

1-1-2008

Brief History of Transpersonal Psychology

Stanislav Grof

Grof Transpersonal Training

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Grof, S. (2008). Grof, S. (2008). Brief history of transpersonal psychology. International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 27(1), 46–54.. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 27 (1).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2008.27.1.46>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#). This Article is brought to you for free and open access by International Journal of Transpersonal Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Transpersonal Studies by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact the editors.

Brief History of Transpersonal Psychology

Stanislav Grof

Grof Transpersonal Training
Mill Valley, CA, USA

The International Transpersonal Association (ITA) was formed in 1978 for the purposes of promoting education and research in transpersonal subjects, as well as sponsoring global conferences for the international transpersonal community. The association was subsequently dissolved in 2004, but is now in the process of being reactivated and revitalized. As background for this development, this paper reviews the history of ITA including its international conferences and noteworthy presenters, the organization's definition, strategies, and specific goals, and details of its contemporary revival.

In the middle of the twentieth century, American psychology was dominated by two major schools—behaviorism and Freudian psychology. Increasing dissatisfaction with these two orientations as adequate approaches to the human psyche led to the development of humanistic psychology. The main spokesman and most articulate representative of this new field was the well-known American psychologist Abraham Maslow. He offered an incisive critique of the limitations of behaviorism and psychoanalysis, or the First and the Second Force in psychology as he called them, and formulated the principles of a new perspective in psychology (Maslow, 1969).

Maslow's (1969) main objection against behaviorism was that the study of animals such as rats and pigeons can only clarify those aspects of human functioning that we share with these animals. It thus has no relevance for the understanding of higher, specifically human qualities that are unique to human life, such as love, self-consciousness, self-determination, personal freedom, morality, art, philosophy, religion, and science. It is also largely useless in regard to some specifically human negative characteristics, such as greed, lust for power, cruelty, and tendency to "malignant aggression." He also criticized the behaviorists' disregard for consciousness and introspection and their exclusive focus on the study of behavior.

By contrast, the primary interest of humanistic psychology, Maslow's (1969) Third Force, was in human subjects, and this discipline honored the interest in consciousness and introspection as important complements to the objective approach to research.

The behaviorists' exclusive emphasis on determination by the environment, stimulus/response, and reward/punishment was replaced by emphasis of the capacity of human beings to be internally directed and motivated to achieve self-realization and fulfill their human potential.

In his criticism of psychoanalysis, Maslow (1969) pointed out that Freud and his followers drew conclusions about the human psyche mainly from the study of psychopathology, and he disagreed with their biological reductionism and their tendency to explain all psychological processes in terms of base instincts. By comparison, humanistic psychology focused on healthy populations, or even individuals who showed supernormal functioning in various areas (Maslow's "growing tip" of the population; p. 5), on human growth and potential, and on higher functions of the psyche. It also emphasized that psychology has to be sensitive to practical human needs and serve important interests and objectives of human society.

Within a few years after Abraham Maslow and Anthony Sutich launched the Association for Humanistic Psychology (AHP) and its journal, the new movement became extremely popular among American mental health professionals and even in the general public. The multidimensional perspective of humanistic psychology and its emphasis on the whole person provided a broad umbrella for the development of a rich spectrum of new effective therapeutic approaches that greatly expanded the range of possibilities of dealing with emotional, psychosomatic, interpersonal, and psychosocial problems.

Among the important characteristics of these new therapies was a decisive shift from the exclusively verbal strategies of traditional psychotherapy to direct expression of emotions, and from exploration of individual history and of unconscious motivation to the feelings and thought processes of the clients in the here and now. Another important aspect of this therapeutic revolution was the emphasis on the interconnectedness of the psyche and the body and overcoming of the taboo against touching, previously dominating the field of psychotherapy. Various forms of bodywork thus formed an integral part of the new treatment strategies: Fritz Perls' Gestalt therapy, Alexander Lowen's bioenergetics and other neo-Reichian approaches, encounter groups, and marathon sessions can be mentioned here as salient examples of humanistic therapies.

In spite of the popularity of humanistic psychology, its founders Maslow and Sutich themselves grew dissatisfied with the conceptual framework they had originally created. They became increasingly aware that they had left out an extremely important element—the spiritual dimension of the human psyche (Sutich 1976). The renaissance of interest in Eastern spiritual philosophies, various mystical traditions, meditation, ancient and aboriginal wisdom, as well as the widespread psychedelic experimentation during the stormy 1960s, made it absolutely clear that a comprehensive and cross-culturally valid psychology had to include observations from such areas as mystical states, cosmic consciousness, psychedelic experiences, trance phenomena, creativity, and religious, artistic, and scientific inspiration.

