

BOOK REVIEWS

FRIEDMAN, HARRIS L., & HARTELIUS, GLENN (Eds.). (2013). *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology*. West Sussex, U.K: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. xxxii + 706 pp. ISBN 978-1-119-96755-2. Hardcover, \$195; e-book, \$43.99. Reviewed by Miles A. Vich.

Finally, a handbook! This impressive compendium, organizing the voluminous literature of transpersonal psychology, is a remarkable achievement. Its coverage, broad and far reaching, begins with an overview of the historical origins, and then presents the expanding and evolving theory, research, and applications that have shaped the field.

This is the first comprehensive volume to rely on the field's diverse literature as it has accumulated over many decades. As pointed out in the book's Forward, the only other comparable effort is the *Textbook of transpersonal psychiatry and psychology* (Scotton, Chinen & Battista, 1996). That volume is a valuable text emphasizing a more psychiatric approach to transpersonal material, and reflects the status of the field in the mid-nineties. It could be considered a companion addition to the much larger *Handbook of transpersonal psychology*.

Throughout the *Handbook* there is an acknowledgement by various authors that the transpersonal area is perhaps the most challenging in psychology due to its elusive content, wide ranging methodologies and fundamental philosophical issues. Nevertheless, the editors set as the book's purpose, "... clarifying and promoting the worth of transpersonal psychology." (p. xxxi) and "... trying to advance the field by helping to define it" (p. xxvi). They also hope the collection "... can as a whole overview the area in a way that well reflects many of its facets" (p. xxix).

To begin on these major tasks the volume offers an orienting Forward by Stanley Krippner, followed by the co-editors' very helpful Introduction. In it they raise various key issues including definitional problems, methodological conundrums, the importance of an empirical approach, and the basic question of how we know. This opening discussion also outlines the book's structure of six major parts, and briefly announces the 38 chapters by 57 authors.

With a rich resource of this size one might be tempted to read a chapter here or there, in any order, according to one's interests and proclivities. This can be fruitful if the reader is already familiar with the field. However, to get a full sense of this *Handbook*, it could be more productive to read the chapters in sequence because they often follow-on well, one laying groundwork for another. Sometimes one piece will raise points or take positions that are also dealt with, supported or critiqued in a follow-on chapter.

Part I begins with the unexpected "A Brand for the Burning" by authors Hartelius, Rothe and Roy, which argues that to be more effective transpersonal psychology needs to be 'rebranded'. They report finding 160 definitions of the field in its literature (many in *JTP*). After examining the themes, concepts and

language of the definitions, they propose a new one, woven from identified intersecting strands:

Transpersonal psychology is a transformative psychology of the whole person in intimate interrelationship with an interconnected and evolving world; it pays special attention to self-expansive states as well as spiritual, mystical, and other exceptional human experiences that gain meaning in such a context. (p. 14)

Whether or not one finds this kind of definition completely adequate, it is literature research based and has an open dynamic that could easily stimulate further research and theory construction. The chapter closes with a study of trends in research methods, geographical distribution of authors, and author gender.

I paid special attention to Chapter 2, “Traditional Roots, History and Evolution of the Transpersonal Perspective,” having been part of the founding group that launched the field via the publication of this *Journal* in 1969. Michael Daniels’ rendering of the roots and history is faithful to the facts and tone of the thinking and influences of those early years. Reviewing the evolution of the field over the decades he identifies religious, psychological, humanistic/existential/feminist, and ecological perspectives in transpersonal psychology. From this he constructs an integral perspective model. His closing observations are pointed ‘challenges’ to anyone identified with transpersonal psychology.

The use of the label ‘spiritual psychology’ as an alternative to ‘transpersonal psychology’ is thoroughly examined in Chapter 3, which finds good reason to stick with the latter. Following on nicely in Chapter 4 is “Criticisms of Transpersonal Psychology and Beyond.” An informed and constructive critic inside the field is a gift in this *Handbook*, especially when it results in a fresh proposal for a “science and culture of consciousness.” Chapters 2 and 4 together should be regarded as essential reading for anyone guided by, promoting, teaching or contributing to this field.

