

BEYOND THE MIND

Theory and Practice of Transpersonal Psychology

1. Towards a Science of Consciousness

1.1. Introduction

I and God, Ego and Self, material and spiritual, individual and wholeness, personal and transpersonal. Exploring these dyads is like exploring the realm where “angels fear,” as Gregory Bateson says. (1)
That is exactly the place we are going to explore.

I thereby ask love and knowledge, consciousness and responsibility, humbleness and respect to lead my way.

I hope that along the journey we take together, each one of us will be able to let go of the heavy burden of identifications and projections, of attachments and expectations, of judgements and fundamentalism.

The declared aim is to share with a wider audience the birth, development, principles and methods of the transpersonal movement.

This is a movement that is on one side deeply rooted in science as a child of the new holistic paradigm, having grown in the scientific community, and on the other side connected to tradition, as expression of a world concept that matches Leibnitz’s ‘perennial philosophy’ the vision of ancient spiritual traditions shared by the wise men and mystics of every age.

The reasons that led me to tackle this task are personal and public; transpersonal, in fact. And I intend to declare both.

To me, sharing the tale of my personal story means sharing the context in which these words were born and have taken up meaning. It implies creating the best conditions to understand them, to get in touch first with the hearts of my journey's companions and subsequently meeting concepts. It requires first relating with the human being concerned in life and then with the physician and psychotherapist concerned with scientific exactness.

Classics teach us that human life is the story of a journey home as in the case of Ulysses.

To me, sharing a model – the transpersonal – and more specifically a methodology – Biotransenergetics – developed on the way, means giving my contribution so that each of us will be able to accomplish his/her journey home, may get to know reliable means, both cognitive and practical, to sail in the ocean of consciousness and to reach the 'Ithaca' of one's most genuine nature.

1.2. What transpersonal psychology is

Transpersonal psychology, according to Charles Tart's (2) definition, works for the realisation of the self, the awakening of the spiritual nature in each individual, and of one's most genuine human qualities. It seems that the word 'transpersonal' applied in psychology, was first used by Roberto Assagioli, the father of "Psychosynthesis," and then by C.G. Jung.

It refers to the areas of the psyche that go beyond the identification with individual personality. Transpersonal psychology thereby refers to the particular approach that studies and develops spirituality and spiritual experiences in a psychological context.

This approach began to assert itself in the field of psychology in the 1960's, moving from the works of A. Maslow (3), who first put empha-

sis on an “evolutive” psychology that would take into account the “development of potentialities,” the “gradual needs satisfaction,” the “relationship between persons” involved in the therapeutic setting, and the “mystical experiences” as basics in a self realisation process.

The first transpersonal association was founded in the USA in 1969, by personalities like Charlotte Buhler, Abraham Maslow, Allan Watts, Arthur Koestler, and Victor Frankl. Antony J. Sutich founded “The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology,” which published the papers of the most relevant minds of the transpersonal movement: Ken Wilber, Stan Grof, Stanley Knipper, Lawrence Le Shan, Michael Murphy, Charles T. Tart, Frances E. Vaughan, etc.

In Italy, the humanistic and transpersonal approach is elaborated in the works of L. Boggio Gilot, A. De Luca, Filippo Falzoni Gallerani and the author.

1.3. Psychology and spirituality

Transpersonal psychology is characterised as a contribution given by scientific research to the study and comprehension of inner experiences of the transcendental type.

Throughout the centuries, these kinds of experiences received different denominations according to various traditions: mystic ecstasy, cosmic experience, cosmic consciousness, oceanic experience, peak experience, Nirvana, Satori, Samadhi, Heavenly Kingdom, Dreaming Body, Nagual...

The main contemporary psychological approaches regard these kinds of experiences as fantasies or pathological situations. According to the various theoretical points of view, they are defined as a wish to be attended to by a “good mother,” the consequences of neural activity

malfunctioning, or a sign of a fragile ego that is incapable of distinguishing between the inner imagination and external reality.

On the contrary, the transpersonal approach believes that inner experiences of the mystic or ecstatic kind reveal a significant aspect of human experience in the same way as the human yearning towards transcendence, and deserve the attention of psychology.

In fact, recent research has shown that the majority of Americans report some kind of mystic experience (Greeley, 1987), while according to another study (Davis, Lockwood and Wright, 1991), 79% of a wide sample relate to having had 'peak experiences' and see them as the deepest and most important in their lives.

In its research, transpersonal psychology unites the experience of western psychology – namely that of the Gestalt school – existential, humanistic, with the eastern mystic traditions based on meditation, such as yoga, Zen, Sufism, along with the shamanic ones based on the direct contact with the forces of nature. It is also influenced by the most recent acquisitions of modern physics and biophysics and is in closely bound to sciences such as sophrology, sociology, anthropology and parapsychology.

In the light of what has since been discussed, transpersonal psychology seems to characterise itself as a wide thought and research movement, working towards an integration of psychological principles and methods with spiritual practices or shamanic rituals, in order to synthesise mind, meditation, spirituality and transcendence, the ordinary consciousness and extraordinary one, mystic ecstasy or shamanic experiences.