

Archetypal and transpersonal psychologies

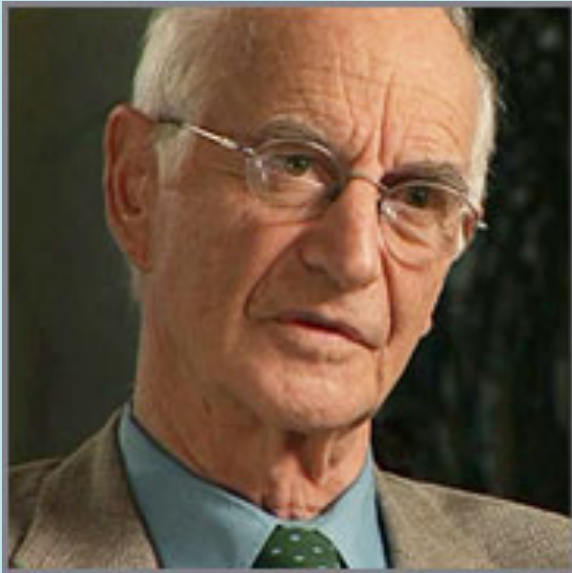
Jung on religious experience and the interface between psychology and religion

- Many ‘transpersonal’ psychologies in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries owe their line of approach to Jung, as well as to William James’ phenomenological approach to religious experience
- Jung postulated the existence of ‘an authentic religious function in the unconscious’ (see Jung, CW11, *Psychology and Religion*, ¶13)
- By ‘religion’, Jung means ‘a careful and scrupulous observation of what Rudolf Otto aptly termed the *numinosum*, that is, a dynamic agency or effect not caused by an arbitrary act of will...The *numinosum* – whatever its cause may be – is an experience of the subject independent of his will...that causes a peculiar alteration of consciousness’ (Jung, CW11, ¶16; Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, Oxford, 1926)
- The religious experience, in Jung’s context, is a direct encounter with an archetypal dominant, without the mediation of consciousness. It is experienced as ‘numinous’ because of its power, agency, and autonomy. It is perceived and interpreted through the symbols of the individual and his/her cultural context and individual temperament, but the experience itself is ‘universal’ because it reflects a particular encounter between consciousness and the universal archetypes of the collective unconscious

‘Transpersonal psychotherapy differs from the traditional approaches not so much in method or technique as in orientation and scope. There may be technical innovations such as meditation, visualization, and awareness training, borrowed from the spiritual traditions of the world, but the essential difference lies in the attitudes of the therapist, attitudes that shape the course of therapy. He neither avoids the issues of value and meaning in a human life nor places them outside the bounds of therapeutic work; rather he explores them, either as they arise in the working through of personal suffering or when their resolution frees the patient’s energies for deeper confrontation with the dilemmas we all face’ .

[Seymour Boorstein, ‘Introduction’ , in Seymour Boorstein (ed.), *Transpersonal Psychotherapy* (Science and Behavior Books, 1980), p. 3]

James Hillman's 'archetypal' psychology



James Hillman, 1926 – 2011

- Deconstruction of conventional psychological theory
- 'Soul-making' or deepening of the soul
- The 'world-soul': everything has, or is, psyche
- Image and myth as the language of the psyche
- The importance of narrative or 'story'
- Honouring of psychopathology as 'soul-making'
- Psychological polytheism: the soul is inherently multiple and does not require 'integration' into a single 'Self'
- Deconstruction of the ego
- Criticism of the idea of the unity and 'health' of the self
- Soul as the proper concern of psychology

- Each entity in life, animate or inanimate, has a spark of the world-soul in it, which Hillman understands as *psyche*:
‘Let us imagine the anima mundi as that particular soul spark, that seminal image, which offers itself through each thing in its visible form’ [‘Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World’, *Spring* (1982), 71-93, on p. 77].
- Soul is most likely to emerge at ‘pathological’ moments. The soul is the ‘imaginative possibility of our nature’. Soul makes all meaning possible, turns events into experience, involves a deepening of experience, is communicated in love, and has a special relationship with death.
- Hillman rejects ideas of ‘cure’, ‘self-improvement’, ‘well-being’ and ‘enlightenment’ as goals for psychotherapy. The goal is ‘soul-work’ or deepening of the soul.
- Myth is not used for interpretation or analysis, but for narrative and engagement with the image.

