

handbook for practitioners. Existential therapists may find it of academic interest but will find little to inform or challenge their work with clients.

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The Transpersonal: Spirituality in Psychotherapy and Counselling

John Rowan. (2005). London: Routledge.

The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the source of all true art and science

(Einstein, A. In Neher, A., 1980)

This is a fascinating, wide-ranging, radical book of 287 pages, not including a very respectable 17 page bibliography, and a 7 page name index. John Rowan is one of the original pioneers of transpersonal psychology in the UK, providing here an essential overview to the multitude of guides of the imagined, and imaginal world of spirituality, and personal mythology. The book is clearly structured into three sections, 'Being', 'Doing' and 'Knowing' with a separate introduction dedicated to landmark contributions to the spectrum of consciousness. Inevitably, at some point those interested in psychotherapy and counselling will question what their model of the divine will be, and in this volume Rowan, naturally, as an intellectual has looked in all the relevant books. At times though it may seem that the

only thing in common with New Age books is that they are all suitable for gullible people. However, the advanced theory outlined in this book shows there is something vital, to be seriously considered, and not dismissed in any cavalier way.

As Beloff states, *‘Even though the pursuit of knowledge requires no ulterior justification, it is always permissible to ask of any given enterprise what prospects it can offer for the betterment of human life’* (Beloff, J., 1988).

Following the introduction, the author examines seven trailblazers who have made crucial contributions to the foundations of the transpersonal field: William James, Dane Rudhyar, Carl Gustav Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Stanislav Grof, Abraham Maslow, and Arnold Mindell. The origin of the term ‘transpersonal psychology’ was coined in 1968 by a group of psychologists and psychiatrists who planned a new journal, and had to decide what to call it. By the next year, in 1969, transpersonal psychology was taken up internationally in various countries, dedicated to making sense of the farther reaches of human nature.

Ken Wilber, an American living in Colorado famously mapped out the levels of consciousness, and adapted it for use in counselling and psychotherapy. Throughout the book the ‘Centaur’ level is often referred to. This being, the total emergence of the real, authentic self, and a consequent increase in spontaneity and autonomy. Wilber also was interested in the process of transition from one stage to another. He states that two dimensions are necessary to breakthrough – firstly a creative drive, and then a desire to let go. With the abandonment of our preconceptions of our identity, we can fall into infinity. Perhaps, the most important level of being is the ‘Subtle’, when we are in contact with our higher transpersonal self, a divine representation of the sacred, the superconsciousness, that Sandie Gustus, (2011), has written about very imaginatively: *‘Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one’*, (Einstein, A. In Gustus, S., 2011). Finally, Wilber writes about the ‘Causal’ level as having boundless radiance, and, a deeper experience of compassion. All of these qualities are sketched out in greater detail, within Rowan’s text, in the form of maps and tables that are well presented, and straightforward to understand. It is interesting to note even therapies that are not transpersonal have been included, and the author notes,

It is very important, of course, for a person going through this sort of thing not to be incarcerated in a mental hospital, so easy to get into and so hard to get out of

(p102)

An important detail to keep in mind, as we can be at times propelled to the active imagination, of the ‘Subtle’ region, often with no preparation.

Others may have been introduced to this level of consciousness via shamanism, the Western Mysteries, Tantra, Wicca, the Kabbalah and so forth. This is the imaginal world we enter into when we dream, retell stories, see visions, or hear internal music, and is known as the *mundus imaginalis*, or mythopoetic, mystical active imagination. Consciousness is forever interfering, correcting and negating psychic processes in an uncanny transpersonal way, often called symbol drama. Symbol systems, such as astrology, the tarot, the I Ching, the runes, the chakras, and deities, can also help a client deal with things that are just on the borders of consciousness. They represent a set of images which can help to open up the world of soul.

In fact, Lukoff suggests a new diagnostic category, '*Psychotic with Mystical Features*', or the low risk '*Mystical Experiences with Psychotic Features*'. At times the client can embody part of the personality of the therapist, which might help stabilize ego strength, and reinforce life skills. This is recognition that distancing is not always useful, and it is possible to go beyond empathy, into what is known as 'linking', into one melded consciousness. Such a therapeutic relationship may usefully be regarded as religious, or mystical; a realm outside normal time, of the imaginative subtle body. One's attention flowing through the heart, making a connection without violating the soul. We are *not* lost in the other, as in fusion, but we are found. Sometimes it is only our defences that do not allow us to enjoy such healing, mystical experiences emanating from the therapist. Although, creative conflict and the experience of novelty and otherness is healthy, as pathological confluence is to be avoided, and the honeymoon period of the process does not have to be insecure generally speaking. The phrase is valuable, '*You alone can do it, but you don't have to do it alone*'; as to join the human race, in terms of therapy, one needs to be confident, assertive, and to be able to communicate in an intelligent manner. Changes will go on happening long after the sessions have ceased. For the way to such liberation, to integration, to metamorphosis, to the most valued interpersonal human relations, is through the horror, which the ordinary person tries to avoid. The soul in all its glory, is the emergence of a new person. There is now a worldwide network of therapists specialising in such states of spiritual emergency, and those involved in the transpersonal may be able to help as well. In fact, there is a particular role for the transpersonal therapist in the field of cross-cultural work, due to the increased respect for all religious experience. Their experience of the 'Subtle' realms, and the transformations of consciousness, will always stand them in good stead, *even if the client is very different from the host culture*. Therapy can be a huge realm of discovery including self-discovery, if we will let it be so.

Meditation is a key activity in this area of work. 'The Way of Forms', is any way of working which involves an object: a mantra, a yantra, a mudra, a bija, a kasina, a symbol, or something else. Very often the symbols

chosen represent some form of aspiration, as in Bhakti yoga. The strong structure of leadership, and orthodox adherence socially to a guru, is usual in this instance. ‘*States are free, stages have to be earned*’. Although, if we want to work genuinely transpersonally we have to question all the assumptions of fixed boundaries. Man is only potentially good, and that is where the defect of his nature lies. However, the zenith of transpersonal achievement would be Absolute Consciousness. Rowan concludes that perhaps with the transpersonal it’s best to live in the mystery and admit that sometimes in the end you don’t know.

This book clearly achieves its goal of delivering a total overview of radical transpersonal psychotherapy. The work is very well researched and is written in a scholarly academic style, that is straightforward to understand. So, I can strongly recommend this volume to both the existential psychotherapist, and to the general public. For the existential practitioner this would be a valuable book, informing the reader of the most important psychical models, and dynamics for optimal functioning in their psychotherapeutic practice. In presenting the second edition of this work, Rowan has made a very useful contribution to the world of psychology.

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Publications received for review

The following publications have been received for possible review. People who wish to be included in the list of book reviewers for Existential Analysis for these or other publications are requested to e-mail the Book Reviews Editor Martin Adams at adamsmc@regents.ac.uk

- Barker, M. (2012). *Rewriting the Rules: An Integrative Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships*. London: Routledge.
- Bazzano, M. (2012). *Spectre of the Stranger: Towards a Phenomenology of Hospitality*. Eastbourne: Sussex.
- Bentall, R. (2010). *Doctoring the Mind: Why Psychiatric Treatments Fail*. London: Penguin.