In 1967, a small working group including Abraham Maslow, Anthony Sutich, Stanislav Grof, James Fadiman, Miles Vich, and Sonya Margulies met in Menlo Park, California, with the purpose of creating a new psychology that would honor the entire spectrum of human experience, including various non-ordinary states of consciousness. During these discussions, Maslow and Sutich accepted Grof's suggestion and named the new discipline "transpersonal psychology." This term replaced their own original name "transhumanistic," or "reaching beyond humanistic concerns." Soon afterwards, they launched the Association of Transpersonal Psychology (ATP), and started *the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. Several years later, in 1975, Robert Frager founded the (California) Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, which has remained at the cutting edge of transpersonal education, research, and therapy for more than three decades. The International

Transpersonal Association was launched in 1978 by myself, as its founding president, and Michael Murphy and Richard Price, founders of Esalen Institute.

Transpersonal psychology, or the Fourth Force, addressed some major misconceptions of mainstream psychiatry and psychology concerning spirituality and religion. It also responded to important observations from modern consciousness research and several other fields for which the existing scientific paradigm had no adequate explanations. Michael Harner, an American anthropologist with good academic credentials, who had experienced during his field work in the Amazon a powerful shamanic initiation, summed up the shortcomings of academic psychology succinctly in the preface to his book *The Way of the Shaman* (Harner, 1980). He suggested that the understanding of the psyche in the industrial civilization is seriously biased in two important ways: it is *ethnocentric* and *cognicentric* (a better term would probably be *pragmacentric*).

It is ethnocentric in the sense that it has been formulated and promoted by Western materialistic scientists, who consider their own perspective to be superior to that of any other human groups at any time of history. According to them, matter is primary and life, consciousness, and intelligence are its more or less accidental side products. Spirituality of any form and level of sophistication reflects ignorance of scientific facts, superstition, child-like gullibility, self-deception, and primitive magical thinking. Direct spiritual experiences involving the collective unconscious or archetypal figures and realms are seen as pathological products of the brain. Modern mainstream psychiatrists often interpret visionary experiences of the founders of great religions, saints, and prophets as manifestations of serious mental diseases, although they lack adequate medical explanations and the laboratory data supporting this position. In their contemptuous dismissal of ritual and spiritual life, they do not distinguish between primitive folk beliefs or the fundamentalists' literal interpretations of scriptures and sophisticated mystical traditions and Eastern spiritual philosophies based on centuries of systematic introspective exploration of the psyche.

Psychiatric literature contains numerous articles and books that discuss what would be the most appropriate clinical diagnoses for many of the great figures of spiritual history. St. Anthony has been called schizophrenic, St. John of the Cross labeled a "hereditary degenerate," St. Teresa of Avila has been dismissed as a severe hysterical psychotic, and Mohammed's mystical

experiences have been attributed to epilepsy. Many other religious and spiritual personages, such as the Buddha, Jesus, Ramakrishna, and Sri Ramana Maharshi have been seen as suffering from psychoses, because of their visionary experiences and “delusions.” Similarly, some traditionally trained anthropologists have argued whether shamans should be diagnosed as schizophrenics, ambulant psychotics, epileptics, or hysterics. The famous psychoanalyst Franz Alexander (1931), known as one of the founders of psychosomatic medicine, wrote a paper in which even Buddhist meditation is described in psychopathological terms and referred to as “artificial catatonia.”

While Western psychology and psychiatry describe the ritual and spiritual life of ancient and native cultures in pathological terms, dangerous excesses of the industrial civilization potentially endangering life on the planet have become such integral parts of our life that they seldom attract specific attention of clinicians and researchers and do not receive pathological labels. We witness on a daily basis manifestations of insatiable greed and malignant aggression: the plundering of non-renewable resources and their conversion into industrial pollution, defiling of natural environment critical for survival by nuclear fallout, toxic chemicals, and massive oil spills, abuse of scientific discoveries in physics, chemistry, and biology for development of weapons of mass destruction, invasion of other countries leading to massacres of civilians and genocide, and designing of military operations that would kill millions of people.

