

WILL IN THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF OTTO RANK:
A TRANSPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Experience has taught, however, that as the therapist can only heal in his own way, the patient can only become well in his own way, that is, *whenever* and *however* he wills, which moreover is already clear through his decision to take treatment and often enough through his ending of it.

Otto Rank in *Will Therapy*

Current theory and practice in transpersonal psychology are based upon a variety of historical and contemporary perspectives-humanistic (Sutich, 1969), religious-spiritual (Tart, 1969), esoteric, scientific and socio-cultural (Boucoulalas, 1980). Similar perspectives can also be found in the work of the early pioneers of modern psychology, primarily in the field of psychoanalysis. In an attempt to formulate comprehensive statements about human experience in the largest sense, the early contributors had to grapple with issues which today would be considered transpersonal in nature. Otto Rank represents one of those early psychoanalytic theoreticians whose transpersonal reflections are perhaps second only to those of Carl Jung in scope and importance.

*scope of
Rank's
transpersonal
reflections*

Rank remains one of the most unknown, and little read, of the early Freudians. Often described as brilliant yet neglected, Rank is in part responsible for his own anonymity. Excused by his biographer (Taft, 1958) as moving too quickly, Rank's attempts at setting forth his ideas are often rambling, ponder-

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early
life
history

ous and even contradictory. He is best remembered in the minds of the psychological public for his contribution of the birth trauma, yet he also made significant contributions in other areas which have only in recent years been re-introduced (Becker, 1973; Assagioli, 1975; Sward, 1980). Rank's brilliance, his depth and his vast knowledge and interest in art, literature and mythology, endeared him to Freud. At the age of 19, he joined the Vienna group, serving as its secretary while pursuing a doctoral degree in the humanities under the mentorship of Freud. Freud realized that, for psychoanalysis to have maximum impact, it needed an active relationship with larger historical and cultural perspectives. The "new science" should not merely be a medical specialty but a comprehensive statement on the human condition in every sense. Rank, as the chosen carrier of this responsibility, pursued his task with passion; he completed his dissertation, the first with a psychoanalytic orientation on the Lohengrin Saga, and by 25 had written one of the minor classics of twentieth-century thought: *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (Rank, 1970). In this essay he intertwines psychoanalytic theory with the great myths of heroes, gods and saviors. His bent for the exceptional, the "artist," is revealed as he discusses comparative religious beliefs from various cultures.

estrangement
from
Freud

Rank had been witness to the schisms which eventually separated Freud first from Adler and later from Jung. By the end of the first World War, Rank, too, found himself more and more estranged—initially from rigid Freudian doctrine, and eventually from Freud himself. His book, *The Trauma of Birth* (Rank, 1973), is believed to have been an honest attempt to broaden general psychoanalytic theory. Freud and other orthodox psychoanalysts, however, saw it not as a work proceeding from present theory, but as an attempt to supplant their model. This resulted in a period of separation which was no doubt extremely painful for Rank. In their father-son relationship, Freud had once considered naming Rank guardian of his children's education. But what Rank had perceived as a work proceeding from the base of psychoanalytic theory, Freud took as a direct affront and of this said, "I have forgiven him for the last time."

post-Freudian
years

Rank went on to make a number of significant contributions independently, but never achieved the level of integration or clarity in his work which would lend it to popular exposition. He spent his post-Freudian years in Paris, New York, and just prior to his death had made plans to relocate to California where his biographer, Jessie Taft, felt he would have been able to edit and finalize his life work. His last book, *Beyond Psychology*, published incomplete and posthumously, supports

this idea, for it contains intimations of where he was headed. This obscure genius died at age 55 of an allergic drug reaction just one month after the death of Freud at 83.

Rank's mostly unrecognized connections to contemporary humanistic and transpersonal psychology are profound. He is still best remembered for his concept of birth trauma and its relationship to neurosis (Rank, 1975; Fodor, 1949). Though later expanded to include all psycho-social transitions from a secure matrix into the uncertainty of a new situation, he has remained caricatured as an exponent of a literalized theory which seemed easy to disprove empirically, thereby lending his entire work to dismissal. In recent years, however, what was then ridiculed has now become reality; this literal interpretation has been used to underwrite Leboyer's work on the importance of "birth without violence," and many of the Neo-Reichian and intensive therapies aimed at resolution of birth trauma.

