

Our First Handbook!

Review of:

The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology¹

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Transpersonal psychology has its first real handbook after more than 40 years of existence, bringing it a step further in its efforts to be recognized as veritable academic subject! With the Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology, the editors make a first attempt to unite the diversity of transpersonal psychologies in a canonical overview. As Stanley Krippner, one of the doyens of this psychology, states in his preface, the editors were able to unite here not only some of the known celebrities but to present also a new generation of transpersonal psychologists. The handbook therefore is not a farewell gift from the founding fathers and mothers, being mostly in the retirement age by now, who – like Charles Tart, Stan Grof, David Lukoff, or James Fadiman – also participated here or – as Stanley Krippner and Frances Vaughan – were invited to comments or statements. It is a contemporary overview of the current position of a transpersonal psychology within the academic landscape, a psychology of which is still not entirely clear whether it should be regarded as a psychological "school", a cultural "movement" or a professional discipline. Therefore, the first could also be the last major monograph of transpersonal psychology. At least the editors, Harris L. Friedman and Glenn Hartelius, open up this area of conflict at the beginning: even the naming of transpersonal psychology is questionable and gets in distress in the 21st Century since the concept of spirituality got a far greater popularity as opposed to the "transpersonal", never being totally accepted by a majority.

¹ Harris L. Friedman & Glenn Hartelius (Ed.) (2013): The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Accordingly, the fundamental questions that will be discussed in the first part, touch much more the basics and are put much more open-ended than in the handbooks of long established disciplines: Can a valid definition of transpersonal psychology be found empirically (Hartelius, Rothe and Roy)²? Can something be stated about its actual unique features based on its historical development (Daniels)³? Or does it have to come out of the closet on its spiritual side (Hartelius, Friedman and Pappas)⁴? Hartelius, Rothe and Roy, therefore in the first chapter broach the issue of giving transpersonal psychology an identity, to carry out a "rebranding", enabling it to act as a "more effective and recognized player" in the broad cultural movement of new spirituality, personal self-realization and environmental sustainability. The authors try to achieve this mainly by a precise, clear-cut determination of transpersonal compared to other psychologies. Michael Daniels in his concise historical opens an overview of a three-dimensional space in which transpersonal psychology can be situated: as the "ascending" psychology towards transcendence or super-consciousness, as the "descending" psychology towards the subconscious of depth psychology, and as an "extensive" psychology towards nature and fellow beings. He urgently calls not only for an integration of all three directions, but also a transpersonal psychology with relevance for real life, which is not restricted to narcissistically motivated theoretical debates, but keeps itself fresh in dialogue, in empirical research, in the female perspective, and in undogmatic curiosity. And Hartelius, Friedman and Pappas decidedly contradict the assertion the designation as "transpersonal" could be relabelled in "spiritual" without any loss of meaning.

This collection of different texts is rightly called a handbook, because it provides an excellent opportunity to get to know transpersonal psychology in its diversity. So some grand old man of the subject are presented in the second, theoretical part: While Stanislav Grof gives a concise summary of his own, theoretically elaborated perspective on archetypal and other "holotropic" states of consciousness, Albert Garcia-Romeau and Charles Tart, with his habitually wide perspective, introduce in an encyclopaedically concise manner into the history and presence of consciousness research in general. In addition, other possible theoretical approaches of transpersonal psychologies are here explained: Jungian psychology (Alan Vaughan), integral psychology in the succession of Aurobindo

² Hartelius, Glenn; Rothe, Geffen & Roy, Paul: *A brand from the burning: Defining transpersonal psychology*. In: Handbook, 3-23

³ Daniels, Michael: *Traditional roots, history, and evolution of the transpersonal perspective*. In: Handbook, 23-43

⁴ Hartelius, Glenn; Friedman, Harris & Pappas, James: *The calling to a spiritual psychology: Should transpersonal psychology convert?* In: Handbook, 44-61

(Brant Cortright), Wilber's approach (Allan Combs), or something that Jorge Ferrer (together with Glenn Hartelius) calls "Participatory Philosophy" and is contrasting in his essay with *philosophia perennis*⁵ as the other, common philosophical foundation of transpersonal theory. In the spirit of romantic philosophy, both authors postulate that "mind and nature necessarily are woven of the same fabric"⁶. Thus, they distinguish themselves from theorists such as Wilber from, whom they attest a Cartesian mind-matter dualism. Instead, they emphasize that "consciousness some form goes all the way down to the basic materials of physicality"⁷.