The main engineers and protagonists of such detrimental strategies and doomsday scenarios not only walk freely, but are rich and famous, hold powerful positions in society, and receive various honors. By the same token, people who have potentially life-transforming mystical states, episodes of psychospiritual death and rebirth, or past-life experiences end up hospitalized with stigmatizing diagnoses and suppressive psychopharmacological medication. This is what Michael Harner (1980) referred to as the ethnocentric bias in judging what is normal and what is pathological.

According to Harner (1980), Western psychiatry and psychology also show a strong cognitive bias. By this he means that these disciplines formulated their theories on the basis of experiences and observations from ordinary states of consciousness and have systematically avoided or misinterpreted the evidence from non-ordinary states, such as observations from psychedelic therapy, powerful experiential

psychotherapies, work with individuals in psychospiritual crises, meditation research, field anthropological studies, or thanatology. The paradigm-breaking data from these areas of research have been either systematically ignored or misjudged and misinterpreted because of their fundamental incompatibility with the leading paradigm.

In the preceding text, I have used the term non-ordinary states of consciousness. Before we continue our discussion, a semantic clarification seems to be appropriate. The term non-ordinary states of consciousness is being used mostly by researchers who study these states and recognize their value. Mainstream psychiatrists prefer the term altered states, which reflects their belief that only the everyday state of consciousness is normal and that all departures from it without exception represent pathological distortions of the correct perception of reality that have no positive potential. However, even the term non-ordinary states is too broad for the purpose of our discussion. Transpersonal psychology is interested in a significant subgroup of these states that have heuristic, healing, transformative, and even evolutionary potential. This includes experiences of shamans and their clients, those of initiates in native rites of passage and ancient mysteries of death and rebirth, of spiritual practitioners and mystics of all ages, and individuals in psychospiritual crisis (“spiritual emergencies”; Grof & Grof, 1989, 1991).

In the early stages of my research I discovered to my great surprise that mainstream psychiatry has no name for this important subgroup of non-ordinary states and dismisses all of them as altered states. Because I felt strongly that they deserve to be distinguished from the rest and placed into a special category, I coined for them the name *holotropic* (Grof, 1992). This composite word means literally “oriented toward wholeness” or “moving in the direction of wholeness” (from the Greek *holos* = whole and *trepein* = moving toward or in the direction of something). This term suggests that in our everyday state of consciousness we identify with only a small fraction of who we really are. In holotropic states we can transcend the narrow boundaries of the body ego and encounter a rich spectrum of transpersonal experiences that help us to reclaim our full identity. I have described in a different context the basic characteristic of holotropic states and how they differ from conditions that deserve to be referred to as altered states of consciousness (Grof, 2000). For greater clarity, I will be using the term holotropic in the following discussion.

Transpersonal psychology has made significant headway toward correcting the ethnocentric and cognitive biases of mainstream psychiatry and psychology, particularly by its recognition of the genuine nature of transpersonal experiences and their value. In the light of modern consciousness research, the current conceited dismissal and pathologization of spirituality characteristic of monistic materialism appears untenable. In holotropic states, the spiritual dimensions of reality can be directly experienced in a way that is as convincing as our daily experience of the material world, if not more so. Careful study of transpersonal experiences shows that they cannot be explained as products of pathological processes in the brain, but are ontologically real.

To distinguish transpersonal experiences from imaginary products of individual fantasy, Jungian psychologists refer to this domain as *imaginal*. French scholar, philosopher, and mystic Henri Corbin, who first used the term *mundus imaginalis*, was inspired in this regard by his study of Islamic mystical literature (Corbin, 2000). Islamic theosophers call the imaginal world, where everything existing in the sensory world has its analogue, *'alam a mithal*, or the *eighth climate*, to distinguish it from the *seven climates*, regions of traditional Islamic geography. The imaginal world possesses extension and dimensions, forms and colors, but these are not perceptible to our senses as they would be when they are properties of physical objects. However, this realm is in every respect as fully ontologically real and susceptible to consensual validation by other people as the material world perceived by scientists.