*expansion
a/concept
of birth
trauma*

On a social level, the current investigation of life cycle "crises" or "passages" reflect a Rankian predisposition. These transitions represent normative change from familiar or secure sources of identity into new configurations of personal meaning and social relationship. Each *is* accompanied by predictable psychological dynamics of anxiety, depression and resistance, and each represents a "small birth" from the old which is no longer capable of nurturance, into the new which demands redefinitions of personal meaning. On a symbolic level the birth/death motif as found in cross-cultural myth, ritual, and rites of passage has been identified with self-transformation in a transpersonal sense. This theme, associated with the transformative and transcendent, can be found in a variety of sources (Masters & Houston 1967; Jung 1971, 1975; Orfanedes, 1972, 1973, 1975; Singer, 1973; Assagioli, 1975; Arguelles, 1975; Metzner, 1980).

Rank was the first to experiment with time-limits in psychotherapy—the rationale that this would keep both therapist and client focused, and that a separation planned for was more easily achieved. In such an environment, characteristic today of most humanistic orientations, the client assumed major responsibility for definition of cure and, along with the therapist, assumed a more active role in the process of therapy.

*intcrestin
time-limits
in
psychotherapy*

Carl Rogers, perhaps the most influential non-medical psychotherapist of this century, has said that Rank's thinking was instrumental in the crystallization of some of his own therapeutic methods (Meader & Rogers, 1973). Rogers' sense of organismic self-regulation is foreshadowed in Rank's "will-

*the
"will-to-health"*

to-health" (Sahakian, 1973). According to Rank, it is the will to health which brings a client to therapy. Through distress and relief the will-to-health operates at a conscious and unconscious level to evoke behaviors and resources necessary to actively engage the world in a complete and willful fashion. At a time when psychic determinism was in vogue, this affirmation of inner initiative and potential was more than bold.

Rank's interest in the exceptional stood in juxtaposition to the medical model with its primary focus upon the pathological. Rank felt it was the creative type that was of the greatest interest, hence his description and emphasis upon the "artist" (Rank, 1975). According to Rank the artist is he/she who has turned the inner psychological struggle into an objectified effort in the outer world, and in this process has developed the capacity for unusual usefulness.

*masculine
ideology
and
feminine
psychology*

Rank dealt as well with the now-popular-then-incredible issue of masculine ideology and feminine psychology (Sward, 1980). In an essay which points toward the essence of current feminist perspective, Rank declared that feminine psychology will not, must not, find its expression within the constraints of masculine ideology, but transform cultural expression for both male and female. In this work Rank hinted at the oppression of women through the culturally dominant masculine psychology. In such a model, woman must either submit to the role defined for her by man or act in an independent masculine fashion; in neither case "is she her own self" (Rank, 1958, P: 268).

*the
historical
basis of
psychological
theory*

Finally, Rank was the first to point out the historical basis of psychological theory. Psychology does not reveal truth as much as it parallels the historical truth of an era. Rank saw in the individual personalities of Freud, Jung and Adler the antecedents of their theoretical systems and the perspective they engendered. In this matter, Rank declared the essence of human experience to be beyond psychology. By this he meant that beyond the rational empirical attempts of modern psychology to explain human behavior lay a dimension he classified as "irrational." In reality, this could better have been referred to as extra- non- or trans-rational, a domain transcendent to the purely rational. Rank felt that the danger of burying the irrational under the rhetoric of rational theorizing meant dismissing the vitality the irrational held for the human spirit. Of this, Rank said that the only real therapy was life and that

The only remedy is an acceptance of the fundamental irrationality of the human being and life in general, an acceptance which means not merely a recognition or even admittance of our basic "prim-

itivity,' in the sophisticated vein of our typical intellectuals, but a real allowance for its dynamic functioning in human behavior, which would not be lifelike without it. When such a constructive and dynamic expression of the irrational together with the rational life is not permitted, it breaks through in violent distortions which manifest themselves individually as neurosis and culturally as various forms of revolutionary movements which succeed *because* they are irrational and not in spite of it (1958, p. 124).

It is this regard for the "irrational" which links Rank's work with that of transpersonal psychology. The respect he held for this dimension of human experience, which he referred to as artistic and at times religious, is the conviction that ultimately human experience will not be rationally explained, only experienced.

