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Editor's Introduction Transpersonal Psychology at 45

Glenn Hartelius

California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, CA, USA

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Editor's Introduction

Transpersonal Psychology at 45

With transpersonal psychology entering its 45th year, a status review seems in order. If the field were an adult individual, she or he would be in Erikson's (1950) Middle Adulthood stage of development, where the psychosocial challenge is stagnation vs. generativity. How is transpersonal psychology doing in this regard? By some metrics, the field seems to be in a positive phase of development.

The year 2002 could be considered something of a low point for the field, given that Ken Wilber (2002) had recently made public statements pronouncing transpersonal psychology dead. To be fair, this was in the context of predicting the death of all psychologies other than his own, but it is also likely that his declarations had considerably stronger impact on the transpersonal community than it did on the broader field of psychology. Given that Wilber had served as one of the field's major theoreticians for a quarter-century or so, this denunciation came as something of a shock. In fact, Wilber claimed to have actually resigned from the transpersonal movement back in 1983, distancing himself even further from the field. Given the paucity of contemporaneous evidence it would seem that either this resignation took place largely in the Upper Left quadrant of his AQAL grid—pertaining to the private interior experience of the individual—or else perhaps belonged to a slightly revised *post hoc* version of events. I personally was just entering the transpersonal field at this time, and such details seemed of little import when compared with the larger message of apparent doom.

In that same year (2002), there were just eight content articles published in peer-reviewed, indexed, academic journals carrying a transpersonal title. This number was no anomaly, being close to what had been the average for the preceding five years. For 2012, the

number of articles in that category is 30—nearly four times the volume. This metric might be seen as a little

Erratum

In the Editor's Introduction to Vol. 30(1-2) of this journal, the introduction to one of the articles unintentionally misrepresented a later paper in the same issue. The introduction stated the following:

After this comes a paper by Igor Berkhin and Glenn Hartelius, entitled, *Altered States Are Not Enough*. This paper grew from a response to Judson Davis' paper, presented at the International Transpersonal Association conference in Moscow, Russia, in 2009. Berkhin delivered a... rebuttal to Davis, representing the way in which tradition-based spirituality often receives attempts at integral scholarship.

In fact, the article by Berkhin and Hartelius did not contain Berkhin's rebuttal to Davis, whose paper, *Jung at the Foot of Mount Kailash: A Transpersonal Synthesis of Depth Psychology, Tibetan Tantra, and the Sacred Mythic Imagery of East and West*, appeared later in that same issue. Davis' scholarship emphasizes an integral approach that combines aspects of transpersonal and depth psychology with Tibetan Buddhist narratives whereas Berkhin's work is guided by strict adherence to the precepts of the Dzogchen school, and both approaches warrant careful consideration.

self-serving, for part of that increase comes from the fact that the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies (IJTS)* has become indexed during those 10 years. Yet the volume of articles in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology (JTP)* has also increased substantially, suggesting that there may be significant growth in the flow of what is arguably the life-blood of the field: its scholarly publications.

At the same time, the number of empirical papers, though still modest, has been growing steadily since the inception of the field. Based on a recent analysis of empirical content in *JTP* and *IJTS* combined, the percentages of empirical papers has grown from 4% in the 1970s to 17% in the 2000s, with steady if declining increments of growth in the intervening decades (Hartelius, Rothe, & Roy, in press). There is great need for the publication of additional empirical research in the transpersonal field, and this journal is specifically committed to supporting such work. Even though the upward direction is slight, such efforts have the advantage of building on an existing trend.

Another important development of the past decade is the articulation and growth of a genuinely new transpersonal theoretical framework, in the form of Ferrer's (2002, 2008, 2011a, 2011b; Hartelius & Ferrer, in press) participatory philosophy. Debuting in the fateful year 2002 with Ferrer's book, *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*, this approach seems initially to overcome a number of the challenges faced by perennialist models that had previously been common within the field (Ferrer, 2000; Rothberg, 1985). In addition, this version of transpersonalism has apparently gained a number of supporters within transpersonal psychology (Ferrer, 2011b).

As a final note, it may be worth pointing to the fact that a new *Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology* is scheduled for publication in 2013 (Friedman & Hartelius, in press). This will likely be the largest and most comprehensive overview of the transpersonal field published to date, and, along with other work (e.g., Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007), helps lay to rest Wilber's (2002) claims that the field has been unable to effectively define itself. The decade since those pessimistic statements has, in fact, seen numerous positive developments.

