

THE CONTINUING GROWTH OF ABRAHAM MASLOW: FROM HUMANISTIC
TO TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Starting around the end of World War II Abraham Maslow's growth as a psychologist became focused first on the nature of personality and second the concept of self-actualization. His deepening understanding did not end with the genesis of humanistic psychology in the 1950's. Indeed by the time of humanistic psychology's rise in the 1960's Maslow already felt it was limited. He encountered the same difficulty that had led William James to move beyond the academic psychology of his era. Both reached a point where they acknowledged the reality of something generally termed the spirit and a part of life's experiences that might best be called spiritual. James' journey into the nature of the spirit had been rejected or at least ignored.

However American culture changed radically in the post World War II era. Eugene Taylor (1999) describes it eloquently. The generation born in the years immediately after the end of the war came of age in the 1960's. A minority of them, specifically a minority of those that attended college, rebelled against the cultural norms in which they were raised. Fundamentally they rebelled against a society they perceived as dominated by the pursuit of money and power. They sensed the university was being transformed into an education factory designed to produce middle class white-collar workers obedient to the interests of corporate America. They also saw that racial injustice and discrimination were rife throughout the country. They rebelled and in the process created what came to be called the counter-culture. Like Maslow they were seeking spiritual values. Their general sense was that their parent's religions, like the universities, had become materialistic. Some found new spiritual values in Eastern religions. While the East and West coasts are often associated with the origins of the counter-culture the views of the group were perhaps best articulated by Tom Hayden (1962) in the *Port Huron Statement of the*

Students for a Democratic Society. He was a student at the University of Michigan and Port Huron is the town in Michigan where the statement was written. As the counter-culture was forming Abraham Maslow was changing as a result of his encounters with some of the influences that inspired the students.

Eugene Taylor (1999) saw transpersonal psychology as a fusion of the humanistic with the counter-culture. He believed it really moved folk psychology into high American culture. Taylor makes note that Maslow had been exposed to the thinking of Dewey who was a disciple of William James. He also worked at Columbia University with Edward Thorndike, another James protégée. I do not know what effect that may have had. Maslow's exposure to the counter-culture and especially to Eastern spirituality primarily came a small group called Esalen. I see Maslow's concept of transpersonal psychology coming the same roots as the counter-culture not being a merger with it. Both were influenced by Eastern spirituality, Alan Watts, Timothy Leary and Aldous Huxley among many. Despite common origins the counter-culture and Abraham Maslow went down different paths. The counter-culture rejected many traditional American values and there was a separatist desire to 'drop out.' Maslow agreed with most American values. To cite one obvious example, Maslow endorsed American actions in Vietnam. Among those who entered adulthood in the 1960s opposition to the Vietnam military action probably had broader support than any other issue.

At the same time Maslow's writings were embraced by the counter-culture. The popular perception that transpersonal psychology endorsed the counter-culture's values was a misunderstanding that may well have been a key reason transpersonal psychology failed to be accepted by most Americans. Most American's had attitudes that reflected personal beliefs similar to Maslow's and were opposed to the counter-culture. In 1966 Ronald Reagan was

elected Governor of California. He scathingly attacked the counter-culture in his campaign speeches (Reagan, 1966). Businesses who were not swayed by political cant and who hired Maslow as a consultant were uniformly impressed with the changes his methods fostered (Hoffman, 1988). It is speculative but possible that had Maslow lived into the 1970's his work in American business might have become more widely recognized. It would be rash to speculate what effect this might have had on the broad acceptance of transpersonal psychology. In the event he died in 1970 and the success of his work was overwhelmed by a tidal wave of general revulsion against the counter-culture. Ronald Reagan's election in 1966 was an early indication of a huge political shift in the United States. This political change was partially fueled by attitudes toward the counter-culture.