Spiritual experiences appear in two different forms. The first of these, the experience of the *immanent divine*, is characterized by subtly but profoundly transformed perception of the everyday reality. A person having this form of spiritual experience sees people, animals, plants, and inanimate objects in the environment as radiant manifestations of a unified field of cosmic creative energy. He or she has a direct perception of the immaterial nature of the physical world and realizes that the boundaries between objects are illusory and unreal. This type of experience of reality has a distinctly numinous quality and corresponds to Spinoza's *deus sive natura*, or nature as God. Using the analogy with television, this experience could be likened to a situation where a black and white picture would suddenly change into one in vivid, living color. When that happens, much of the old perception of the world remains in place, but is radically redefined by the addition of a new dimension.

Brief History of Transpersonal Psychology

The second form of spiritual experience, that of the *transcendent divine*, involves manifestation of archetypal beings and realms of reality that are ordinarily transphenomenal, that is unavailable to perception in the everyday state of consciousness. In this type of spiritual experience, entirely new elements seem to “unfold” or “explicate”—to borrow terms from David Bohm—from another level or order of reality. When we return to the analogy with television, this would be like discovering to our surprise that there exist channels other than the one we have been previously watching, believing that our TV set had only one channel.

The issue of critical importance is, of course, the ontological nature of the spiritual experiences described above. Can they be interpreted and dismissed as meaningless phantasmagoria produced by a pathological process afflicting the brain, yet to be discovered and identified by modern science, or do they reflect objectively existing dimensions of reality, which are not accessible in the ordinary state of consciousness. Careful systematic study of transpersonal experiences shows that they are ontologically real and contain information about important, ordinarily hidden dimensions of existence, which can be consensually validated (Grof, 1998a, 1998b, 2000). In a certain sense, the perception of the world in holotropic states is more accurate than our everyday perception of it.

Quantum-relativistic physics has shown that matter is essentially empty and that all boundaries in the universe are illusory. We know today that what appears to us as discrete static objects are actually condensations within a dynamic unitive energy field. This finding is in direct conflict with the “pedestrian perception” of the world and brings to mind the Hindu concept of *maya*, a metaphysical principle capable of generating a convincing facsimile of the material world. And the objective nature of the historical and archetypal domains of the collective unconscious has been demonstrated by C.G. Jung and his followers years before psychedelic research and new experiential therapies amassed evidence that confirmed it beyond any reasonable doubt. In addition, it is possible to describe step-by-step procedures and proper contexts that facilitate access to these experiences. These include non-pharmacological procedures such as meditation practices, music, dancing, breathing exercises, and other approaches that cannot be seen as pathological agents by any stretch of the imagination.

The study of holotropic states confirmed Jung's (1964) insight that the experiences originating on deeper

levels of the psyche (in my own terminology, “perinatal” and “transpersonal” experiences) have a certain quality that he called (after Rudolph Otto) *numinosity*. The term numinous is relatively neutral and thus preferable to other similar names, such as religious, mystical, magical, holy, or sacred, which have often been used in problematic contexts and are easily misleading. The sense of numinosity is based on direct apprehension of the fact that we are encountering a domain that belongs to a superior order of reality, one which is sacred and radically different from the material world.

To prevent misunderstanding and confusion that in the past compromised many similar discussions, it is critical to make a clear distinction between spirituality and religion. Spirituality is based on direct experiences of non-ordinary aspects and dimensions of reality. It does not require a special place or an officially appointed person mediating contact with the divine. The mystics do not need churches or temples. The context in which they experience the sacred dimensions of reality, including their own divinity, are their bodies and nature. Instead of officiating priests, the mystics need a supportive group of fellow seekers or the guidance of a teacher who is more advanced on the inner journey than they are themselves.

Spirituality involves a special kind of relationship between the individual and the cosmos and is, in its essence, a personal and private affair. By comparison, organized religion involves institutionalized group activity that takes place in a designated location such as a temple or a church, and involves a system of appointed officials who might or might not have had personal experiences of spiritual realities. Once a religion becomes organized, it often completely loses the connection with its spiritual source and becomes a secular institution that exploits human spiritual needs without satisfying them.

Organized religions tend to create hierarchical systems focusing on the pursuit of power, control, politics, money, possessions, and other secular concerns. Under these circumstances, religious hierarchy as a rule dislikes and discourages direct spiritual experiences in its members, because they foster independence and cannot be effectively controlled. When this is the case, genuine spiritual life continues only in the mystical branches, monastic orders, and ecstatic sects of the religions involved. While it is clear that fundamentalism and religious dogma are incompatible with the scientific world view, whether it is Cartesian-Newtonian or based on the new paradigm, there is no reason why we could not seriously study the nature and implications of

transpersonal experiences. As Ken Wilber (1983) pointed out in his book, *A Sociable God*, there cannot possibly be a conflict between genuine science and authentic religion. If there seems to be such a conflict, we are very likely dealing with “bogus science” and “bogus religion,” where either side has a serious misunderstanding of the other’s position and very likely represents a false or fake version of its own discipline.

