpersonal Association of the Netherlands; here Rumold Mol is well known.

In 1989 the Italian Association of Transpersonal Psychology was set up, which includes an Institute of Meditation. Laura Boggio Gilot is widely known as a representative of this group.

Roberto Assagioli was developing the theory and practice of psychosynthesis throughout the 1920s and 30s (when two articles of his were published in the Hibbert Journal in England) and 40s, but it was only in the 50s that it emerged from Italy and encountered the wider world, material starting in the 60s to be published in the USA and in France. The history is well described in the book 'Psychology with a Soul' by Jean Hardy (Hardy 1987). The Psychosynthesis Research Institute was opened in Valmy near Delaware in 1957, soon after that the Psychosynthesis Association of Argentina came into being, and in 1960 the Greek Centre for Psychosynthesis was founded by Triant Triantafyllou. In 1965 the Psychosynthesis and Education Trust was founded in England: it lapsed in 1969, but was revived again in 1980 by Diana Whitmore. In 1974 the Institute of Psychosynthesis was founded in London by Joan and Roger Evans. Psychosynthesis training centres now exist in many countries, including Canada, Holland and Switzerland, and are opening up in other countries.

In 1993 the Polish Transpersonal Association was established, taking advantage of the new opening up of Eastern Europe. Other beginnings around this time include the Croatian Transpersonal Association, the Czech Transpersonal Association and the Spanish Transpersonal Association, where Manuel Almendro is a leading figure.

A British training school broadly within the purview of the transpersonal is the Karuna Institute in the West of England, which has been teaching Core Process Psychotherapy under the able guidance of Maura and Franklyn Sills from 1980 onwards. The focus on awareness and presence in this work derive from a Buddhist perspective. This approach draws on deeper levels of unconditioned awareness to penetrate the processes involved in the arising of consciousness itself. In Core Process work, this understanding, and ways of working, distilled from Buddhist awareness practice, have been integrated with western practice to form the basis of a new psychotherapy, well described by Laura Donington.(Donington 1994).

In 1993 was formed the Association for Accredited Psychospiritual Psychotherapists in the UK, as a body serving the Institute of Psychosynthesis, the Psychosynthesis & Education Trust, the Karuna Institute, ReVision and the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology. They choose to call themselves psychospiritual rather than transpersonal.

This all illustrates one of the most important facts about the transpersonal: it has no centre, no founder, no basic texts, just a number of people who are all trying, in their various ways, to make sense of what Maslow called 'the farther reaches of human nature'.

It also needs to be said that the primary interest of all these organizations is in transpersonal psychology generally, not just in psychotherapy: in fact, some of them are not very interested in psychotherapy at all. The transpersonal field includes psychiatry, anthropology, sociology, ecology and altered states of consciousness - particularly as attained through meditation, as described by Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Walsh & Vaughan 1993). To these we might add transpersonal management theory (e.g. Ray & Rinzier 1993) as well as transpersonal psychotherapy.

One of the pioneers of transpersonal research was Stanislav Grof, who conducted many studies in the 1950s using LSD. He made some very

interesting discoveries about the effects of the birth experience on later psychopathology, and in his later research, using holotropic breathing instead of LSD, explored the whole range of transpersonal states of consciousness, particularly in his 1988 book.

In more recent years there has been an explosion of transpersonal research, which explicitly deals with the question of spirituality. Well-known exponents of this approach are William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson, whose book is a classic. It is divided into four parts. Part 1 is *Critiques and Extensions*, two chapters by the editors on transpersonal research.

Part 2 is *Expanded Methods of Disciplined Inquiry*, five chapters covering integral inquiry, intuitive inquiry, phenomenological inquiry, feminine inquiry and reflexive inquiry. All of these are qualitative rather than quantitative. It is better, they say, to speak of 'scholarly standards' rather than of 'scientific validity'.

Part 3 is *Applying the Principles: Selected Examples*, three chapters containing thirteen examples of how these approaches are actually used, focussing on (a) encountering and collecting data, (b) engaging and confronting data, and (c) expressing and communicating findings. There is nothing mysterious about these things; they make a great deal of sense. It is a bit like finding out one has been talking prose all one's life. It all comes out of actual work done at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, where the editors teach.

Part 4 is *Further Extensions*, where the editors discuss validity and also ethical and political challenges. There are three appendices: (i) Five transpersonal approaches to research; (ii) Six related research approaches; and (iii) Seventeen conventional methods of disciplined inquiry. I am just bowled over by the extent and quality of all this material – this book is a wonderful gift, so far as I am concerned. It would be an excellent source for any course on research methods.

Here is a specimen quote: "Rich description and certainty seem to be contraries or complements – neither can be reduced to the other, and both are necessary to a complete understanding of the whole." (p.42) How simple that is, yet how true. Here is another: "When we direct a sufficient density of interest, intentionality, and attention toward a topic, the universe seems to join

in, beneficently conspiring to provide additional pieces to the puzzle and helping us advance our thinking about the topic in question." (p.63) This is not the language you will find in most books on research.