In Part II the focus is on theory. It opens with Stanislav Grof’s “Revision and Re-Enchantment of Psychology” tracing his 50 years of consciousness research and an explication of his theory of ‘holotropic states.’ The next chapter, “Altered States of Consciousness,” is Charles Tart’s well researched approach to the study of consciousness, considered from pre-history to our era. Then, Jung’s Analytical Psychology, Jungian transpersonal theory, and Washburn’s related approach are reviewed by Alan G. Vaughn in Chapter 7. Next is Sri Aurobindo’s evolutionary, yogic levels of consciousness philosophy rendered in an integral psychological model. In Chapter 9, “Transcend and Include,” Allan Combs presents the five ‘phases’ of Ken Wilber’s psychologies and worldviews. Wilber, who began publishing in *JTP* in 1975, and is perhaps the most widely published theorist in this field, dis-identified from the transpersonal psychology label sometime in the 1980’s. Eventually he began using a

more ‘integral’ model incorporating *holons*, each with inner and outer, singular and plural quadrants.

Co-editor Hartelius and Jorge N. Ferrer, after critiquing perennial and integral philosophies, advance a ‘participatory philosophy’ in Chapter 10. It emphasizes that spiritual and mystical experiences are *participatory events* and ontologically real. It also holds that self and world, part and whole, shape each other reciprocally in an ongoing process of mutually transforming participation. Co-editor Friedman, in a personal narrative (Chapter 11), describes the development of his concept of Self-expansiveness as a scientific construct, and its wide-ranging utility in assessment, therapy, theory, and research. Finally, in “Neuroscience and the Transpersonal,” we get a sense of the productivity of bringing these two fields together, relying on extensive neurophysiological research and an informed understanding of transpersonal phenomena. The citations are recent, with 70 percent of the references published since 2002.

Part III shows how far transpersonal methodology has progressed since the first issue of *JTP* in 1969 aligned the new field with an empirical approach (Sutich, 1969a). Rosemarie Anderson and William Braud lead off with an overview of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research methods developed over more than twenty years. Their work shows how the challenges of doing research in this field have led to improvements and refinements in research methodologies. Their transpersonal approaches include intuitive, integral, and organic inquiries, and possible future directions. Next, Charles D. Laughlin and Adam J. Rock, discuss neurophenomenology, describing the connection between cognitive science and the practice of transcendental phenomenology. In Chapter 15 Douglas A. MacDonald and Friedman dive into and sort out the large number of assessment tools dealing with transpersonal and spiritual constructs, and offer specific recommendations for researchers. Friedman in the following chapter critiques the uses of ‘grand theories’ and ‘mini theories’ in transpersonal psychology and argues, rather effectively, for more productive ‘middle range theories.’ Chapter 17, by MacDonald, looks closely at issues in the philosophical underpinnings of transpersonal psychology as a science, a very helpful way to conclude this strong section.

Part IV, “Transpersonal Experiences,” is approximately the half-way point in this substantial work. From here on some of the authors are longstanding names in the field, and others are more recent contributors from a variety of backgrounds and affiliations. This section begins with the category exceptional human experiences (EHE’s): mystical, psychic, encounter, unusual death related, exceptional performances, healing, desolation/nadir and dissociation human experiences, studied for their meanings and transformative potentials. Chapter 19 discusses the dimensions and theories of psychedelic-induced experiences and directions for future research. Near-death experiences with a focus on helping ‘NDErs’ are next. It is followed by Chapter 21 exploring the myths and history of spirituality and sex, examining the role of sacred and transpersonal sex today, and concluding by affirming the reconciliation power of transformative sexual experience. Lastly, the chapter on parapsychology

considers psi-conducive stimulus conditions, the psychology of belief in psi, and the relationship between parapsychology and transpersonal psychology.

Part V, the largest section with 10 chapters, takes on “Transpersonal Approaches to Transformation, Healing and Wellness.” Chapter 23 offers a transpersonal and clinical perspective on non-ordinary states of consciousness as they relate to mental health, including pathologizing spirituality, transcending egoic boundaries, diversity issues, spiritual emergency, differential diagnosis, and treatment. The “Meditation” chapter, with over 200 references, covers empirical research and future directions, and recognizes that transpersonal psychology played a pivotal role in making meditation accessible to Western psychology. The difference between Chapter 19’s discussion of psychedelic experiences and Chapter 25’s focus on psychedelics is the latter’s emphasis on cultural context, psychobiology, various therapies and wider implications. Next, “Transpersonal Dimensions of Somatic Therapies,” a partly personal narrative, weaves specific practices and somatic systems together with larger social, ecological and transpersonal considerations.