Transpersonal psychology, as it was born in the late 1960s, was culturally sensitive and treated the ritual and spiritual traditions of ancient and native cultures with the respect that they deserve in view of the findings of modern consciousness research. It also embraced and integrated a wide range of “anomalous phenomena,” paradigm-breaking observations that academic science has been unable to account for and explain. However, although comprehensive and well substantiated in and of itself, the new field represented such a radical departure from academic thinking in professional circles that it could not be reconciled with either traditional psychology and psychiatry or with the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm of Western science.

As a result of this, transpersonal psychology was extremely vulnerable to accusations of being “irrational,” “unscientific,” and even “flakey,” particularly by scientists who were not aware of the vast body of observations and data on which the new movement was based. These critics also ignored the fact that many of the pioneers of this revolutionary movement had impressive academic credentials. Among the pioneers of transpersonal psychology were many prominent psychologists, such as James Fadiman, Jean Houston, Jack Kornfield, Stanley Krippner, Ralph Metzner, Arnold Mindell, John Perry, Kenneth Ring, Frances Vaughan, Richard Tarnas, Charles Tart, Roger Walsh, as well as others from many disciplines (e.g., anthropologists, such as Angeles Arrien, Michael Harner, and Sandra Harner). These individuals created and embraced the transpersonal vision of the human psyche not because they were ignorant of the fundamental assumptions of traditional science, but because they found the old conceptual frameworks seriously inadequate and incapable to account for their experiences and observations.

The problematic status of transpersonal psychology among “hard sciences” changed very radically during the first two decades of the existence of this fledgling discipline. As a result of revolutionary new concepts and discoveries in various scientific fields, the philosophy of traditional Western science, its basic

assumptions, and its Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm were increasingly challenged and undermined. Like many other theoreticians in the transpersonal field, I have followed this development with great interest and described it in the first part of my book, *Beyond the Brain*, as an effort to bridge the gap between the findings of my own research and the established scientific worldview (Grof, 1985).

The influx of this exciting new information began by the realization of the profound philosophical implications of quantum-relativistic physics, forever changing our understanding of physical reality. The astonishing convergence between the worldview of modern physics and that of the Eastern spiritual philosophies, foreshadowed already in the work of Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrödinger, and others, found a full expression in the ground-breaking book by Fritjof Capra (1975), his *Tao of Physics*. Capra's pioneering vision was in the following years complemented and refined by the work of Fred Alan Wolf (1981), Nick Herbert (1979), Amit Goswami (1995), and many others. Of particular interest in this regard were the contributions of David Bohm, former co-worker of Albert Einstein and author of prestigious monographs on the theory of relativity and quantum physics. His concept of the explicate and implicate order and his theory of holomovement expounding the importance of holographic thinking in science gained great popularity in the transpersonal field (Bohm, 1980), as did Karl Pribram's (1971) holographic model of the brain.

The same is true for biologist Rupert Sheldrake's (1981) theory of morphic resonance and morphogenetic fields, demonstrating the importance of non-physical fields for the understanding of forms, genetics and heredity, order, meaning, and the process of learning. Additional exciting contributions were Gregory Bateson's (1979) brilliant synthesis of cybernetics, information and systems theories, logic, psychology, and other disciplines, Ilya Prigogine's (1980) studies of dissipative structures and order out of chaos (Prigogine and Stengers 1984), the chaos theory itself (Glieck, 1988), the anthropic principle in astrophysics (Barrow & Tipler, 1986), and many others.

However, even at this early stage of the development, we have more than just a mosaic of unrelated cornerstones of this new vision of reality. At least two major intellectual attempts at integrating transpersonal psychology into a comprehensive new

world view deserve to be mentioned in this context. The first of these pioneering ventures has been the work of Ken Wilber. In a series of books beginning with his *Spectrum of Consciousness*, Wilber (1977) has achieved a highly creative synthesis of data drawn from a vast variety of areas and disciplines, ranging from psychology, anthropology, sociology, mythology, and comparative religion, through linguistics, philosophy, and history, to cosmology, quantum-relativistic physics, biology, evolutionary theory, and systems theory. His knowledge of the literature is truly encyclopedic, his analytical mind systematic and incisive, and his ability to communicate complex ideas clearly is remarkable. The impressive scope, comprehensive nature, and intellectual rigor of Wilber's work have helped to make it a widely acclaimed and highly influential theory of transpersonal psychology.