Many people are suspicious of the transpersonal, thinking that it has to do with escaping from the everyday world. Yet more and more books are coming along now which relate the transpersonal in convincing ways to just that everyday world. This book is one of those; it points out that all research is political, in the sense of serving power structures in one way or another. It speaks of 'ideological assumptions', of 'empowering the silenced voices of society', and of 'taking seriously the power of knowledge in culture'. There is a good discussion of postmodernism. I was struck by how up-to-date it is.

Towards the end, the editors offer the image of a gem with five facets: Mindfulness (of heart and intellect); Discernment and discrimination (nothing to do with the New Age, then!); Appreciation and understanding; Transformation of self (yes, doing research can be part of that process); and Transformation of others. This fifth way of action is social and may well be political.

This book is a valuable addition to the thinking in this field. I cannot recommend it too much. And there is another book on transpersonal research by Valerie Bentz and Jeremy Shapiro, who take a Buddhist approach, which is also excellent.

One of the most important developments in the field of the transpersonal was the publication in 1980 of *The Atman Project* by Ken Wilber. This was later followed up by the book *No Boundary* (1981) which applies the same thinking to psychotherapy in particular. This puts the transpersonal on a much better theoretical footing, showing how it represents a particular stage in psychospiritual development, linking psychology with spirituality in a convincing manner. Wilber has since published a detailed study (Wilber et al 1986) of how different forms of therapy relate to problems which emerge at different stages on the psychospiritual journey. And I myself have tried to relate all this to actual practice in the field (Rowan 2005).

In Wilber's recent work he has devoted attention to the way in which much of the research in psychotherapy and elsewhere is often narrow, leaving out such things as the social context within which all therapy takes place.

You may remember that back in 1986 Rollo May wrote a letter to the APA Monitor criticising transpersonal psychology for trying to go beyond the human, which he thought was unwise. But you may not know that later a discussion was published in the journal *The Humanistic Psychologist* between Rollo May, Jacqueline Larcome Doyle and Stanley Krippner, in which he retracted much of what he had said, and appeared much more accepting of the transpersonal. He then wrote a whole book entitled 'The Cry for Myth', in which he made some good transpersonal points himself.

Recent work on the transpersonal has been much more specific and particular, rather than the earlier more general matters, and we have such books as the *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology* edited by Scotton, Chinen and Battista, and the excellent *Transpersonal Knowing*, edited by Hart, Nelson and Puhakka, as well as the revised book of readings edited by Seymour Boorstein under the title of *Transpersonal Psychotherapy*. My own updated book on transpersonal psychotherapy and counselling shows that even when we get into the farther reaches of mysticism, we can still do useful work and make important discoveries.

One of the most important things about the transpersonal approach is the way in which it makes it easier to communicate with people having different belief systems. The stunning book by Mary Fukuyama and Todd Sevig, entitled *Integrating Spirituality into Multicultural Counselling*, show convincingly how useful the transpersonal approach can be when trying to communicate with people from other cultures.

Those who are interested to follow this up further may like to use the list of websites which are appended. (16)

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TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND RESEARCH: BOOKS AND WEBSITES

- John Rowan: 'Don't you DARE ignore the transpersonal!': SEPI Conference 2007**
- Anthony, Dick, Ecker, Bruce & Wilber, Ken (eds)(1987) *Spiritual choices: The problem of recognising authentic paths to inner transformation* New York: Paragon House. Excellent.
- Assagioli, Roberto (1991) *Transpersonal development* London: Crucible. A selection of essays from different times in Assagioli's life. Uneven but worth having.
- Bentz, Valerie M & Shapiro, Jeremy J (1998) *Mindful inquiry in social research* Thousand Oaks: Sage. Research based on Buddhist thinking.
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- Horne, James R (1978) *Beyond mysticism* Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. A very helpful account of what mysticism is, its typology, its scope and limits.
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Whitmore, Diana (2004) *Psychosynthesis counselling in action (3rd edition)*
London: Sage. An excellent rundown, including much practical material.

Wilber, Ken (2000) *Integral psychology* Boston: Shambhala. Contains all the research on levels of consciousness from many different centuries and countries.

SOME USEFUL TRANSPERSONAL WEBSITES

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transpersonal_psychology

General encyclopedia entry, giving much useful information.

www.atpweb.org/

The Association for Transpersonal Psychology. Publishes Journal.

www.panigada.hypermart.net

The other big transpersonal journal.

www.transpersonalpsychology.org.uk

Publishes the BPS Transpersonal Psychology Review

www.mdani.demon.co.uk/trans/humtrans.htm

Mike Daniels site with university links.

www.johnrowan.org.uk

My own site, with many other links.

www.itp.edu/

The California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology.

two.not2.org/psychosynthesis/

A good site for references to psychosynthesis.

www.eurotas.org/

The site for the European Transpersonal Association.

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