Hillman on his ‘acorn theory’ (described in *The Soul’s Code*, Atlantic Books, 1997 with numerous reprints), from an interview with Hillman by Scott London at www.scottlondon.com/interviews/hillman.html

‘...Well, it’s more of a myth than a theory. It’s Plato’s myth that you come into the world with a destiny, although he uses the word *paradigma*, or paradigm, instead of *destiny*. The acorn theory says that there is an individual image that belongs to your soul. The same myth can be found in the kabbalah...The Hindus and the Buddhists have it in different ways – they tie it more to reincarnation and karma, but you still come into the world with a particular destiny’.

Influences on Hillman:

Plato: the idea of individual destiny

Aristotle: the idea of the 'final cause' : teleology

Jung, with whom Hillman studied in the 1950s

Jewish Kabbalah, particularly as it is developed in Hasidism

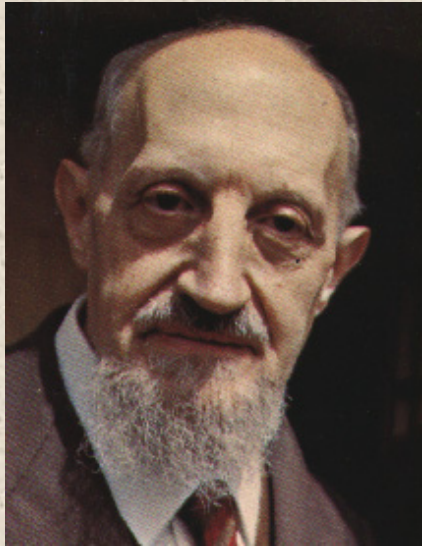
Hellenistic and Renaissance Neoplatonism and theurgy
(particularly Iamblichus and Marsilio Ficino)

Greco-Egyptian and Renaissance Hermeticism (particularly
Paracelsus)

Astrology

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, on the
plurality of inner experience

Roberto Assagioli and 'Psychosynthesis'



Roberto Assagioli, 1888-1974

- According to Assagioli, although psychology and spirituality are distinct domains, psychology is necessary for the integration of spiritual experience, and a spiritual perspective is necessary for psychology
- Wholeness is an a priori state; we do not make ourselves whole, but we can shift our perspective to recognise our innate wholeness
- 'Subpersonalities' are 'psychological satellites' which co-exist within the personality and contain an archetypal core. The interaction between them reflects the story of individual development.
- Major works by Assagoli:
The Act of Will (London: Wildwood House, 1974)
Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings (NY: Viking Press, 1971)

Assagioli often described his work as ‘height psychology’ .

Influences on Assagioli:

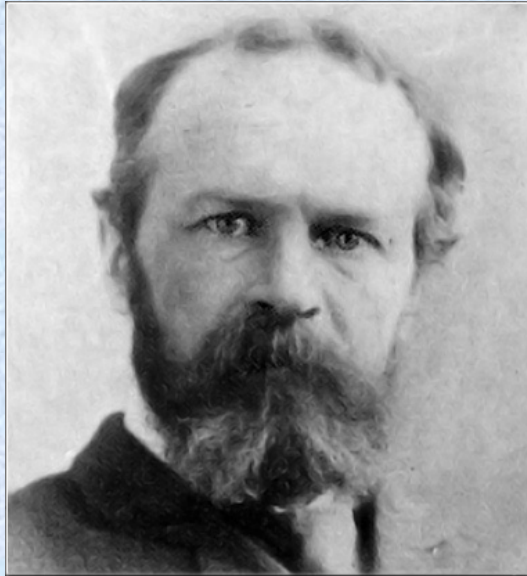
- Freud: from his training in psychoanalysis, Assagioli absorbed the basic dichotomy of conscious and unconscious and the autonomy of unconscious drives.
- Jung: Assagioli was strongly influenced by Jung’ s concept of individuation and the integration of the personality through direct experience of the Self. He also absorbed Jung’ s idea of complexes but renamed them ‘subpersonalities’ .
- William James: from James Assagioli acquired the basic premise of the reality of mystical states.
- Victor Frankl (1905-1997), a Viennese psychiatrist and the founder of ‘logotherapy’ : Frankl’ s experiences as a prisoner in the concentration camps during the Second World War led him to postulate an essential human desire for understanding the self and the purpose of life. This could be discovered through conscience, which Frankl believed was given transcendently. [See Victor Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (NY: World Publishing, 1969), and Victor Frankl, *The Unconscious God: Psychotherapy and Theology* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1976)]