However, it would expect too much from an interdisciplinary work of this scope and depth to believe that it could be perfect and flawless in all respects and details. Wilber's writings thus have drawn not just enthusiastic acclaim, but also serious criticism from a variety of sources. The exchanges about the controversial and disputed aspects of his theory have often been forceful and heated. This was partly due to Wilber's often aggressive polemic style that included strongly worded *ad personam* attacks and was not conducive to productive dialogue. Some of these discussions have been gathered in a volume entitled *Ken Wilber in Dialogue* (Rothberg & Kelly, 1998), and others in numerous articles and Internet websites.

Many of these arguments about Ken Wilber's work focus on areas and disciplines other than transpersonal psychology and discussing them would transcend the nature and scope of this paper. However, over the years Ken and I have exchanged ideas concerning specifically various aspects of transpersonal psychology; this involved both mutual compliments and critical comments about our respective theories. I first addressed the similarities and differences between Ken's spectrum psychology and my own observations and theoretical constructs in my book *Beyond the Brain* (Grof, 1985). I later returned to this subject in my contribution to the compendium entitled *Ken Wilber in Dialogue* (Rothberg & Kelly, 1998) and in my own *Psychology of the Future* (Grof, 2000).

In my attempt to critically evaluate Wilber's theories, I approached this task from a clinical perspective, drawing primarily on the data from modern

consciousness research, my own and that of others. In my opinion, the main problem of Ken Wilber's writings on transpersonal psychology is that he does not have any clinical experience and the primary sources of his data have been his extensive reading and the experiences from his personal spiritual practice. In addition, he has drawn most of his clinical data from schools that use verbal methods of psychotherapy and conceptual frameworks limited to postnatal biography. He does not take into consideration a large portion of the clinical evidence amassed during the last several decades of experiential therapy, with or without psychedelic substances.

For a theory as important and influential as Ken Wilber's work has become, it is not sufficient that it integrate material from many different ancient and modern sources into a comprehensive philosophical system that shows inner logical cohesion. While logical consistency certainly is a valuable prerequisite, a viable theory has to have an additional property that is equally if not more important. It is generally accepted among scientists that a system of propositions is an acceptable theory if, and only if, its conclusions are in agreement with observable facts (Frank, 1957). I have tried to outline the areas where Wilber's speculations have been in conflict with facts of observation and those that involve logical inconsistencies (Rothberg & Kelly, 1998).

One of these discrepancies was the omission of the pre- and perinatal domain from his map of consciousness and from his developmental scheme. Another was the uncritical acceptance of the Freudian and post-Freudian emphasis on the postnatal origin of emotional and psychosomatic disorders and failure to acknowledge their deeper perinatal and transpersonal roots. Wilber's description of the strictly linear nature of spiritual development, inability to see the paradoxical nature of the pre-trans relationship, and reduction of the problem of death (*thanatos*) in psychology to a transition from one developmental fulcrum to another have been additional areas of disagreement.

An issue of considerable dissent between us has been Ken Wilber's insistence that opening to spirituality happens exclusively on the level of the centaur, Wilber's stage of psychospiritual development characterized by full integration of body and mind. I have pointed out, in fundamental agreement with Michael Washburn (1988), that spiritual opening often takes the form of a spiral combining regression and progression, rather than in a strictly linear fashion. Particularly frequent is the opening involving psychospiritual death and rebirth, in

which case the critical interface between the personal and transpersonal is the perinatal level. This can be supported not just by clinical observations, but also by the study of the lives of mystics, such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and others, many of whom Wilber quotes in his books. Particularly problematic and questionable is Wilber's (2000) suggestion that we should diagnose clients in terms of the emotional, moral, intellectual, existential, philosophical, and spiritual problems that they show according to his scheme, and assign them to several different therapists specializing in those respective areas. This recommendation might impress a layperson as a sophisticated solution to psychological problems, but it is naïve and unrealistic from the point of view of any experienced clinician.