Continuing in Part V, Chapter 27, “Hypnosis and Transpersonal Psychology,” recounts the haphazard historical development of hypnosis, and takes “A transpersonal look” at clinical hypnosis, and in particular the Ericksonian, socio-cognitive, and medical/health traditions. The connections to transpersonal psychology are also explored in this advocacy piece, which, oddly, provides no definition of hypnosis (one can be found in Chapter 6, p. 131). An empirical approach opens the next chapter, on “Dreaming,” a brief but strong review of related states of consciousness, transformational aspects, purposes and functions, phenomenological research, and dream understanding and practices. “Expressive and Creative Arts Therapies,” Chapter 29, clarifies the distinctions between them, examines their benefit and supportive research, considers epistemological issues (e.g., “... healing on multiple levels from various way of knowing”) and then briefly outlines the major therapies: art, dance/movement, drama, psychodrama, and music. Chapter 30 reviews 9 psychospiritual integrative practices, examining one (Psychospiritual Integrative Therapy) in depth, and concludes with many recommended research options. The “Diamond Approach,” described as a modern Western teaching of human development and as a spiritual path living a life engaged with the world, is presented in some detail, and then assessed in Chapter 31. The last chapter in Part V is “Transpersonal Psychotherapies.” It stresses the essential role of consciousness, the special role for spirituality, offers an explanatory framework for the process, considers identity and development, and discusses relevant research and future trends.

Part VI, the final section of this most useful resource, relates transpersonal psychology to a wide range of disciplines and perspectives. It opens with “Ecopsychology” in Chapter 33, presenting its history, core themes, and practices, followed by a consideration of related transpersonal dimensions, e.g., “... realizing the natural world as a portal to the transpersonal” (p. 608). Chapter 34, “Feminist and Cultural Contributions to Transpersonal Psychology,” is concerned with the lack of integration of spiritual perspectives in

feminist practices and explores the intersection of transpersonalism and womanism. It also speaks to a transpersonal relinking of mind-body-spirit, and seeks a more inclusive cultural, philosophical and methodological approach to research and theory building.

The sub-title of Chapter 35, “The Emergence of Transpersonal Social Engagement” (TSE), indicates the early stage of work in this form of inquiry and action connecting psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions and then extending them from an individual focus to collective applications. This is a ‘big picture’ challenge to the field, and I came away from this on-target discussion with the impression that TSE could be an access-bridge between global issues in general and most of the content areas discussed in this *Handbook*. The next chapter is “Modern Miracles from Ancient Medicine,” focusing on ‘transpersonal medicine’ and ‘transformative moments.’ The emphasis is on “... *healing from beyond the self*” (p. 641). Although there are some individual case examples with outcome observations and several reports of successful healing treatments with multiple patients, there is no discussion of placebo processes and few alternative explanations for the positive treatment results claimed. This important topic area needs more development than is reported in this anecdotally styled, mostly personal narrative.

Chapter 37 returns to the arts, not as therapy per se, but as a primary mode to access transpersonal and transcendent realms. It explores science, language and the arts, how artists experience the transpersonal, the social-cultural availability of art, and the ways a transpersonal art can be regained as everyday experience. The author’s language is creative, combining a poetic-activist temperament with a minimum of art jargon, and asserts a transpersonal/social values context for art, broadly defined. Obviously there is a wider, massive literature on the religious-spiritual-transcendental aspects of art that cannot be included in a brief piece, but I would add here *Transpersonal Images*, the 1983 color-plate catalogue from the 8th International Conference of the International Transpersonal Association. Especially relevant is the exhibition essay by Roger Lipsey (1983), who later published the pioneering volume, *An art of our own: The spiritual in twentieth century art* (Lipsey, 1997).

The *Handbook’s* final chapter, 38, is not a summary or concluding essay but an affirming view of “Transpersonal Education,” which is defined as, “... including *transpersonal content* and *qualities* that involve the *process and practice* through which these qualities might be discovered or re-discovered, identified, cultivated, integrated and applied ...” (p. 671). The text explores the differences between transpersonal psychology, transformative education, spiritual education and transpersonal education. It explores cross-cultural worldviews, examines two transpersonal schools/institutes, looks at connections to conventional classrooms, and includes the way of self-education.

This generously documented *Handbook* also provides an Appendix listing “Transpersonal Journals, Doctoral-Granting Schools Offering Transpersonal Programs, and Transpersonal Organizations,” with capsule descriptions of each. One correction in the entry for *JTP: The Journal* was founded [in 1969] followed

by the development of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology in 1972 (not vice versa). Also, the book overall has some typographical errors and some minor language awkwardness, most of which, however, can be easily understood. The index is helpful but not sufficiently detailed, and the figure and table numbers appear among the page numbers in the index and are difficult to find, and would have been more usefully rendered as separate listings.

