

SOME HISTORICAL SOURCES OF THE TERM "TRANSPERSONAL"

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This article documents various historical psychological and philosophical uses of the term "transpersonal," some of which have only recently been uncovered. It also reports the original construction and use of the term by the American philosopher and psychologist, William James.

the choice of the founding editors

As the distinguishing term in the title of this Journal, "trans-personal" was selected in 1968 by the founding editors, Anthony Sutich, Abraham Maslow and others, after much deliberation (Sutich, 1976). The choice expressed their philo-sophical position and reflected a vision of a "new and proper the area of psychological inquiry" (Sutich, 1969).

Abraham Maslow had used "transpersonal" in a communication to Sutich in 1967, and in 1968 in a letter referring to an editors meeting with Stanislav Grof:

The main reason I am writing is that in the course of our conversations we thought of using the word "transpersonal" instead of the clumsier word "transhumanistic" or "transhuman." The more I think of it, the more this word says what we are all trying to say, that is, beyond individuality, beyond the development of the individual person into something which is more inclusive than the individual person, or which is bigger than he is...(Sutich, 1976).

Sutich preferred "transpersonal" for the same reasons and because it emphasized the new field's focus on "the experiencing individual" (Sutich, 1969). He had also used the term in a 1967 draft statement of purpose (Sutich, 1976), but in the limited sense of "expression of transpersonal and transcendent potentialities," and indicated that his source was Grof, who used it in a lecture, in September, 1967.

There seems to be no record of "transpersonal psychology" as a phrase, name or title being used prior to the 1967-1969 discussions. There were, however, uses of the single term "transpersonal" much earlier in this century.

The writer and philosopher, Dane Rudhyar, in *Rhythm of Wholeness* (1983), describes his use of the term and a possible connection to Carl G. Jung:

Because of the several meanings of the Latin prefix *trans*, the word *transpersonal* is ambiguous. For contemporary psychologists and participants in the "consciousness movement," the word applies to a state of being or consciousness beyond the personal level and to any direct or indirect attempt to experience or better understand such states. However, I have used the term since 1930 to represent action which takes place *through* a person, but which originates in a center of activity existing beyond the level of *personhood*. Such action makes use of human individuals to bring to focus currents of spiritual energy, supra-mental ideas, or realizations for the purpose of bringing about, assisting, or guiding transformative processes.¹

Rudhyar's footnote is directly relevant:

¹To my knowledge I was the first to use the term -- though C.G. "through," Jung may already have used it in German without my being aware or as of it -- in an article in the magazine *The Glass Hive* (1930) edited by Will Levington Comfort.

transpersonal as "beyond," "through," or as "collective unconsciousness"

Rudhyar's speculation about Jung's use of a German term was appropriate. In 1917 Jung used the term *ueberpersonlich* in the German edition of *Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology*, which appeared in English in an authorized translation edited by Constance E. Long (Jung, 1917/1920). In the section, "*The Psychology of the Unconscious Processes*," Long translated *ueberpersonlich* as follows: ". . . the dominance of the *superpersonal* unconscious . . ." (italics added). In later translations "*transpersonal*" was used. This source was provided by John Beebe, editor, *San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*.

Jung occasionally revised his work, and by 1942 *The Psychology of the Unconscious* (re-titled) had a chapter heading, "The Personal and the Collective (or Transpersonal) Unconscious." The text included this statement:

We have to distinguish between a personal unconscious and an *impersonal* or *transpersonal unconscious*. We speak of the latter also as the *collective unconscious* . . .

The present author is indebted to Professor Sam Shapiro, at the University of Hawaii, for bringing to his attention the apparent first English-language construction and use of the term "*Trans-personal*" by William James. The source is one of James' biographers, R.B. Perry, in *The Thought and Character of William James*, Volume 2 (1936). Perry describes a

. . . syllabus for the Harvard course [in Philosophy Ia] which contains a long discussion of idealism, which did not afterwards appear either in the Stanford revision or in *Some Problems of Philosophy*. He defended Berkeley against the charges of nihilism and solipsism, credited him with introducing "the whole phenomenalist way of thinking," summarized, sympathetically, the case against naive realism, and finally left his own position in doubt:-

[quoting James] Phenomenalism or idealism is usually accused . . . of denying the "objective" import of experience. It is important in discussion to disentangle certain ambiguities in the word "objective" as used here. That an idea represents an "object" may mean that it represents something either: -- 1. *Trans-personal*-as when my object is also your object; or, 2. *Trans-corporeal*-as when my object is outside my body; or, 3. *Trans-cerebral*-as possibly in my body, but out of my brain; or, 4. *Trans-visible* or *trans-palpable*-as when it is defined either as a "scientific" entity (like the atom or ether-wave) or as a panpsychic entity; or, finally, 5. *Trans-mental* altogether, as when it is said to be altogether "unknowable". . . .

Perry indicates that the printed syllabus was prepared by James during 1905-1906.

The construction of these five terms using the prefix "trans-" reveals both the creative and systematic reach of James' thinking. In the syllabus his context was philosophical, and he

does not refer to psychology in the quoted passage. Yet many of the problems and issues that transpersonal psychology considers in its purview today can be seen in several, if not all, of his five definitions using the prefix "trans-."

Tracing the influence of these early sources on current trans-personal theory and practice is beyond the scope of this brief paper. All of the sources cited, however, use concepts that in retrospect may be seen as related in varying degrees to con-temporary transpersonal thinking.

In the case of James it is notable, though not completely surprising, that the father of American psychology created a term that quite independently has come to identify an entire psychological perspective. Like much of James' work, today's transpersonal perspective is an experience-and knowledge-based search for an understanding of the whole of human psychological life.

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