The important question is what led Abraham Maslow to feel humanistic psychology was inadequate and what key precepts did he embrace that created transpersonal psychology. Edward Hoffman (1988) provides some answers. Maslow was feeling limitations within humanistic psychology in 1960 even as it was being formally launched. If we look back over the entire course of Abraham Maslow's professional career he continually questioned, continually challenged, and continually grew emotionally as well as intellectually. By 1960 his focus was fixed on the meaning of self-actualization and peak experiences. I speculate that his meeting with Viktor Frankl in 1960 may have spurred Maslow's interest in the purely subjective realm of the spiritual. Slowly Maslow became more fascinated with those aspects of human reality that could not then be accounted for scientifically. From Frankl he seems to have discerned that self-actualization cannot occur wholly within. Frankl may have reawakened beliefs about social interaction that Adler had instilled. Maslow also became more aware of self-actualization as a process rather than a fixed state. He retained his belief that self-actualization was a form of

personality development. He began to see it as a means of freeing men from neurotic bonds. Concurrently Eastern thinking specifically Buddhism was influencing him. He began to sense a level of ecstatic, mystical knowledge that he termed 'Being-cognition.' He began to believe in a cosmic unity. He created the concept of a utopian community, Eupsychia, and used the principles of Eupsychia when he consulted for corporations.

Maslow published a book, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, in 1964. The counter-culture found it revolutionary and it became incredibly popular on many college campuses. It was the book that tied his name to the counter-culture. Maslow continued to grow spiritually and by 1965 had reached the point where he felt the need for something beyond humanistic psychology, something he now believed was limited by its sensible and empirical approach. He named his new concept transpersonal psychology and saw it as a 'fourth force' in the history of the field. In his last years he found mainstream science incapable of expressing the true wonder of human existence. He asked one of the questions that continue to plague society to this day: In an era of great material wealth and prosperity, why are people so consistently unhappy. He developed the concept of a Jonah Complex, an escape from greatness, and an unwillingness to develop full potential.

Why has there been substantial resistance in academic psychology to transpersonal psychology as a viable scientific endeavor? The perceived association of Maslow's transpersonal psychology with the counter-culture originally made it anathema to academic psychology. It was said that Maslow had become narcissistic (Hoffman, 1988). Even were this not a factor, Maslow faced the same conditions that had plagued William James decades before (Fancher & Rutherford, 2012). In 1970 as in 1910 the overwhelming majority of academic psychologists refused to accept concepts such as spirituality they could not quantify. As one

example, Howard Gardner (1999) acknowledged the reality of the spiritual realm. He even said he had personally had spiritual experiences. However since he could not demonstrate their existence scientifically he would not consider it a ninth type of intelligence.

I do not know of any serious psychologist or psychiatrist who would maintain there can be any human experience that is not somehow shown within the body. Beginning in the mid 1980's advances in non-invasive tools to examine the human body's internal chemical activities have transformed both medicine and psychology. More and more experiential realities that have been ignored by academic psychologists for lack of observable evidence are finding firm scientific verification in neurological studies. Neurological findings such as mirror neurons are now accepted and taught in general psychology courses. The brain is revealing many of the mysteries of emotions and personality. Much of what neurological explorations have found confirm the validity of the tenants of transpersonal psychology. The American Psychological Association (APA) has accepted qualitative research for publication. Humanist psychology is now an acknowledged division within the APA. As neurological evidence mounts I would expect transpersonal psychology to also be acknowledged as equally valid.

In addition as the 21st Century begins there are portends of huge shifts in scientific thought. Physicists are beginning to seriously consider the effect of quantum mechanics on human consciousness (Rosenblum & Kuttner, 2011). Some cognitive psychologists are looking to physics as a source of deeper knowledge (Blackmore, 2012). Ultimately I anticipate that neurological psychology will be the next great wave in academic psychology supplanting cognitive psychology. Further, neurological psychology will be transformed as our knowledge moves beyond chemistry delving more deeply into the brain on an atomic level and ultimately exploring it on a sub-atomic level.

How will these changes affect transpersonal psychology? Foremost I expect transpersonal psychology will become a fully accepted part of clinical psychology and that advances in neurological psychology and cognitive psychology will not only confirm the value of transpersonal psychology but also yield further insight into the nature of man. In the end I expect there will remain two major branches of psychology. There will still be a division between academic psychology where an objective nomothetic approach will continue and clinical psychology where a subjective idiographic understanding of a human being must prevail. Many therapeutic techniques will continue to proliferate in clinical psychology and transpersonal concepts will become integrated within those techniques. The contributions of academia will provide clinicians with deeper insights. Ultimately I expect the day is near when Carl Jung's (1933) simple statement is accepted scientific fact: "The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances. If there is any reaction, both are transformed." (p. 49).

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