I had a strong *de ja vu* experience reading Chapter 5. It appears that Grof's chapter is quite similar to his article (with a nearly identical title) in *JTP* 2012, No. 2 (Grof, 2012), which the *Handbook* does not note or cite. There are some changes. There is barely a mention of Wilber in the 2012 article, but a pronounced shift to an elaborate comparison of Wilber's 1980 schema with Grof's developmental theory in the *Handbook*. A psychiatric training incident not in the article is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Overall, some article references are dropped and others are added in the *Handbook*. Readers unaware of the original article might not know of an apparent shift in Grof's thinking or sources. The *Handbook* could have followed the example of its acknowledgement for Chapter 15, p. 296 (the only such acknowledgement in 38 chapters), where the note acknowledges that chapter's material as an "adaptation of," is "based upon" and, finally, is a "version of" a paper that was previously published. For whatever reason, in the case of the Grof material in Chapter 5, the editors or publisher missed an opportunity to connect some significant literature of the field.

I was curious about the frequency of references in the entire book for each of the 8 periodicals listed as Transpersonal Journals. A quick tabulation rendered as percentages showed the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* = 13%; *Journal of Consciousness Studies* = 9%; *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* = 10%; *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* = 45%; *Journal of Transpersonal Research* = 1%; *Revision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation* = 4%; *The Humanistic Psychologist* = 16%; *Transpersonal Psychology Review* = 2%. These data suggest that although the *JHP* has published for 53 years, *JTP*'s 45 volume years concentrating on the field may account for its high reference count.

I was also interested in the in the recency of all references, simply counting all, of any medium, with dates from the 19th century through 2002 (about 160 years), and those with dates of 2003 or later (the ten years prior to the book's publication). The percentages are 55% through 2002 and 45% the last ten years. This may indicate authors' preference for a growing current literature, and its growing wider availability.

Regarding the availability of the *Handbook* itself, yes, this is *the* essential compendium for the field, and yes it *is* expensive. However, any library serious about its psychology holdings, and perhaps some individuals, should find a way to have it. For anyone really involved in transpersonal psychology or transpersonal studies, access to this landmark resource may be a necessity.

One of the limitations for any handbook attempting to cover a wide literature is the necessity to write in summary style, condensing explanations, descriptions

and data, and sometimes only mentioning important and richly developed sources. To illustrate, in Chapter 35, “Widening Circles,” the style is scholarly, bringing up in a moderate tone a wide range of transpersonal social engagement (TSE) issues. The content, however, deals directly with major concerns such as global crises, spiritual narcissism, sacred activism, and other crucial contemporary issues, including liberation psychologies. The discussion of this latter topic relies on the work of Watkins and Shulman (2010) and their soundly argued advocacy for “... peaceful, just, and ecologically vibrant communities that support psychological well-being” (p. 10). Many other chapters are also quick summary guides to a deep and essential literature, which, in most cases, is well worth digging into.

Yet, even with coverage as broad as this *Handbook's*, the editors acknowledge some gaps. These include the relationship between transpersonal psychology and numerous religious traditions with transpersonal insights; the transcendentalist and syncretistic traditions, e.g., theosophy; various organizational and management systems. Perhaps the most serious omission is not probing the problem of misuse of transpersonal knowledge. Examples the editors recognize are cases of guru abuse, spiritual bypass, and totalitarian evil. It may come as a surprise to some individuals and groups with transpersonal interests that knowledge of this dimension of human experience, like any other science or discipline, can be used for good or ill. This reality necessarily raises the inevitable question: What values and purposes are to be pursued, what *is* the good?

When I was asked to review this volume I did not know that reading through it would refresh so much of my experience from the founding years and the decades that followed. I can now see how theorizing in the field has tended to move from an almost exclusively vertically organized model (higher or deeper consciousness, hierarchical levels of development, ascending or descending evolution, etc.) to, in recent years, a more mixed model that includes horizontal vectors (broader or wider consciousness, concentric nested development, expanding or contracting dynamics). This seems to me a healthy shift, more inclusive of diverse cultures, more accommodating of both individual and group development, with a more grounded real-world connection. Also I see that the *empirical* approach to transpersonal phenomena, set out in *JTP* in 1969 (Sutich, 1969a), is still likely to be the most productive and credible way to advance the field. It has also been a relief to see that well informed ‘in-house’ criticism of some aspects of transpersonal psychology also offers alternatives. For example, I found author Walach’s proposal, in Chapter 5, to link transpersonal psychology to a “science and culture of consciousness” an intriguing possible option to give new direction to the field.

At the beginning of this book the editors set out their goals. Have they accomplished them?

