




9-1-2017

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Recommended Citation

Thouin-Savard, M. (2017). . *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 36 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.iii>



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Adversarial Collaboration: How Free and Open Debate Leads to Better Transpersonal Ideas

Editor's Introduction

The willingness to publicly and articulately disagree is the lifeblood of academia, and perhaps even of human progress in general. When mediaeval Christian authorities insisted that the Earth was the flat and immovable center of the Universe, it took daring and perseverant investigators to demonstrate a different truth—at the cost of much censorship and a few heresy convictions (Drake, 2001). Similarly, when the founders of chiropractic medicine were ridiculed by traditional doctors, and even jailed for “the illegal practice of medicine” (Gibbons, 1994, p. 61), scientific evidence ultimately succeeded in bringing legitimacy to the field. More recently, when the wide majority of sexology researchers assumed that heterosexuality was the only normal or healthy sexual behavior in existence (e.g., Jackson & Scott, 2010), it was through public confrontation that courageous voices helped shift attitudes and destigmatize a wide variety of sexual expressions.

Scholarship, too, improves through a process of ongoing challenge to, and revision of, outdated assumptions. In recent decades, for example, critical social theories such as feminist, queer, and critical race theory (e.g., Agger, 2006; Calhoun, 1995) have not only transformed the academic arenas of humanities and social sciences, but have also helped sensitize a wider public to the existence of power dynamics behind the production of knowledge. It is not only the seminal work in these areas that has cultivated greater awareness of such issues among members of the public: it is also the ensuing pushback, discussions, and debates that further refined and disseminated these ideas in ways that have created ripples far beyond academic circles.

One of transpersonal psychology's goals from its inception has been to challenge and enlarge

the descriptions of human experience that scientific psychology has provided. Yet there has been a notable lack of visible debate amongst its scholars (cf. Ferrer & Puente, 2013). Critical engagement with different perspectives within the scholarly community is essential for the transpersonal field to mature and develop, just as a healthy democratic process includes both a free press and fact-checkers. Transpersonal journals have a responsibility to provide platforms for such engagements, rather than censoring viewpoints unpopular to their editorial teams.

The recent publication in this journal of a paper by Steve Taylor (2016), along with a critical response by IJTS' main editor (Hartelius, 2016), has sparked further debate. In this issue, Hartelius has stepped down from the position of main editor to engage with Taylor in a series of papers that can be characterized as an adversarial collaboration on the topic of psychology and spirituality. This debate exposes two different perspectives on the role and location of transpersonal psychology within the larger scope of academia—focusing on whether perennialism and essentialism are acceptable approaches to psychological theories of spirituality. While both parties share a common commitment to expanding academia's understanding of psychology beyond the reductionist and materialist paradigm traditionally associated with Western science, each advocates a different strategy toward this goal. Taylor and Hartelius demonstrate the commendable qualities of vigorous debate conducted with a collegial attitude, exemplifying balance between intellectual integrity where no punches are pulled, and an uncompromising personal respect towards one's opponent.

This journal hopes to sponsor further critical conversations in future issues, including scholars wishing

to participate in the dialogue initiated by Taylor & Hartelius. The field of transpersonal psychology can only benefit from open forums, active engagement, and constructive disagreements in its efforts to contribute to academia and to society at large.

In This Issue

The current issue opens with a paper by Mark Schroll and Claire Polansky entitled, "Bridging Transpersonal Ecosophical Concerns with the Hero's Journey and Superheroes Through Comicbook Lore: Implications for Personal and Cultural Transformation." This piece considers how mythical figures and comicbook superheroes can inspire personal growth, as well as social and planetary change. Schroll and Polansky begin with definitions of the terms *myth*, *hero*, and *hero's journey*, and their implications for understanding personal and transpersonal growth. They then illustrate their observations through portraits of individual characters from comicbook lore, examining their significance toward raising collective archetypal awareness of the psyche's relationship with Earth.

This paper is followed by a brief Special Topic Section on spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency, introduced by Ted Esser. In this section, we are pleased to republish a seminal 1986 paper on spiritual emergency by Christina and Stan Grof. This is one of the occasional exceptions to the *IJTS* policy of publishing only original papers, for the purpose of providing background to this important area of transpersonal research. While the Grof and Grof paper is in some ways more informal than what the journal typically publishes, the concept and context of spiritual emergency is offered in a clear and eloquent manner. After this comes the Taylor-Hartelius debate on psychology and spirituality, introduced by Les Lancaster and Harris Friedman, and managed by Brian Barnes. A short essay by Ken Ring, entitled, "Waiting to Die," completes the issue.

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About the Journal

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies, published by Floragades Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at www.transpersonalstudies.org, and in print through www.lulu.com (search for IJTS).