In order to understand Rank's transpersonal contributions, it is necessary to begin with his concept of the will. "I mean by will," Rank stated, "a positive guiding organization and integration of the self which utilizes creatively as well as inhibits the instinctual drives" (1968, p. 11). This will represents an autonomous force in the individual which does not favor any particular biological or social drive, but constitutes the creative expression of the total personality and distinguishes one individual from another (Hafstein, 1978). In an initial elucidation of this concept of will, beyond its place in personal psychology, Ira Progoff has likened the full creative potential of the will to Jung's concept of the Self:

The Self as conceived by Jung is the psychological potentiality which emerges in each individual personality; and the will as conceived by Rank is the vital force with which that potentiality is expressed in the world (Progoff, 1973, p. 207).

Initially, will manifests as the mediant between impulse, on the one hand, and inhibition on the other. Rank saw this opposition as central to human experience; the individual must struggle on the biological, psychological and interpersonal level with these twin processes continually. Rank referred to "impulse" as a basic psychological and social need, linked in positive extension to creativity, spontaneity, expression, and action in the world. Inhibition, though polar in action, he felt, was vital and genuine, as are all other self-serving and self-expressing instincts. He saw "inhibition" as the tendency to hold or stay action in creative service to organism and personality. By extension this includes restraint, receptivity, openness, and depth. For Rank, the management of these twin dynamics, in relation to the opportunities and constraints of the environment, results in the development of personality.

*Rank's
concept of
the will*

*impulse,
inhibition,
and will*

*will
as the
handmaiden
of
consciousness*

Will as the mediating agent in this process places a major emphasis upon volition and consciousness in designing the expression of these two forces. Rank saw will as the handmaiden of consciousness evoking, through expression and inhibition, awareness of self, the world and the relationship between the two. Assagioli (1975) has elaborated upon this connection between will and consciousness stating that will/self/transpersonal self are in a final sense almost synonymous; that when freed from contention at the level of basic needs and drives, the will has the capacity to organize, choose, select, bring about change in self and circumstance, operating from another dimension or level of expression.

This conception of the will is quite different from the popular image of will power and a push/pull effort. This "counter-will" is described as the will's inferior function, will in reaction to the will of others. A normative situation in childhood, this conflict of wills has the potential to ultimately evolve, is driven to evolve, through issues related to ego development, existential conflict, and ultimately, transpersonal awareness (Vaughan, 1979). Beginning as the simple desire of life to maintain itself and ultimately leading to what Rank (1958) described as will to immortality, willing is the dynamic capacity to connect self to inner workings, self to others, self to world and self to AllElse.

*the
two kinds
of will*

Farber (1976) in amplifying upon the dynamics of the Rankian will has described, as its mature expression, a dual capacity: a utilitarian dimension and simultaneously a more fluid or receptive potentiality. The first will, the utilitarian, is that which moves us toward particular objectives in a conscious deliberate fashion requiring some effort or intentionality in specific pursuits. The second, however, is characterized by a lack of conscious effort- " ... mind and body seamlessly and unself-consciously joined in totality" (Farber, 1976, p. 5). This is an experience of openness where the predominant quality is one of freedom. Impenetrable and incapable of rational inspection, this is a state of flow, an openness to the possibilities and potential of the moment. Farber has called our era the age of disordered will where will of the first realm, traditional and utilitarian in nature, is brought to bear upon tasks better left to will activity of the second realm.

It takes only a glance to see a few of the myriad varieties of willing that cannot be willed that enslave us; we will to sleep, will to read fast, will to have simultaneous orgasm, will to be creative and spontaneous, will to enjoy our old age, and most urgently, will to will (Farber, 1976, p. 32).

More specifically and in describing the consequences of first-realm will dependence he states:

... I can will knowledge, but not wisdom; going to bed, but not sleeping; eating, but not hunger; meekness, but not humility; scrupulosity, but not virtue; self-assertion or bravado, but not courage; lust, but not love; commiseration, but not sympathy; congratulation, but not admiration; religiosity, but not faith; reading, but not understanding. I would emphasize that the consequence of willing what cannot be willed is that we fall into the distress we call anxiety. And since anxiety, too, opposes such willing, should we, in our anxiety about anxiety, now try to will away that anxiety, our fate is still more anxiety. Within this impasse meaning, reason, imagination, discrimination fail so that the will is deprived of its supporting and tempering faculties (Farber, 1976p. 7)