The above problems concerning specific aspects of Wilber's system can easily be corrected and they do not invalidate the usefulness of his overall scheme as a comprehensive blueprint for understanding the nature of reality. In recent years, Ken Wilber distanced himself from transpersonal psychology in favor of his own vision that he calls integral psychology. On closer inspection, what he refers to as integral psychology reaches far beyond what we traditionally understand under that name and includes areas that belong to other disciplines. However broad and encompassing our vision of reality, in practice we have to pare it down to those aspects which are relevant for solving the problems we are dealing with. With the necessary corrections and adjustments discussed above, Wilber's integral approach will in the future represent a large and useful context for transpersonal psychology rather than a replacement for it; it will also serve as an important bridge to mainstream science.

The second pioneering attempt to integrate transpersonal psychology into a new comprehensive world view has been the work of Ervin Laszlo, the world's foremost system theorist, interdisciplinary scientist, and philosopher of Hungarian origin, currently living in Italy. A multifaceted individual with a range of interests and talents reminiscent of great figures of the Renaissance, Laszlo achieved international fame as a child prodigy and concert pianist in his teens. A few years later he turned to science and philosophy, beginning his lifetime search for understanding of the human nature and the nature of reality. Where Wilber outlined what an integral theory of everything should look like, Laszlo actually created one (Laszlo, 1993, 1996, 2004; Laszlo & Abraham, 2004; Laszlo, Grof, & Russell, 2003).

In an intellectual *tour de force* and a series of books, Laszlo has explored a wide range of disciplines, including astrophysics, quantum-relativistic physics, biology, and psychology. He pointed out a wide range of phenomena, paradoxical observations, and paradigmatic challenges for which these disciplines have no explanations. He then examined the attempts of various pioneers of new paradigm science to provide solutions for these conceptual challenges. This included Bohm's theory of holomovement, Pribram's holographic model of the brain, Sheldrake's theory of morphogenetic fields, Prigogine's concept of dissipative structures, and others. He looked at the contributions of these theories and also at problems that they had not been able to solve.

Drawing on mathematics and advances in hard sciences Laszlo then offered a solution to the current paradoxes in Western science, which transcends the boundaries of individual disciplines. He achieved that by formulating his "connectivity hypothesis," the main cornerstone of which is the existence of what he calls the "psi-field," (Laszlo, 1993, 1995; Laszlo & Abraham, 2004). He describes it as a subquantum field, which holds a holographic record of all the events that have happened in the phenomenal world. Laszlo includes in his all-encompassing theory quite explicitly transpersonal psychology and the spiritual philosophies, as exemplified by his paper on Jungian psychology and my own consciousness research (Laszlo, 1996) and his last book, *Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything* (Laszlo, 2004).

It has been very exciting to see that all the new revolutionary developments in science, while irreconcilable with the 17th century Newtonian-Cartesian thinking and monistic materialism, have been compatible with transpersonal psychology. As a result of these conceptual breakthroughs in a number of disciplines, it has become increasingly possible to imagine that transpersonal psychology will be in the future accepted by academic circles and become an integral part of a radically new scientific world view. As scientific progress continues to lift the spell of the outdated 17th century materialistic worldview, we can see the general outlines of an emerging radically new comprehensive understanding of ourselves, nature, and the universe we live in. This new paradigm should be able to reconcile science with experientially based spirituality of a non-denominational, universal, and all-embracing nature and bring about a synthesis of modern science and ancient wisdom.