In both this second and the third, methodological part, one essay deals with neuroscience, being of utmost importance today, in its implications for Transpersonal Psychology and with the possibilities of their mutual integration. In the first essay, Les Lancaster, Chair of the Transpersonal Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society, presents a compelling model that assigns neuroscience the lowest place in a chain of superordinate interpretive systems. As neuroscience research can produce only the material correlates of states of consciousness and not its (causal) explanation, it must be embedded in neuropsychological, psychological (in Lancaster's words: "psychodynamic") and spiritual models of explaining the world in subsequent steps of interpretation. Charles Laughlin and Adam rock, however, adhere to a naive materialist causal reductionism ("consciousness is a function of the internal organization of the brain"⁸) and use a large part of their article to emphasize the role Laughlin played in the creation of a theory of knowledge that combines neuroscientific third-person research with phenomenological first-person perspective, and which by him – before Francisco Varela used that term – was christened "neurophenomenology". Rosemarie Anderson and William Braud provide a good overview of quantitative, qualitative, combined and specific transpersonal research methods: *Intuitive Inquiry*, *Integral Inquiry* and *Organic Inquiry* are such methodologies, all of which pay special attention to the state of consciousness of the researcher and his own inner process. Apart from that, the methods section is entirely focused on the concern of the editor, Harris Friedman, to establish transpersonal research as a part of scientific psychology. Therefore, philosophical and qualitative research approaches do not occur in this part (except for the just mentioned).

⁵ The assumption that there was one single and identical truth behind all different models of explaining the world and all different (in this case spiritual) traditions. This assumption is hold true among others by the famous organizer of global spiritual knowledge, Ken Wilber.

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⁷ 195

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Nevertheless, Friedman⁹ is quite right when he favours empirical research at a mid range level including quantitative methods. If he claims, however, transpersonal psychology must give up its focus on transcendence in order to carry out such research, it remains unclear whether it is not possible to comprehend transcendence just as such a theory construct that he is calling for.¹⁰ That the linguistic coincidence of “science” as the whole academic endeavour and “science” as the natural sciences in English (but not so in German) could be a trap, in which Friedman is stepping, without meaning to, becomes perhaps most evident when he says: “Science can only deal with the natural and physical”¹¹. That there is a real science beyond the natural and physical (i.e., the material and sensual world), that a science of the inner world can exist as well, is controversial only as long as you continue to conceive psychology in terms of the prevailing paradigm of the 20th Century as the science of all externally measurable.¹²

Genie Palmer and Arthur Hastings open the fourth part, reporting about extraordinary, transpersonal experiences, with an introductory overview. Like no other, the appreciative handling of this subject accounts for the specificity of transpersonal psychology. We just learn concisely of examples of phenomena, explanatory approaches, and empirical research on exceptional human experiences (EHEs) – too concise and too exemplary, one might say, given the importance of this issue for Transpersonal Psychology. We wonder also that Palmer and Hastings let begin the whole transpersonal research on EHEs with the introduction of the concept by the U.S. citizen Rhea White in 1993, completely ignoring, for example, the work of the British biologist Alister Hardy and his Welsh Alister Hardy Society (AHS) that perform very similar research and data collections since at least 1970. Although it must be admitted that the AHS behaves very elitist with a certain Welsh stubbornness and sees itself by no means be-

⁹ *The role of science in Transpersonal Psychology*. In: Handbook, 300-311

¹⁰ Cf. Harnack, Edgar W. (2011): Investigating God Instead of Proving God. Methodological Preliminaries of Transcendental Research. *Journal for Spirituality and Transcendental Psychology* 1 (1), 120-136.

