



THE PSYCHOSPIRITUAL

Psychospiritual and Transpersonal Psychotherapies

David Jones

The founding of the Association for Psychospiritual Psychotherapists (AAPP) in March 1993 made me wonder whether psychospiritual work should not properly be regarded as a fifth force in psychology, following Maslow's third force humanistic and fourth force transpersonal. The following quote taken, with permission, from the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Psychology* shows the different approaches to therapy offered by the psychoanalytic, behaviourist, humanistic and transpersonal schools. It raises the possibility that a fifth force psychospiritual should be added. We wrote to some of the leading people in the field and asked them for a definition, so that readers of *Self & Society* could be informed about this matter.

The *Dictionary* says: 'To illustrate the differences in approach of major psychological schools, consider an individual suffering from strong feelings of non-acceptance by his peers and a meaningless quality to his life. **Psychoanalytic therapy** would concentrate on finding the childhood causes of these feelings and treating them so that the patient would feel accepted and find as much fulfilment as is reasonable in life work with others: fulfilment would be implicitly seen as inherently limited because of the psychoanalytic conception of the ego as a reality factor doomed to making compromises between a primitive and irrational id and a rigid and socially necessary superego. The **behaviour therapist** would look for the situational contingencies that

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elicited the feelings of unacceptance and meaninglessness and teach the patient alternate reaction and control techniques in these situations. Both psychoanalytic therapy and behaviour therapy implicitly accept society as sound and stress adjustment to it. A **humanistic therapist** would use some traditional knowledge about psychopathology to help the patient, but the emphasis would be on developing the satisfaction that is believed to be inherent in open communication with others, and stressing the patient's needs to explore his or her own unique human potentials and developing ways to express and satisfy these potentials. Some prevailing cultural values are directly questioned in humanistic approaches insofar as they limit an individual's personal growth and happiness. A **transpersonal therapist** might use any of the techniques of the former three schools, but also guide the patient to a recognition that while a reasonable degree of satisfaction within socially defused realms is fine, the ego is an instrument for adapting to a particular culture, and the patient has a fuller and deeper self than can ever be provided by any amount of ego functioning. The patient might be taught meditation exercises, e.g. that teach him not to identify with any aspect of ego functioning but sense a more universal core of being within himself: voluntary disidentification (when not carried to extremes) provides a very effective means to avoid the effects of stress. Other techniques might involve learning to enter some altered states in which mystical experiences occur that provide an intense experiential foundation for a sense of meaning in life, etc. The transpersonal approach stresses

effectiveness in ordinary life but not identification with it as the ultimate definer of human potentials.'

Not everyone we wrote to wanted to write an article for us and, as you will see, David Brazier was the only one to meet our request for a formal definition. However, the others reflected in interesting and useful ways on the nature of psychospiritual work and the way in which groups of practitioners and trainers are now forming in the climate of active power-brokering that prevails as the profession of psychotherapist is developed. John Rowan, whose book *The Transpersonal — Psychotherapy and Counselling* is a comprehensive and perceptive examination of transpersonal work, wrote to us with a caution. 'If you try to hive off psychospiritual psychotherapy as a different tradition from transpersonal work you give yourself the task of inventing a new speciality from scratch, with its own vocabulary, its own journals, its own conferences and so forth. Would it not be simpler and more appropriate to say something like — "We wish to contribute to the transpersonal tradition in psychotherapy, which we think has been rather weak and thin up to now, but (for organisational reasons) prefer to use the term 'psychospiritual' . . ." You could then contribute to the transpersonal conferences and journals world-wide with a challenging input, and strengthen that side of the transpersonal tradition.'

Whilst this collection of papers was being assembled I received a copy of a proposal put forward to the British Psychological Society (BPS) for the formation of a 'Transpersonal Psychology Section'. The BPS, which has sections for Clinical,

Social, Educational and several other specialities, never set up a section for Humanistic Psychology and to my knowledge never received a proposal to do so. Its counterpart in the USA, the American Psychological Association, has a large and flourishing Humanistic Section. And of course the American Association for Humanistic Psychology, which influenced the setting up of our own AHP in 1971, is also large and flourishing. At the moment these organisations subsume psychospiritual work under the Transpersonal heading. David Fontana and Ingrid Slack gave us permission to reprint their *Definition of Transpersonal* which formed part of the proposal put to the BPS. It appears at the end of the collection with David and Ingrid's list of recent books on this subject.

One thing is certain, David Fontana and Ingrid Slack are right when they say that humanistic and transpersonal work is closely related. *Self & Society* hopes to publish articles about the psychospiritual approach in future issues. Perhaps the AHP will hold a conference on the theme raised in this collection.

I want to end this introduction with two quotations which I find valuable. The first is from the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Psychology*: 'Anthony Sutich (1907–1976), founder and editor of the *Journal of*

Transpersonal Psychology, listed the topics of central empirical interest in transpersonal psychology as including: individual and species-wide meta-needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, being-values, ecstasy, mystical experience, awe, being, self-actualization, essence, bliss, wonder, ultimate meaning, transcendence of the self, spirit, oneness, cosmic awareness, individual and species-wide synergy, maximal interpersonal encounter, sacralization of everyday life, transcendental phenomena, cosmic self-humour and playfulness, maximal sensory awareness, responsiveness and expression.'

The second is from Fontana and Slack: 'Transpersonal psychology is concerned with the exploration and application of a number of therapeutic practices, techniques for personal growth, and responses to the creative arts. Importantly, its concern includes the increasing lay and professional interest in (a) eastern psychospiritual traditions and their associated activities such as meditation, contemplation, prayer, and ritual; (b) peak experiences and the higher levels of human emotions such as love, empathy, and sacrifice; (c) various holistic therapies and healing techniques; and (d) mystical and similar exalted states such as those reported in the religious and spiritual traditions.'

Further Reading

David Fontana and Ingrid Slack, *Proposal to Form a British Psychological Society Section in Transpersonal Psychology*, 1995

Rom Harre & Roger Lamb (eds), *The Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Psychology*, Blackwell, 1983

John Rowan, *The Transpersonal – Psychotherapy and Counselling*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993