Second-realm will to balance and to support the utilitarian dimension is required. However, in tracking down the nature of this second realm will, we are confronted by paradox at every turn. It is doing by not doing: the slipping of one's habitual anchors related to first-realm willing, and letting flow. It is an act of *being in the world as it is and willing-not-to-will otherwise*. It is an open state where convenient mental fictions are suspended, be that even for a brief instant, and the innate potential of the moment perceived. This leads to a renewed sense of action or, if necessary, its absence-defined entirely by a clear perception of what is possible at any given moment. On a more practical level, a relationship exists between this idea of willing-not-to-will and the practice of clinical biofeedback. In learning to master control of involuntary processes, success is contingent upon the development of "passive volition" (Green & Green, 1977). This is a meta-force characterized by non-striving, a passive yet dynamic state of consciousness primarily subjective and experiential in nature. When asked to explain how a particular physiological response is controlled, the practitioner is often at a loss for words and describes the regulatory function metaphorically. Swami Rama described his ability to control blood flow and subsequent temperature change in two locations in the palm of his hand as simply "turning off the valves" (Boyd, 1976). Yet the harder one tries to accomplish a bioregulatory task, the more the parameter varies in an inverse direction. The biofeedback practitioner must learn "undoing," to let go of will-effort associated with first-realm willing, and to get-out-of-one's-own-way in inhibiting biological homeostasis.

*the
nature
of
second-
realm
will*

This experience, biologically and psychologically, involves trusting the spontaneous organizing and integrating activity of

*the
willand
"vital experience"*

the organism and, in relation to the world, our own capacity to respond with spontaneous intelligence and intuition to the tasks and challenges before us. We are then able to experience ourselves and the world directly. This involves both an opening and centering of the person as an expression of trust in the capacity of what is within to be able to deal with what is without. The will in both dimensions is necessary for the birth of consciousness and it is through the full exercise of will that the individual is led to "vital experience" (Rank, 1941, p. 16) described as:

... taking place at a psychic level deeper than rationality and its result is a sense of connection to life that extends beyond the present moment in all the directions of time, .. a sense of more-than-personal-participation in everlasting life (Progoff, 1973, p.250).

*the
receptive
dimension
of the
will*

This experience, that of the Rankian hero or artist, must be beyond psychology. Psychology represents an attempt at rational ideology and as such has the capacity to explain but not experience. Like the blind men with their elephant, it is not that any psychological perspective is wrong, simply not right enough. The receptive dimension of the will qualifies action and belief as tentative; a point of view is simply a point of view; action is right or wrong given circumstance or context. Involved in this is the paradox of passionate action in the face of eternal doubt. This requires the ability to "hang out," to live with ambiguity in an actively creative yet hesitant, restrained and ever expectant state. Fittipaldi (1980) using the Christian Mystical experience as example describes this as a state of Empty-Mind:

Empty-mind

Empty-mind involves an attitude or consciousness that is not bound by any of its own forms. Each human person is born into a culture. Often a person might conceive of such patterns as the best and only way of perceiving reality, in which case we have cultural chauvinism or imperialism. Empty-mind involves the realization that no concept of reality adequately describes that reality. Hence, empty-mind is open to concepts and is flexible. It is a consciousness that realizes its own limitations and boundaries and respects them and is not bound by them (p. 18).

To truly live in "empty-mind" is to perceive that every form of social or psychological experience is limited and capable of change at any moment. Clinically, this places the definition of normal or abnormal functioning beyond the narrow confines of contemporary psychological theory for it is

... presumptuous and at the same time naive, .. this idea of simply removing guilt by explaining it causally as "neurotic!" Such an approach to the individual who seems inhibited by ex-

cessive guilt was not only a therapeutic but ideological one; he (the therapist) worked not only with the objective of helping the suffering individual but at the same time on the tacit basis of a reformer assuming that civilization as he found it in his environment was on the whole right and that the individual who seems to be in the wrong has to learn to "adjust to it" (Rank, 1958, p.273).

The experience of the distressed individual is not the problem; rather it is the attitude toward such experience. With this in mind, therapy has the potential to become truly transpersonal, not a rationalizing of experience, but its acceptance.

*acceptance
and
alteration
of
attitude*

Dynamic therapy aims only at an alteration of attitude, of valuation toward what is given individually, and not at an ego change in the sense of a general ideology or of the individual idealization tendency of the patient. ... At bottom, it rests on the acceptance of the personality as a whole with its entire ambivalence. For the attempt at alteration of the individual who is never satisfied with himself is just what has driven him into the neurosis, which in itself signified a much more revolutionary character change than any therapy could ever undertake. The conflict among opposing tendencies in the individual is not, as it first appeared to be, the cause of the neurosis, but the very basis of life, and the neurosis is only the expression of dissatisfaction with this condition of life, in the last analysis, a refusal of life itself (Rank, 1968, p. 108).

