THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL TRANSPERSONAL CONFERENCE

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Although transpersonal psychology is still quite a new field, from the outset its leaders have included some very eminent men and women. One important facet in the development of transpersonal psychology to date has been the periodic occurrence of large-scale scientific conferences. Notable among these have been transpersonal sections of annual conventions of the Association of Humanistic Psychology since 1969 (Assoc. Humanistic Psychology, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972), and the first four annual Interdisciplinary Conferences on Voluntary Control of Internal States, at Council Grove, Kansas (Fadiman, 1969, 1970; Weide, 1971, 1972).

From May 31–June 5, 1972, the first explicitly _international_ transpersonal conference took place. Housed in a rural resort at beautiful Bifrost, Iceland, this International Conference on Psychobiology and Transpersonal Psychology was coordinated by Geir Vidar Vilhjalmsson, a psychologist from Reykjavik. Conference sponsors were the Institute for Consciousness Research (founded in Reykjavik by Vilhjalmsson) and the Transpersonal Institute of Palo Alto, California.

A capacity group of 58 invited participants represented, among other disciplines, psychology, psychiatry, theology, comparative religion, orientology, mythology, physiology, physics, chemistry, music therapy, choreography and dance. The majority were from the United States and Canada, nine from Iceland, and a considerable number from England, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Italy, and France.
Vilhjalmsson had previously prepared lists of theme questions for conference participants to consider. These questions, which are reproduced below with minor editorial changes, may provide useful thematic material for future conferences and for transpersonal research.

The first three days of the Bifrost conference were each devoted to one main topic. Each of these topics in turn was discussed first by a panel of three experts, secondly by all participants in small groups, thirdly in a total group situation, and finally explored experientially in afternoon group sessions. The following is a day-by-day outline of events.

I. FIRST DAY. MAIN TOPIC: WAYS OF TRANSCENDENTAL GROWTH

Panelists-Martha Crampton, Stanislav Grof, Huston Smith.

(1) Do all ways lead to the same ultimate goal, i.e. to nirvana, to union with God, or are there special lines of transcendent development possible?

(2) Are possibly both the preceding statements accurate?

(3) What about the danger that a growth-method may become an end in itself, thus turning into a trap? What about non-attachment and other ways to meet this danger?

(4) How do different ways and methods relate to different levels of transcendent consciousness and to different structural levels in the body (e.g., brain structures, endocrine glands, chakras)?

(5) What about the relationship of personal growth to transcendent growth? Is there always a necessary correlation, or can personal levels really be transcended without working them through?

(6) How do you see the importance of groups in transpersonal psychology? Do you think, for example, that certain types of transcendent consciousness most easily manifest themselves in groups? And what would you include in an inventory of transpersonal group methods?

In the discussion of these questions, there was considerable agreement that the ultimate goal for all seekers is indeed one, with many different roads leading to this end. These diverse paths have been illustrated in classic esoteric typologies such as...
The Seven Rays (of Alice Bailey and other teachers), and the different main types of Yoga paths. The group also discussed the use of psychedelic chemicals as facilitators of transcendent experience; Hindu palmistry as a device for spiritual diagnosis; the dependence of transpersonal growth upon satisfactory personal growth; the importance of "plateau experiences" or the maintaining of transcendent states once they have been experienced; issues of "objective reality" versus "relative realities"; and numerous other points.

In the evening three films were shown: Huston Smith's two films on Sufism and Tibetan Buddhism, and "The Sacred Art of Tibet," from the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center in Berkeley, California.

II. SECOND DAY. MAIN TOPIC: PSYCHIC AND SPIRITUAL HEALING

Panelists—Lawrence LeShan, Edgar Jackson, Joan Reid.

(1) Is it possible to differentiate the various types of paranormal healing according to the level at which the healer's consciousness is focused during the healing, and from whence he draws the "healing energy" he uses?

(8) Are the common terms Spiritual (= transpersonal levels), Psychic (= personal levels), and Magnetic (= bio-energetic levels) satisfactory from a scientific point of view?

(9) While purely spiritual healing is taking place, the healer's function might be similar to that of a catalyst, whereas during psychic and magnetic healing, energy interactions and energy sensations are often reported. Do you have any thoughts as to the nature of the catalytic or the energetic interactions, and what possibilities can you think of for their objective registration?

(10) What about certain frequently reported phenomena such as discarnate helpers, guides, or healing spirits? Are these to be treated in all cases as figments of the imagination, or is there room for such phenomena in empirical science?

(11) How do you see the relationship of psychic and spiritual healing to various approaches to psychotherapy?