Influences on Assagioli (continued):

- Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), the ‘founder’ of humanistic psychology: Maslow proposed that many individuals aspire to an experience of self-actualisation, and such people tend to have ‘peak’ experiences which provide a sense of meaning. [See Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (Ohio State University Press, 1964; Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (NY: Van Nostrand, 1962)
- Alice A. Bailey (1880-1949): Although Assagioli was careful to avoid making his links with Bailey and her Theosophical background public, he was nevertheless deeply committed to Bailey’s ideas. These included the idea of a cosmic spiritual evolutionary process, whereby the world-soul or cosmic soul was itself developing; smaller units such as the individual were part of this great evolutionary movement of a unified cosmic life-force. The hierarchical nature of Assagioli’s psychological models reflects the spiritual hierarchy of Bailey’s ideas.



William James, *The Varieties of Mystical Experience* (1902)



William James, 1842-1910

‘Personal religious experience has its roots in mystical states of consciousness’. These states, acknowledged as ontically ‘real’, are distinguished by:

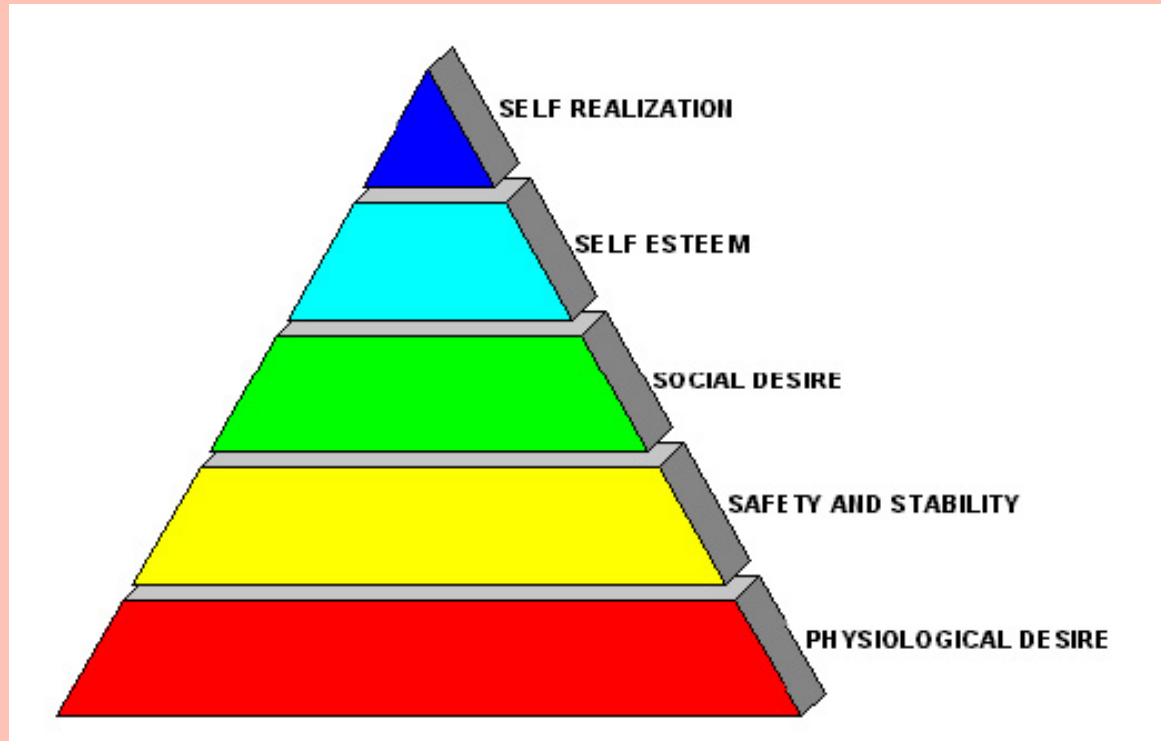
- ‘ineffability’ (inability of the conscious ego to describe the experience)
- ‘noetic quality’ (experience of gnosis or knowledge)
- ‘transience’ (these states cannot be sustained for long)
- ‘passivity’ (although the experience can be invoked, once it occurs the individual feels in the grip of a higher will or ‘Other’)

