

Humanistic Psychology, Psychedelics, and the Transpersonal Vision

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In the 1950s and early 1960s the field of humanistic psychology was established, with the founding of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology (JHP)* by Abraham Maslow and Anthony Sutich and the Association of Humanistic Psychology founded by Carl Rogers, Virginia Satir, and Maslow in 1961. Also known as the Third Force, following behaviorism (the First Force) and psychoanalysis (the Second Force), humanistic psychology broke with the restrictive and overly deterministic models of conventional psychology of that time and presented a more optimistic vision of human potential, stressing the importance of personal growth and self-actualization. Maslow, one of the leading founders and proponents of humanistic psychology charted a hierarchy of needs in order of decreasing priority yet increasing sophistication, starting with basic physiological needs and safety and extending to belongingness and love, fulfillment, self-worth, and autonomy.

As the 1960s unfolded, however, Maslow and others identified with the humanistic movement perceived an essential albeit often neglected and denigrated element of human nature, the spiritual dimension. “The spiritual life is then part of the human essence. It is a defining characteristic of human nature, without which human nature is not full human nature” (Maslow 1972, p. 325). Asserting the need for psychology to continue to evolve beyond the limitations of the Third Force and embrace the full range of human potentialities, Maslow declared,

I should say also that I consider Humanistic, Third Force Psychology to be transitional, a preparation for a still higher Fourth Psychology; transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interest, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization and the like. (Maslow, 1968, pp. iii-iv)

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This evolving understanding of the human psyche and the range of potential experience was in large part catalyzed by the emergence in American culture of psychedelic drugs, quietly and discretely during the 1950s and then explosively as the 1960s turned into a decade of rapid change, conflict, and turmoil. An age of discovery had been kindled, outwardly as the boundaries of outer space were explored, and now with the availability of such astonishing psychological probes, some active (e.g., LSD [lysergic acid diethylamide]) on a microgram level, the cartography of inner space began to be charted. Established in the late 1960s, and receiving the ardent support of Maslow, the field of transpersonal psychology, or the Fourth Force, set out to understand the range of altered states of consciousness and their implications to ego or personal self, transcendence, and the spiritual. The work of psychiatrist Stanislav Grof, a leading European researcher of the range of therapeutic effects of psychedelics who moved to the United States in the late 1960s, exemplifies the value of the transpersonal model of the human psyche to understanding the full range of human potentiality and harnessing the potential of the experience to facilitate powerfully positive treatment effects, even in patients (e.g., chronic alcoholics, terminal cancer sufferers with profound existential anxiety and depression) considered to be the most refractory and non-responsive to conventional therapies (Grof, 1980; Grof & Halifax, 1977).

The transpersonal vision was an outgrowth of humanistic psychology and strongly influenced by the human potential and counterculture movements of the 1960s. In its effort to fully understand varying states of consciousness, along with different views of reality, transpersonal psychology endeavored to integrate the ideas and insights of Western psychology with the insights of Eastern spiritual traditions. Endorsing the value of rigorously examining "higher" states of consciousness and the most evolved stages of human evolution, Maslow encouraged the exploration of these "farther reaches of human nature." While Maslow in his critical early work was limited to the study of spontaneous peak experiences, subsequent investigators were able to reliably facilitate psychedelic catalyzed profound mystical experiences that were found to directly correlate with positive therapeutic outcomes (Grof, Goodman, Richards, & Kurland, 1973; Pahnke, 1969; Walsh & Grob, 2005).

In spite of numerous encouraging reports of psychedelic-facilitated psychiatric therapy, particularly of treatment-resistant patients, it was clear by the late 1960s and early 1970s that the mainstream culture was not prepared for the degree of quantum change unleashed by the rapid diffusion of these powerful chemical compounds from the confines of clinical and laboratory research to the society at large. Particularly among vulnerable youth taking psychedelics under uncontrolled and unprotected conditions, concern was raised by untoward and sometimes sustained adverse effects. Psychedelics were also perceived in some quarters as potent agents of social change, and had a vital though at times unappreciated role in the emergence of many political rights movements of that era. By the early 1970s a regressive backlash had effectively terminated

virtually all clinical research with psychedelics, allowing the field to lie dormant for decades, until the cautious granting of approval to conduct Phase 1 normal volunteer research with a few select compounds in the 1990s and eventually with the development of a series of rigorous clinical treatment studies in the 21st century. With the passage of time and growing societal sophistication, this new generation of psychedelic research has succeeded in avoiding cultural censure while establishing a healthy foundation to employ a rigorous application of the transpersonal vision within the structure of carefully vetted and approved clinical research studies.

This special themed multi-issue series of *JHP* presents reflections on the past as well as visions of the future by several of the most respected of the early psychedelic research pioneers who have remained active over the years and have spanned the generations, from the halcyon days of early explorations and discoveries through the decades-long wasteland of cultural rejection and fear, to the reawakening of interest and productive activity of this promising yet long-neglected field. For more than half a century, William Richards, Ralph Metzner, Ram Dass, and Stanley Krippner have made valuable contributions to elucidating the significance of the transpersonal vision they perceived through their vast research experience with psychedelics and who remain active investigators and mentors to new generations of highly motivated and well-positioned researchers. Beginning with this first issue and continuing in upcoming issues in this series, these pioneers will offer their reflections along with other contributors presenting current research findings and on myriad topics within the field of psychedelics and consciousness studies. The compelling research investigations presented in this special collection by leading clinical research groups highlights the remarkable potential of this research model when using state of the art methodologies and when employed under optimal conditions.

We are pleased to present this special issue of *JHP* on a topic of ageless importance that still holds relevance and promise in today's modern world. From the establishment of the Third Force, the field of humanistic psychology, through its later evolution into a Fourth Force, the transpersonal vision, and now reawakening as a culturally accepted and supported clinical research field, the application of the psychedelic treatment model under optimal conditions continues to hold profound implications for our systems of healing, on personal, collective, and global levels. By fully understanding the lessons of the past, we are now presented with the opportunity to employ these putative agents of healing under optimal conditions, allowing for a full elaboration of their potential to facilitate a further and salutary evolution of the human condition.

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