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THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY IN RUSSIA: A DIALOGUE¹

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We have read your paper with great interest and satisfaction and would like to make some remarks in the form of a dialogue.

"Russian people were experiencing . . . perestroika as hardship, chaos, and lack of supplies." (p. 4)

I would add--and lack of meaning: everything was wrong before, everything turned out to be even more wrong after perestroika. There is no logic under the present situation for common people. There is something wrong with our modus vivendi. Time stopped to be complete--the Future is not emerging.

To get balanced in life we need to contact more deeper levels of our minds--the realm of initial meanings, not mastered yet as it belongs to the unconscious. And there we face one of the main problems of Western culture.

"But three generations of Russians have been reared with a collective mentality." (pp. 4-5)

That is right, though not only three generations but practically all of them because serfage was not abolished until the 19th century.

" . . . the Russians were waking up from a long, fearful, and mindless lethargy." (p. 4)

Sorry to say they are not. Many of them even miss that lethargy.

"Politically we can observe a new generation of leadership which could herald a quest for a new beginning" (p. 4)

There is no such sincere generation either in politics, or in psychology (or science). New "ideology of money" transforms a quest into making. I do not see those who "like thought as it is" (Nietzsche). The activity for most is encouraged by the advantages to be "more equal." That is especially evident under the current situation.

This is one of the reasons why *"the transpersonal perspective in Russia is scarce."* (p. 6)

It is also insufficient due to lack of information and activity.

In our view there is a possibility for the transpersonal perspective to be changed here if not only psychologists but all people hungry for transformation and personal growth could contribute to it.

" . . . led to transformations in Russian thought." (p. 5)

It is a perplexing problem "transformations in Russian thought." The results of recent elections leave much to be desired. A new version of an "abnormal condition."

"Inner voice" of the Russians was amazingly spoken out at the beginning of this

¹Comments sent to Denise Lajoie dated 21 March, 1994. (Editor)

century by poets, writers, musicians, artists, philosophers, mystics. It was a "silver century" in Russian culture, and it did not work--it did not protect from revolutionary cataclysm.

"Responsibility for moral choices" (p. 5) to be accepted needs powerful examples: incarnations of true meanings.

If we are not aware of God, we are incapable of being aware of Life and Death. We cannot value both properly.

Transformation needs long-term training and education in meanings--Culture is to be brought into use: first human beings, then--specialties. I wrote about it in a journal of higher education, Alma Mater (1993).

"The psychological needs of the Russian people are vastly different than the clients we see in the West." (p. 12)

That is true. We live under the situation of vital needs--no comfort, no insurances, no stability, no future after all. And this latter one makes the situation similar to the one of a labour-camp: there is one thing left--to enjoy meaning, something eternal, noncorruptible.

At the beginning of the century there was a message from a famous Russian poet, Alexander Block:

Misfortunes and losses everywhere,
What is awaiting you?
Set your shaggy sail,
Mark your strong cuirasse
By the sign of the cross on the chest!

We are facing a challenging situation, and every day needs effort to fight a battle. Death is not only behind the left shoulder, but right in front, and memento mori is the most uttered wisdom.

On page 6 there is a reference to the Russian-American Exchange Program, which since 1980 *"has discreetly brought selected Soviets and Americans together to explore . . ."*

"Selected" is a key word in this passage, as practically the content of the Program is available only for selected persons.

" . . . the newly emerging communication between Russian and American psychologists . . . " (p. 6)

To my mind communication between people is no less important.

Many people cannot afford psychological help due to prices and for some other reasons. But there are quite a number of volunteers ready to start their quest in a field of non-trivial psychology to manage their own psychological situations, get balanced and recharged with the courage to be.

"Without training, we can hardly expect Russian psychologists to understand the transpersonal perspective in the field." (p. 13)

That is right. But I think your activity will yield much more if you train not only career psychologists but all people exposing themselves to transpersonal concerns and educated in other fields. There are many ready for the adventure in Self-discovery.

Though I do not belong to Transpersonal Psychology I respect it much as a pioneer in the attempt to make a new image of man, to complete it. And I am much

upset by the lack of in-depth relationships with the Transpersonal Movement.² I see different reasons for that. To name just a few:

1. Books and contacts are not available for most of us due to insufficient financial resources.

You say "*workshops are held, psychological reviews are being prepared*" (p. 7), but again it appears to be available for "selected" people.

" . . . *periodical is scheduled to be published . . .* "--without it the transpersonal perspective will remain scarce unpredictably long.

2. I do not think your preferable address to career psychologists (as I have mentioned it above) makes sense. They are imprisoned by the concepts of old schools, self-sufficient, and not open for essentially new ideas. Humanistic Psychology is the one more or less acceptable. Transpersonal Psychology is much more perplexing.

In the Psychological Dictionary (Eds. A. Petrovsky & M. Yaroshevsky, 1990) only Humanistic Psychology is specified, while Maslow is not referred to as one of the founders of the Transpersonal approach.