One subject which received much discussion by the group was
the concept of energy and its usefulness in describing the processes within and between healer and healee. Another much-discussed issue was the empirical meaning of the so-called spirit guides which (or who) are so important to many healers. One panelist explained his view of healing as a mystical union, participated in by healer and healee, which stimulates self-repairing processes within the person being healed. Another panelist described her perception of spirit guides as objectively real; and an Icelandic clairvoyant revealed her own perceptions of the particular guides present at the time, while that same panelist was engaged in healing activity. The third panelist discussed healing as functioning at three levels: 1) psychotogical—suggestion, thought, psychosomatic and placebo effects; 2) psychic—paranormal, involving special psychic entities; and 3) parapsychic—cosmic, spiritual, holy.

This theoretical multidimensionality of healing processes was related by the group to research in altered states of consciousness, to classical theories of chakras and to other theoretical approaches, as discussed in the Greens’ article on the meaning of transpersonal (Green and Green, 1971). It was agreed that psychic and spiritual healing are clearly to some extent learnable, as is shown for example in Brazil, where literally thousands are trained in schools for healers. It was also pointed out that in England psychic and spiritual healers have access to patients in ordinary medical hospitals, under governmental authorization and often in open collaboration with physicians.

The evening featured an experiential healing session led by Helen Bonny and Vilhjalmsson. This event included toning (spontaneous sound production), visualization and music therapy. Accounts of this session are due to appear in a forthcoming book on music therapy (Bonny and Savary, 1973).

III. THIRD DAY. MAIN TOPIC: THE PSYCHOBIOLOGY OF TRANSCENDENTAL STATES

Panelists—Paul Grof, Nicholas Herbert, Bury1 Payne.

(12) What happens to an individual physiologically, bio-chemically, bio-energetically, psychologically, and transcendentally, when he undergoes a transcendental experience?

(13) How do different types of transcendental experiences differ in these respects?
(14) How can new technological developments like Kirlian Photography, bio-feedback procedures, psychoactive chemicals, electronic environments, etc., further our understanding of the transcendental?

(15) What do you think about the relationship between objective and experiential reality? Do you think that everything (or no-thing) that can be experienced must also correspond to an outside, objective reality? Or do you only attribute objective reality to that which can be validated through the physical senses? Can you reconcile these two opposite points of view?

(16) Applying the above to a concrete example, do the archetypes have an objective reality independent of an experiencing subject?

(17) How do you see the role of the central nervous system, with its various levels of consciousness-carrying structures, e.g., DNA, RNA, enzymes, neuro-transmitters, neural pathways and networks, cortical and sub-cortical centers, and the brain as a whole? Do you think that consciousness is produced by this complex physico-chemical structure, or do you think that the CNS and the body function like a diving bell - i.e. that consciousness is of psychological origin and that the body is an instrument for its interaction with the physico-chemical environment?

(18) Is it possible to transcend the dichotomy between physical and psychological by looking at both as forms of energy?

(19) Do you think it is scientifically valid to look upon our planet as a biological whole (bio-spaceship earth) and to ask what kind of consciousness the planet might have as an individual biological being?

(20) If the above point of view makes sense, is it then possible to look at recent developments of worldwide transport and communication systems as integrative functions, analogous to vascular and neural pathways in a developing brain?

(21) From such a planetary point of view, what would be the function of an individual human being? What could be the relationship of transcendental experiences to the hypothetical planetary consciousness outlined above?

One panelist presented a five-dimensional model of consciousness to account for paranormal and transpersonal states. Another discussed possible mechanisms for the entry of
higher-dimensional consciousness into the three-dimensional structure of the brain. The third panelist applied the concept of *chakras* to the paradoxical manic-depressive syndrome, in which are found similar biological indices (of high energy level) despite opposite psychological proclivities (in quality of mood).

In the afternoon there were reports by Jean-George Henrotte of France and Lester Fehmi of the U.S. on EEG and meditation. In the evening Joseph Campbell delivered a featured lecture on the biological and psychological meaning of transcendental symbols, especially Hindu chakras and Tibetan archetypes.

Special notice is due to the experiential groups, which met every afternoon during the first three days. Extensive experimentation took place with techniques such as group meditation, visualization, movement, dance, and music therapy. In addition, a group met daily at 6 p.m. for explorative healing sessions.

**IV. FOURTH DAY. MAIN TOPIC: RESEARCH METHODS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

Instead of a panel and other elements of the earlier conference format, this day featured a large group brainstorming session, and more flexible discussion. The afternoon was spent in preparation for ritual group enactment of the unplanned culmination of the entire proceedings—a marriage of two conference participants at dawn the following day!

This unusual ultra-human ending to a scientific conference symbolized and powerfully expressed several polarities which had been important throughout the meetings: new beginnings in regard to timeless concerns; ritual, mystically significant forms in relation to spontaneous feeling and rational thought; and the infusion of transcendent ideas and emotions into concrete human experience.

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