¹¹ Friedman l.c., 307

¹² In my view, Friedman contradicts himself writing, „...what occurs within and outside the skin is within the purview of science. [...] Inner data can be obtained through phenomenological methods...” and on the other hand: “To be seen as empirical data, all that is required is that information be amenable [...] to the senses...” (S. 309). Moreover, the fact that he does not understand transcendence as a construct generating empirical effects (comparable to the construct of “intelligence”) leads to rejecting the empirical basis of the knowledge of the transcendent (“I am not even comfortable calling so-called transcendent experiences an ‘experience’”), while, of course, it is not possible to speak about “transcendent experiences” (direct experience of transcendence as an object) but only about “transcendental experiences” (referring to the construct of transcendence); cf. Ruschmann, Eckhart (2011): Transcending towards Transcendence. In: *Implicit Religion*, 14 (4), 421-432

longing to a transpersonal movement, one can not exactly say Rhea White's EHE Network dealt less "exclusive" with researchers that do not belong to them (as the author himself has experienced).

Yet another drawback becomes clear when reading further in this fourth part, focusing on experience: While it speaks *in extenso* of near-death experiences, psychedelic (i.e., substance-induced) and sexual extraordinary experiences, all other areas of phenomena are not described here. Although the courage to this particular selection must be honoured, it appears somewhat arbitrary and not representative. In particular, one of the core issues of transpersonal psychological counselling practice, namely "spiritual emergencies" are treated only one page long (425f.). Major syndromes of severe crises of spiritual processes, such as Kundalini crisis, are missing completely in the index and are practically not addressed. Apparently, the editors wanted to set an example that transpersonal psychology, in the spirit of Maslow, may deal with the positive that can arise from extraordinary experience, and the difficult, treatment and supervision requiring processes are only a small peripheral area.

"Transpersonal approaches to transformation, healing, and wellness" are treated in the fifth part. The structure of the chapter is surprising, since the classical practical field of transpersonal psychologists – psychotherapy and counselling – is not represented as an overview. After an introductory article by Jakob Kaminker and David Lukoff about mental health and illness from a transpersonal perspective nine specific areas are highlighted: meditation, the use of psychedelic substances, somatic therapies, hypnosis, dreams, art therapy, psychospiritual integrative practices, the Diamond way according to Almaas and a specific methodology for transpersonal psychotherapy, presented by Vitor Rodrigues (with Harris Friedman), former President of the European Transpersonal Association (EUROTAS). What can we learn about the views of the editors, if you compare this structure, for example, with the classic "Transpersonal Psychotherapy" by Seymour Boorstein¹³? The significance of different therapeutic schools in combination with transpersonal perspectives for the editors – in contrast to Boorstein – is no longer an issue. Transpersonal Psychology is not a therapy method and not a collection of such methods, they apparently want to say. It is a movement within which psychotherapy and counselling make up only a small part of the area, and this can be connect freely with different elements (see the list), which, on the other hand, can also stand for themselves. According to the authors of the only chapter discussing transpersonal psychotherapy,¹⁴ how-

¹³ Boorstein, Seymour (Ed.) (1980): *Transpersonal Psychotherapy*. Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books.

¹⁴ Rodrigues, Vitor & Friedman, Harris: *Transpersonal psychotherapies*. In: Handbook, 580-594

ever, it gets its specific imprint by three determining factors: particular attention to the state of consciousness; the special role of spirituality; and the view that identity is variable and has to be included in personal development.

In the last part, some transpersonal research areas are mentioned: Ecopsychology, feminist and cultural contributions, socially engaged transpersonal psychology, transpersonal medicine, transpersonal perspectives on the arts, and transpersonal education. Here, it is clear again that the volume understands Transpersonal Psychology not only as an academic discipline in the shade of more established subjects, but as a broad movement, which – similar to humanistic psychology in the 1960/70s – can impact on many areas of society. It is only logical and satisfying for the author to note that it is seen, sporadically, that transpersonal thinking has to deal with the psychological background of the ecological disaster of our time, because the horizontal connectedness of transpersonal thinking to other beings and the vertical connection to the transcendent both can not do without respecting the natural world (as co-creation, as an expression of the Divine etc.).¹⁵ Similarly, it is logical and beautiful when it is stated here, that transpersonal thinking must produce an attitude of diverse social engagement.¹⁶

Overall, the handbook provides a quite successful, colourful overview of issues and trends in Transpersonal Psychology. It shows why Transpersonal Psychology, despite all the prophecies of doom did not die out at the same time as the hippie movement, but is in the best of health, because it has in view that part of the human potential that other psychologies consider as too little tangible to spooky and much easier to ignore than to take seriously. But it is this part of humanity, "the Transpersonal" (which here should not be called "spiritual"), which elevates us above our material existence. What regards the question of the relationship of a contemporary Transpersonal Psychology to spirituality, it should be noted that the former, according to its self-definition in this handbook, deals with spirituality *in the broadest sense*¹⁷ only.