Returning to their purposes listed at the opening of this review, first it seems they have certainly clarified and promoted the worth of transpersonal psychology, at the same time acknowledging its current limitations and incompleteness. They have also advanced the field by conducting extensive

literature research to synthesize a representative definitional statement, as quoted above previously. They wisely offer it as “one such attempt” with various heuristic advantages, rather than as a final ideological position. This is consistent with the original intent of the founding *JTP* editor, who in the first issue, carefully outlined his view of,

... the role of definitions and statements of purpose in relation to the historical emergence of new forces in psychology. Definitions and statements of purpose are understood to be formulations subject to change as required by the development of objective living conditions, relationships, forces, etc. that they may represent. (Sutich, 1969b)

Stated another way, as a field or discipline evolves so may its definition.

Finally, does the *Handbook* well reflect many of the facets of the area? This field is a rough-cut jewel to be sure, with many odd-angled facets, and the book’s many authors consider the vast majority of them. Although some chapters handle the summarizing overview style better than others a few seem somewhat underdeveloped. However, as a whole, I found that the *Handbook* not only brings forward the range and complexity of the field, but it does so in a generally expansive and encouraging voice that points toward a promising future for a field that could be on the way to becoming a discipline.

There are, it may be argued, additional facets that should be examined. There could be more emphasis on specialized contemporary transpersonally influenced practices (e.g., eclectic monasticism, eco-pilgrimage, high-risk professional service); more focus on the varieties of the experience of aging, illness and death (not just NDE’s, EHE’s, or dramatic rarities); more on the values and ethical aspects of living by various transpersonal identifications (e.g., the psychology of compassion as practiced in secular, spiritual, or religious paths); more attention to transpersonal phenomena arising out of trauma, violence, disasters, deprivation, epidemics, war, and our attempts to survive, mitigate or transcend them. To bring a transpersonal focus to these concerns is to recognize that “at all levels and in all societies, transpersonal experiences and beliefs can affect human relationships, life philosophies, reactions to death and bereavement, education, and responses to economic hardship and natural disasters” and that “transpersonal concerns, experiences and beliefs have arguably been one of the most potent influences upon human behaviour throughout history” (Fontana & Slack, 1996)¹.

Clearly transpersonal psychology has grown and been refined by focusing on the nature of historical and modern consciousness, as it is found in its existing individual, social, environmental or cultural contexts. But new conditions are being created every day, and it may be time for the field to face and begin to deal with the rapidly approaching future of new scientific, technological, and cultural conditions. I refer to how human consciousness and its transpersonal dimensions may be affected by artificial intelligence, cyber-human interfaces, brain plasticity alterations, neurocognitive training, virtual reality systems, surgical and pharmacological interventions, genetic modifications, the world-wide web,

increasing public and private surveillance, and others. For example should we view the internet as “*the nervous system of the 21st century*” [italic in the original] (Doctorow, 2014), or expect that “the greatest benefit of the arrival of artificial intelligence is that AIs will help define humanity” (Kelly, 2014)? Can we completely dismiss self-contradicting notions such as ‘spiritual machines’ or ‘meditating robots’? What are the limits of human invention and creativity? What are the ultimate capacities of the human psyche and of transpersonal consciousness?

If this field can anticipate how human awareness and its culture may be impacted by these and other such discoveries, inventions, and practices it may be able to contribute profoundly to what humanity can be in the era that awaits us. Is this too speculative? Too far into the future? Too ‘sci-fi’? Hardly. Most of these technologies or practices exist today and are developing in capability and complexity. And they are emerging in a world that is struggling with a growing and painful recognition of its potentialities, its conflicts, and its limitations. Any or all of these factors may shape the evolving transpersonal field, and any coming “science and culture of consciousness.” Given what can be seen from where we are today, it seems our field is more likely to have a future *if it engages* the future that is arising all around us.

NOTE

¹These statements are excerpts from “The need for transpersonal psychology,” an article that provided the basis for the rationale that led to the successful formation of the Transpersonal Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society in 1996. The authors presented a strong call for the formal recognition of a broadly historical, culturally diverse, globally active, and scientifically based transpersonal psychology. Their forward looking and thoughtful argument may be even more relevant nearly 20 years later.

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The Editors

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The Reviewer

Miles A. Vich, M.A., D.H.L. (hon.) has served in various roles, 1962–1999, in the fields of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, including Editor of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, as a founding Board member of the Transpersonal Institute, as Editor of *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and Executive Director of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology. Since retiring in 2000 he has archived many transpersonal documents in the ITP (now Sofia University) Library, Palo Alto, California, and many humanistic era documents in the University of California, Davidson Library, Santa Barbara. He serves on the Board of Editors of *JTP* where he is an occasional contributor. He is also pursuing a longstanding interest in art.

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