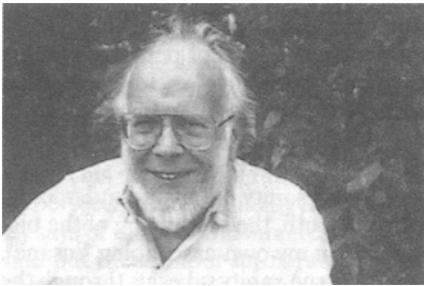


CONFERENCE NEWS

THE TRIPLE CONNECTION

by John Rowan

The Second European Conference of Transpersonal Psychology was held in Strasbourg last August. To get 700 people from 222 different countries together is no mean feat, particularly when the organisers (the French Association for Transpersonal Psychology, or AFT) had never done it before.



I took part in a symposium with Ian Gordon-Brown and Beata Bishop on the theme of *The Shadow in Transpersonal Work*. We were all saying in our various ways that it is no good getting too positive at the expense of neglecting the various important functions of the negative.

When the Transpersonal gets disconnected from the Humanistic.....

I went to another session which was very different, led by a woman whose title was "The secret of transpersonal work", and which was a practical workshop on meditation. What I experienced at that session was that the leader said that she was going to introduce us to a type of meditation which linked the chakra at the solar plexus with the heart chakra and the third eye chakra, so that we could transform the sometimes negative feelings at the solar plexus level to the love and understanding which we would radiate from the third eye, once we had transmuted the energies in the heart.

Now it seems to me this simply leaves out or ignores the lower chakras, and even a couple of the higher chakras, and this is not OK in my book. It is this kind of disconnection which we were warning about in our symposium. It is a sort of determination to be positive at all costs, and this is not only phoney (which I object to on general grounds) but is actively dangerous in encouraging people to think that they can deal with their darker stuff without really meeting it and owning it.

It seems to me now that transpersonal psychology desperately needs humanistic psychology and is lost without it. The two things fit together so well and so necessarily, because to try to do the transpersonal without having done your own personal inner journey first (facing the splits and the denials and the repressions and the shame and all the rest of it) seem to lead to the kind of gullibility and lack of ground-

ing which we all deplore when we come across it.

--- *and the Psychoanalytic*

The other conclusion is of a similar kind, but perhaps even more controversial, and that is that Humanistic Psychology similarly needs Psychoanalysis. To try to get by in the personal (counselling, psychotherapy) realm without the insights of psychoanalysis seems to me to be fighting with one hand tied behind your back. I am particularly thinking of the basic Freudian version of the unconscious, and of the way in which the object relations people (Winnicott, Balint, Fairbairn, Guntrip) have used it, building on the work of Melanie Klein. But also, I think, people like Kohut and Kernberg have had some very interesting things to say, never mind Lacan.

Somehow there is a progression here, I feel. Psychoanalysis is so important in the basic area of dealing with someone's hidden side, just becoming aware of how much one had excluded from one's awareness, and being able to live an ordinary life. (If you happen to go along with the work of Ken Wilber, this is the level of the Mental Ego). Humanistic Psychology goes on from there to a more emancipatory, liberatory stage, where the person goes further into their own process, and comes out more whole than they have ever before (This is what Wilber calls the *Centaur* stage). And transpersonal psychology goes on from there, questioning the boundaries which are still present - are those limits and boundaries valid and necessary, or should they now be questioned too? (This is what Wilber calls the *Subtle* stage).

New Age gullible

One of the things which haunts the transpersonal approach is the popular idea of the New Age. This has got to be such a dubious label that when I occasionally see in bookshops a section labelled New Age, the only thing I can see in common between the books in that section is that they are all for gullible people. There is a lack of any ability to make distinctions and hold to any kind of criteria of what is valid and what is not. And it suddenly occurred to me at the Conference that this inevitably happens when the transpersonal gets disconnected from the humanistic. So I would bat for the notion that there is a triple connection here, and that we lose any part of it at our peril. This is a new thought for me, or at least it has never been so clear before.

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