The current issue's Special Topic Section, edited by Adam Rock, considers the subject of shamanism. Yet this is not shamanism considered only from the external

or etic vantage point of traditional anthropology, but from the emic perspective of primal cultures—an approach pioneered by, among others, Michael Harner. His ground-breaking book, *The Way of the Shaman*, appeared in 1980, and shamanism entered the transpersonal literature the next year (Peters, 1981). Though this section is separately introduced, we are particularly pleased to have together long-time scholars in this and related fields such as Michael Harner, Jürgen Kremer, Stanley Krippner, Roger Walsh, and Michael Winkelman, along with more recent participants producing excellent new scholarship in the field such as Adam Rock and Lance Storm. Note that a rare exception has been made to the *IJTS* policy of publishing only previously-unpublished papers in order to include several of these estimable authors in the section.

In addition, the general article section contains several worthwhile papers. First among these is *Dissipative Processes in Psychology: From the Psyche to Totality*, by Manuel Almendro and Daniella Weber. Inclusion of Almendro in this volume is particularly apt, since he is also a long-time researcher and scholar in the field of shamanism (e.g., Almendro, 2008). Yet this paper focuses on another interest, which is transpersonally-oriented psychotherapy. Almendro and Weber unveil an approach to understanding psychotherapy that uses the dynamics of dissipative processes as metaphors for how healing happens within the psyche. This exposition is illustrated through the use of examples from a case history, together with artwork by the patient representing stages of his process.

The second paper, *Spirituality and Hallucinogen Use: Results from a Pilot Study among College Students*, by Adam Stasko, Satya P. Rao, and Amy Pilley, offers an intriguing preliminary view into how American college students understand hallucinogenic experiences relative to their spirituality. Considerable research has been done on how hallucinogens function within indigenous spiritual traditions, but little comparable work has been done in Western cultural settings. This study uses semi-structured interviews to develop qualitative accounts of how a small sample of college students at New Mexico State University relate to hallucinogen use both as a form of recreation and as a spiritual tool.

A third general article, *Sexuality as a Transformational Path: Exploring the Holistic Dimensions of Human Vitality*, by Samuel Arthur Malkemus and Marina T. Romero, examines human sexuality within a more whole-person frame. Criticizing much of

contemporary sexology as excessively cognicentric, the authors propose that the creative, full-bodied vitality of human sexuality cannot be effectively understood through the lens of an intellectual scientific approach. As complement to traditional approaches, they propose considering sexuality through multiple epistemic frames that are able to reflect its multi-dimensional nature.

Following the Special Topic Section on Shamanism are several additional items worthy of attention—a research note related to shamanism, a reply to a critique of a prior article, and a book review. The first of these is a research note on Transpersonal Effects of Exposure to Shamanic Use of Khoomei (Tuvan Throat Singing): Preliminary Evaluations from Training Seminars, by Vladislav Matrenitsky & Harris L. Friedman. This research, collected under uncontrolled circumstances, does offer preliminary data on some phenomenological aspects of the experience of participating in Tuvan throat singing within workshop settings, as well as associated benefits and negative effects. Given that very little research exists on this topic, these findings were deemed worthy of inclusion in the issue.

Following this is an extensive rejoinder by Elías Capriles to John Abramson's (2010) critique of Capriles' (2009) earlier, major article in this journal. Capriles' 2009 paper examined the transpersonal theories of Grof, Washburn, and Wilber, and found them lacking from the perspective of Dzogchen Buddhism. Abramson (2010) had offered a rejoinder specifically to the critique of Wilber, and here Capriles responds with a lengthy and detailed rebuttal to Abramson's critique.

Capriles' (2009) initial critique was summarized in the editorial introduction of that issue as follows:

From the perspective of Western psychology, Wilber's effort to distill a variety of paths into a single model can be seen as a reasonable goal. Capriles concludes that what his visionary approach misses, however, is the great diversity that actually exists among different paths. For example, the state of samadhi sought by practitioners of Yoga results in a deep absorption in which active knowing and awareness of the sensory continuum cease. One is no longer able to function practically in the world. By contrast, both sensory and cognitive processes continue in nirvana, and the practitioner is not only able to function, but does so in enhanced ways. What differs is that the distinctions between subject and object, knower

and known, have been absolutely eradicated. In a nirvanic state, there is not a subject who experiences nirvana: there is simply the arising of apparent yet transparent phenomena within the presence of supreme reality. Furthermore, rather than bypassing the realm of ordinary sensory appearances, nirvana offers the opportunity for skillful and compassionate engagement with the suffering of the world. Given the vast difference between these spiritual goals—which are just two of many such different goals—any effort to synthesize them will necessarily be unsuccessful.