References

- Alexander, F. (1931). Buddhist training as artificial catatonia. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 18, 129.
- Barrow, J. D., & Tipler, F. J. (1986). *The anthropic cosmological principle*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Bateson, G. (1979). *Mind and nature: A necessary unity*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Bohm, D. (1980). *Wholeness and the implicate order*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Capra, F. (1975). *The Tao of physics*. Berkeley, CA: Shambhala Publications.
- Corbin, H. (2000). Mundus imaginalis, or the imaginary and the imaginal. In B. Sells (Ed.), *Working with images* (pp. 71-89). Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications.
- Frank, P. (1957). *Philosophy of science: The link between science and philosophy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Gleick, J. (1988) *Chaos: Making a new science*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Goswami, A. (1995). *The self-aware universe: How consciousness creates the material world*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher.
- Grof, S. (1985). *Beyond the brain: Birth, death, and transcendence in psychotherapy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Grof, S., & Bennett, H. Z. (1992). *The holotropic mind: The three levels of human consciousness and how they shape our lives*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Grof, S. (1998a). Ken Wilber's spectrum psychology: Observations from clinical consciousness research. In D. Rothberg & S. Kelly (Eds.), *Ken Wilber in dialogue: Conversations with leading transpersonal thinkers* (pp. 85-115). Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- Grof, S. (1998b). *The cosmic game: Explorations of the frontiers of human consciousness*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Grof, S. (2000). *Psychology of the future: Lessons from modern consciousness research*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Grof, S. & Grof, C. (1989). *Spiritual emergency: When personal transformation becomes a crisis*. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher.
- Grof, C. & Grof, S. (1991). *The stormy search for the self: A guide to personal growth through transformational crises*. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher.
- Harner, M. (1980). *The way of the shaman: A guide to power and healing*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Heisenberg, W. (1971). *Physics and beyond: Encounters and conversations*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Herbert, N. (1979). *Mind science: A physics of consciousness primer*. Boulder Creek, CA: C-Life Institute.
- Jung, C. G. (1964). *Collected works: Vol. 10. Psychology of religion: East and west*. Bollingen Series 20. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Laszlo, E. (1993). *The creative cosmos: A unified science of matter, life, and mind*. Edinburgh, UK: Floris Books.
- Laszlo, E. (1996). *Subtle connections: Psi, Grof, Jung, and the quantum vacuum*. The International Society for the Systems Sciences and The Club of Budapest. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from < <http://www.goertzel.org/dynapsyc/1996/subtle.html>>
- Laszlo, E., Grof, S., & Russell, P. (2003). *The consciousness revolution: A transatlantic dialogue*. Las Vegas, NV: Elf Rock Productions.
- Laszlo, E., & Abraham, R. H. (2004). *The connectivity hypothesis: Foundations of an integral science of quantum, cosmos, life, and consciousness*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Laszlo, E. (2004). *Science and the Akashic Field: An integral theory of everything*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Maslow, A. (1969). The farther reaches of human nature. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 1, 1-9.
- Pribram, K. (1971). *Languages of the brain*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Prigogine, I. (1980). *From being to becoming: Time and complexity in the physical sciences*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
- Prigogine, I., & Stengers, I. (1984). *Order out of chaos: Man's dialogue with nature*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Rothberg, D., & Kelly, S. (Eds.). (1998). *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with leading transpersonal thinkers*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- Schrödinger, E. (1967). *What is life?: With mind and matter*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Sheldrake, R. (1981). *A new science of life: The hypothesis of formative causation*. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher.
- Sutich, A. (1976). *The founding of humanistic and transpersonal psychology: A personal account*. Doctoral dissertation, Humanistic Psychology Institute, San Francisco, California.
- Sutich, A. (1976). The emergence of the transpersonal orientation: A personal account. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 8, 5-19.
- Washburn, M. (1988). *The ego and the dynamic ground*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Wilber, K. (1977). *The spectrum of consciousness*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- Wilber, K. (1980). *The atman project: A transpersonal view of human development*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- Wilber, K. (1983). *A sociable god: Brief introduction to a transcendental sociology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral psychology: Consciousness, spirit, psychology, therapy*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Wilber, K. (1995). *Sex, ecology, and spirituality: The spirit of evolution*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.
- Wolf, F. A. (1981). *Taking the quantum leap*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

About the Author

Stan Grof, MD, is a psychiatrist with more than fifty years of experience in research of non-ordinary states of consciousness induced by psychedelic substances and various non-pharmacological methods. Currently, he is Professor of Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco and Wisdom University in Oakland, CA, conducts professional training programs in holotropic breathwork and transpersonal psychology, and gives lectures and seminars worldwide. He is one of the founders and chief theoreticians of transpersonal psychology and the founding president of the International Transpersonal Association. In October 2007, he received the prestigious Vision 97 Award from the Dagmar and Vaclav Havel Foundation in Prague. Among his publications are over 140 papers in professional journals and the books *Realms of the Human Unconscious*; *LSD Psychotherapy*; *The Adventure of Self-Discovery*; *Beyond the Brain*; *The Cosmic Game*; *Psychology of the Future*; *When the Impossible Happens*; *The Ultimate Journey*; *Spiritual Emergency*; and *The Stormy Search for the Self* (the last two with Christina Grof). He may be reached at: stanG@infoasis.com.