In willing/willing-not-to-will-otherwise, one opens to experience as it is, integrating or existing in the classical Rankian present-centeredness which accepts what the self holds/belongs. This has been described as "inclusion"; a fusing of intentionality and receptivity where one reaches out to meet new experiences both in the world and within oneself, "accepting the thing as it is" (Mahlberg, 1978).

Inclusion/fusion has a parallel in Buddhist meditation where the practitioner seeks to open herself/himself to what is without reservation or pre-conception.

*parallels
in
Buddhist
meditation*

One should realize that one does not meditate in order to go deeply into oneself and withdraw from the world. .. There should be no feeling or striving to reach some exalted or higher state, since this simply produces something conditioned and artificial that will act as an obstruction to the free flow of mind.... The everyday practice is simply to develop complete awareness and openness to all situations and emotions, and to all people, experiencing everything totally without mental reservations and blockages, so that one never withdraws or centralizes onto oneself.... When performing the meditation practice, one should develop the feeling of opening oneself out completely to the whole universe with absolute simplicity and nakedness of mind (Trungpa and Hookham in Welwood, 1979).

Rank, like Adler, felt the emphasis in rigid Freudianism upon the unconscious to be misplaced. However, like Jung, he also saw vast potential and extra or trans-rational experiences as the ultimate property of human consciousness. Progoff (1973) has suggested that Rank forms the vital link between the two positions of these early theoreticians, the Rankian will linking conscious volitions with extra-rational human dimensions. This position closely parallels in essence the ideas recently elucidated by Welwood (1977) concerning figure/ground in relation to conscious awareness, the unconscious and the transpersonal.

*figure/ground
and
boundary
flexibility*

Figure or present, conscious awareness arises out of the composite ground of all potential consciousness. For Rank, the individual functions in a unitary fashion in that what is conscious is implicit in what is not and vice versa. Conscious action is formed and supported by that which is not, and no dichotomy exists, only the opportunity through operation of the will to develop lively figure boundaries and greater access to the ground out of which awareness arises. Boundary flexibility leads to greater situation-specific responsibility. The composite ground consists of wider and wider interpenetrating levels, from basic open space in the Buddhist sense through transpersonal perspective and finally to situational specific awareness. Depth of being may be experienced in flashes of intuitive meaning or in a totally awakened state. Rank's idea of guilt/neurosis is, then, like Welwood's (1979):

... interpreted ... as arising from a commitment to "small" as opposed to "big" mind. We may feel guilty when we choose our smaller version of the world, at the expense of the larger expansive vision that arises from the basic relatedness of self and world (p. 171).

guilt/neurosis

This Rankian sense of guilt/neurosis results from interrupting the urge toward transcendence or transpersonal awareness. Anxiety is associated with a limited sense of one's willful potential. On the one hand there exists the compulsion to willfully "make meaning" by attaching the self to something larger than the personality, yet simultaneously the result of attachment to anything less than "irrational-vital-experience-beyond-psychology" is doomed to be anxiety provoking.

This larger sense of meaning, Rank described as the "thou" needed by the ego to become a Self. "The psychology of the self is to be found in the other, the individual thou, or the inspirational ideology of the leader or the symbolic diffusion of another civilization" (Rank, 1958, p. 290). This must ultimately be considered transpersonal in nature.

The reaching out for something bigger originates in the individual need for expansion beyond the realm of himself, his environment, indeed, early life itself. In this sense, the individual is striving not just for survival but is reaching for some kind of beyond, be it in terms of another person, a group, a cause, a faith to which he can submit (Rank, 1958, pp. 194-95).

Rank's artist, the creative type, willfully confronts the paradoxical experience of knowing self most definitely in relation to Other. In final measure, this paradox of self and other is resolved through immersion in the irrational as he/she "strives after the abrogation of individuality, for likeness, unity, oneness with the all" (Rank in Hafstein, 1978, p. 75). As Rank says in *Will Therapy*:

*willful
confrontation
of
paradoxical
experience*

The individual may enjoy every experience as such without tying it up causally, totally or finally with all the rest of his life or with what goes on in the world at all. The person then lives more in the present, in the moment, without longing to make it eternal,

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