As Michael Daniels¹⁸ states unequivocally, the milieu of humanistic psychologists Maslow and Rogers, in which the transpersonal movement arose, had not at all a personal spiritual orientation. Transpersonal psychology emerged out of a humanistic worldly oriented concern and their relationship to the concept of

¹⁵ Davis, John V. & Canty, Jeanine M.: *Ecopsychology and transpersonal psychology*. In: Handbook, 597-611

¹⁶ Rothberg, Donald & Coder, Katherine E.: *The emergence of transpersonal social engagement*. In: Handbook, 626-639

¹⁷ „A broader version of spirituality“. In: Handbook, Hartelius, Friedman und Pappas, l.c., 51.

¹⁸ *Traditional Roots, History, and Evolution of the Transpersonal Perspective*. In: Handbook, 23-43

transcendence has remained unclear. Hartelius, Rothe and Roy¹⁹ empirically assert that three different perspectives characterize Transpersonal Psychology: (1) Transpersonal Psychology is the psychology of a *Self expanding* its limitations to include others and nature and to go beyond space and time; (2) it is a *holistic psychology*, the multi-disciplinary psychology of the whole person, including their spiritual and social interests and the global ecosystem; and (3) it is the *psychology of transformative processes* within a cosmic whole striving towards creative self-expression. Hartelius, Friedman and Pappas²⁰ conclude: "These themes are highly consistent with prominent features of an interconnected and secular spirituality, but quite different from a version of spirituality that is intimately connected with any particular religious tradition".

The distinction between transpersonal psychology and *transcendental* psychology, as it appears in the naming of the *Journal of Spirituality and Transcendental Psychology*, aims precisely at this difference: Transcendental psychology should be understood as a psychology closely related to Transpersonal Psychology, but specifically dealing with the empirical Transcendent (as the object of religious traditions) and the development of individuals to this aim – not a self-expansion, wholeness, and transformation in an arbitrary sense, as transpersonal psychology à la Hartelius / Friedman sees itself; as a psychology that (because of its genuinely religious object) includes practical and theoretical models of all religions and does not – as this form of transpersonal psychology – explicitly exclude them. Hartelius', Rothe's and Roy's warning of a psychology in the service of a specific religious or occult group is of course to be taken serious, and a serious spiritual psychology must never become an *ancilla theologiae*²¹ (which theology ever), but must not only be *trans-personal*, but also *trans-religious*. At the same time, against the reluctance of (mainly) Harris Friedman²², a psychology of the supernatural, of the super-worldly is possible, as long as the concept of science is not unduly limited to certain methodologies and postulated there would be ideologically neutral, paradigm-free research problems, data collections, and interpretations. Only by assuming ideological premises it is possible to investigate exceptional human experiences in a valid and reliable manner phenomenologically or quasi- experimentally, whereby – in contrast to the agnostic comparative religion, to which transpersonal psychology in its rejection of the

¹⁹ Cf. note 2

²⁰ Cf. note 4

²¹ I.e., „the servant of theology“; a middle-age motto for characterizing philosophy or rather all non-theological academic disciplines.

²² E.g., in: *The Role of Science in Transpersonal Psychology*. In: Handbook, 300-311.

transcendence axiom²³ tries to assimilate – the results and conditions of the research change, if it is based on a spiritual world view instead of a materialist. Transpersonal Psychology, this the editors of this handbook have shown, in its current trend follows more and more the trend of the times, which pay homage to a natural and neuroscience research, and in this respect it is simply part of the general social field. If the tendency of the handbook is thus representative of the entire movement, then the thus defined Transpersonal Psychology cannot be reconciled with an untimely and therefore timeless, spiritual in the narrow sense (= transcendental) psychology.

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²³ The indispensable ideological predetermination of the researcher, here turning out for the assumption that a – not at the outset determined – transcendence exists; and that this can be experienced as much as it is relevant for human experience in its consequences (cf. the concept of constructs in psychology and the concept of empirical religion of William James).