Capriles argues that, if Wilber's framework is deconstructed in this way, then concepts that rely on this framework should also be re-examined. For example, in light of a Dzogchen view of Awakening, neither the notion of a pre / trans fallacy, nor the debate over whether spiritual development is an ascending or descending process, has significance. Awakening, from Capriles' perspective, is the unraveling of the very context within which pre / trans and ascent / descent derive meaning. For all of these reasons, he argues that is difficult to conclude that the conceptual structure developed by Wilber has any meaningful application other than as a testament to one man's eloquent, but ultimately flawed, effort to wrest simple truth out of a complex world.

Abramson (2010) pointed to the many similarities in background between Wilber and Capriles, and considered Capriles' (2009) paper an opportunity to see whether Capriles might in some measure redress Wilber's "long standing complaint that many of his critics misunderstand and misrepresent his theories" (p. 180). Much of Abramson's (2010) Reply to Capriles focuses on changes in Wilber's thought since 2000 that had arguably brought him in line with Capriles' (2009) presentation of Dzogchen teachings. In other words, Abramson was in part questioning whether Capriles' critique of Wilber might have been different had Capriles examined Wilber's writings published after 2000. A specific area that Abramson (2010) raised was whether Wilber's universal map of consciousness, "constructed by piecing together descriptions that different traditions make available" (p. 184), might fare better in light of the development of Wilber's thought in the years since 2000.

In his response within this issue, Capriles offers a detailed reply to Abramson, with additional thoughts

on Wilber V, the latest iteration of Wilber's conceptual model. The short version is that Capriles' critique of Wilber, though updated through an examination of Wilber's more recent writings, remains substantively intact, or possibly even buttressed with supplemental articulation. For Capriles, Wilber's positing of a metaphysical, transcendent reality remains incompatible with any and every school of Buddhist thought. Wilber's equation of *samsara* with the realm of form and *nirvana* with formlessness is similarly problematic, for Capriles asserts that certain aspects of form, such as the substance of thought, are not excluded by a nirvanic state, nor is a simple figure/ground divide that Wilber's nondual would preclude. Rather, while the energy that is the stuff of thought might in fact be perceived within a nirvanic state, what would be perceived would not be the substance ascribed to this stuff in a samsaric state, but its true, illusory nature, thereby liberating those thoughts. This is but a small sample of the numerous lucid arguments offered by Capriles.

It is difficult to come away from Capriles' response and imagine that Wilber's grand schema offers an interpretation of Dzogchen Buddhism that is capable of withstanding scrutiny by a tradition-saturated scholar. This is of potential significance, for the nature of a grand schema is that if it fails in one substantive domain, then it fails as grand schema. Wilber has been critiqued elsewhere for distorting particular traditions for the purpose of getting them to fit his model, yet he has fought back both by criticizing critics for failing to keep up with his ever-evolving model, and for being under-qualified. It is difficult to see either of these issues applying to Capriles, which raises the question of whether Wilber's model can legitimately stand in the face of such a substantive and exceptionally well-informed critique from the perspective of one of the higher vehicles of Buddhism.

Even if Wilber's model should fail as grand schema—which remains to be determined—there are numerous aspects of his earlier psychological models that remain potentially viable and practical for a transpersonal psychology. In addition, there is an intuitive pull to the notion that somewhere, somehow, all paths must be leading to some shared spiritual goal. It is an appealing idea that calls for tolerance of and even active appreciation for religious diversity. Yet if the consensus eventually finds that such a seemingly humane and honorable notion fails on various grounds, a good measure of credit for this development will be due to Wilber, who has developed this approach in more

detail and with more sophistication than perhaps any other author or thinker before him.

The final contribution in this issue is a review by Dorit Netzer of the 2011 book, *Transforming Self and Others Through Research: Transpersonal Research Methods and Skills for the Human Sciences and Humanities*, by Rosemarie Anderson and the late William Braud. This supplements and significantly expands an earlier book by the same authors (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Both are works that engage with the complex questions of how to research human experience in a manner that is both scientific and authentic to the many dimensions of life—a concern that is central to both humanistic and transpersonal approaches to psychology.

Transpersonal psychology is no longer a new discipline, and it cannot attribute its relative obscurity to being on the cutting edge. A decade ago it seemed on the verge of acquiescing to demise. Yet the past years have seen flowering on many fronts, from the significant growth in its journal literature to the publication of important works such as the Anderson and Braud (2011) research guide and the forthcoming *Handbook*. Winter has passed, and a new Spring beckons.

Glenn Hartelius, Editor
Sofia University

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