Yet the psychological paradigm within recent years is shifting a bit here. For example, Psychological Journal³ published our article (Nalimov & Drogalina, 1992) dealing with scientometric analysis of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. But the response to it was very poor. Same situation is observed in philosophy. Of course, philosophers are trying to get rid of Hegelian Marxism called Leninism, but I doubt they become more open for new ideas. I cannot help being reminded of the first publication by Maikov (1987) in a philosophical journal:

Peering into development of "new orientation" at the USA, we obviously see cultural and ideological roots of this movement, its connection with crisis of liberal bourgeois ideology. (p. 76)

Maybe the current fashion for Transpersonal Psychology is imposed by the very commodity economics of the market for spiritual issues? (p. 77)

And now they are supposed to change their minds. Doubtful.

3. On page 15 a question was posed about whether there is "*really a hidden underground spiritual movement in Russia.*"

I think there is, but a fuzzy one, without any structure.

Some examples:

A book of mine, Spontaneity of Consciousness (Nalimov, 1989), issued in 10,000 copies, was quickly out of print.

A friend of mine, Daniil Andreyev, a poet and mystical philosopher, one of the last of the Mohicans of the Russian "Silver Century," when released from GULAG finished the book The Rose of the World (Andreyev, 1991, 1993)--a mythology of the Evil, according to the definition by the philosopher G. Pomerants.

D. Andreyev recounted the visions he had during his 10-year imprisonment and constructed a philosophical system dealing with the experience of transphysical knowledge.

His book was published twice in 500,000 copies, and was out of print (both issues).

Another book by E. Shuré, Great Initiates: A Study of the Secret History of Religions, was out in almost as many copies and disappeared in no time.

²I do not mean various techniques which can be applied independently of a world outlook, as most of them imply commercial yield.

³Psikhologicheskii Zhurnal being issued by the Psychological Institute of the Academy of Science.

I do not know who buys and reads these books, yet I know that the quest for meaning and independent non-confessional thought was started long ago. We can go back yet another two centuries to the attempt by mason N. I. Novikov to publish in Russian the Bhagavad-gītā (Western Europe got it three years earlier in 1785).

Such writers as Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy were deep religious thinkers. In Russia, till nowadays, there remains interest in such persons as Blavatskaya and Steiner. At the dawn of the century there emerged such philosophical and spiritual movements as Mystical Anarchism which were destroyed by repressions. This movement was founded as an esoteric structure embodied in the Order of Knights Templars (Russian detachment) ideologically rooted in Christian gnosticism and with roots even back into Egypt (Nalimov, 1993).

The teachers of the Movement tried to make a bridge between philosophy, science, religion, and art. The Orthodox Church was in opposition to them.

4. I think it is time to make a bridge between Transpersonal Psychology and free thinkers in the Russian intellectual community. What is necessary to do for that?

(a) To make Transpersonal thought within the reach of readers not connected with the official ideological establishment.

Books and journals are to be available in libraries and bookshops. Some of them are to be translated into Russian, as Russians are not good at English.

(b) To start discussions of non-trivial philosophical works different from the Transpersonal approach yet rich with new ideas associated with consciousness issues.

5. In the course of time and effort our positions are being brought together. Stan Grof published a review of my book, Realms of the Unconscious: The Enchanted Frontier (Nalimov, 1982), now being translated into French in Paris. Right now we are doing a review of his book Realms of the Human Unconscious: Observations from LSD Research (Grof, 1976). The translation was initiated and sponsored by V. V. Nalimov about fifteen years ago when he was a head of the Laboratory of Mathematical Theory of Experiment. It has taken so many years to have it brought out by the Institute for Scientific Information of the Russian Academy of Sciences (1992). We had an opportunity to present our papers at Santa Rosa and Prague. Angela Thompson presented my philosophical approach in the Journal of Humanistic Psychology (Thompson, 1993); a shorter variant of it appeared in Current Contents (Garfield, 1993). We have published some translations from S. Grof (1990, 1991), K. Wilber (1990), and D. Bohm (1993).

And yet the most essential book of V. V. Nalimov, Spontaneity of Consciousness: A Probabilistic Theory of Meanings and Semantic Architectonic of Personality (Nalimov, 1989, in Russian), was rejected by the American publishers due to its interdisciplinary approach to the subject. All the works by Dr. Soidla,⁴ mentioned in the paper by Lajoie, were not published. I have finished a memoir text, A Rope-Dancer, recounting a Russian situation within a period of a century, including some special aspects of spiritual life, and archive materials from KGB. But again I do not know how many years it will take to find a publisher and to overcome all obstacles, conceptual and financial. And there is no time left.

"Misfortunes and losses everywhere . . ."

What about my shaggy sail?!

⁴Some of these are now being published in the International Journal of Transpersonal Studies and elsewhere. (Editor)

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