James’ views exercised a strong influence on Jung as well as Hillman, Maslow, and Assagioli, and on Aldous Huxley (*The Doors of Perception*), who used substances such as mescaline to precipitate what Maslow later called ‘peak’ experiences and who heralded the psychedelic revolution of the 1960s

Transpersonal psychologies

- The most important influences on the development of transpersonal psychologies were James, Jung, Maslow, Frankl, Assagioli, Aldous Huxley, the ‘gurus’ of the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s such as Rajneesh (Osho), and the explorers of psychedelic drugs, such as Timothy Leary. Subtler influences come from ancient mystery cults, transmitted through *fin-de-siècle* occultism; currents such as Theosophy and French symbolist poetry; and Jewish and Christian mysticism.
- The term ‘transpersonal’ seems to have been coined by Maslow in a letter to Stanislov 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 actual person into something which is more inclusive than the individual person, or which is bigger than he is.’ (Quoted by A. J. Sutich in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 1976). However, the term was also used by Dane Rudhyar in the 1920s in relation to what he called ‘transpersonal astrology’.

Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs'



'Self-realization' includes encounters with the numinous ('peak experiences') which provide meaning to the individual's life

‘Mystical’ or ‘peak’ experiences

- The “existential crisis” often awakens the search for meaning, and may be accompanied by a transpersonal experience of some kind (dream, vision, illumination, etc.)
- The existential crisis is precipitated by an increasing flow of superconscious or transpersonal energy directed by the Self toward the personality (Assagioli, 1965).
- The peak experience occurs when superconscious energies spontaneously become conscious.
- A crisis of duality often occurs after this crisis, when the person now needs to integrate the transpersonal vision into ordinary life. This may generate fanaticism and messianic fervour, resulting in depression and disillusionment when the world does not respond.
- Frankl’s Logotherapy consists of working with the individual as tripartite: physical, psychological and spiritual. Transpersonal psychology, especially that of Assagioli, attempts to integrate psychological with spiritual.
- Types of peak experience:
 - a) oceanic (feelings of oneness, love, compassion for all, loss of sense of isolated self)
 - b) illumination (realisation or knowledge of the interconnections of all things)
 - c) purpose (realisation of a mission or life purpose as part of a dedication of service)

These three are roughly equated with Alice Bailey’s three Rays (will, love and mind).
- Other types of peak experience may involve physical healing, recollection of past lives, release of grief and subsequent sense of healing and freedom, and other experiences which do not easily fall into the three main categories.

‘Transpersonal therapy is concerned with the psychological processes related to the realization, or making real, of states such as “illumination”, “mystical union”, “transcendence”, and “cosmic unity”.

[Anthony J. Sutich, ‘Transpersonal Psychotherapy: History and Definition’ , in Boorstein (ed.), *Transpersonal Psychotherapy*, p. 9]

Cognitive science: the ‘neural basis’ of religious experience

- In the last three decades, cognitive science has begun to explore the domains of religious experience, including RASCs (‘religiously altered states of consciousness’) or RISCs (‘religiously interpreted states of consciousness’) such as ‘illumination’ , ‘mystical union’ , ‘transcendence’ , and ‘cosmic unity’
- Cognitive science draws heavily on developmental psychology and the anthropology of religion, seeing religious representations and ritual enactments as a subset of cultural representations and actions
- Religious or mystical experience is reflected in characteristic ‘mental representations’
- These experiences are related to physiological states; religious symbolism and representations are ‘cognitively constrained’ by universal properties of the human mind-brain. In other words, we are hard-wired to experience particular kinds of altered states with characteristic narratives and images
- ‘Religious experience can be understood quite simply as an emotional reaction to religious representations.’ – Ilkka Pyysiäinen, ‘Cognition, emotion, and religious experience’, in Jensine Andresen (ed.), *Religion in Mind: Cognitive Perspectives on Religious Belief, Ritual, and Experience* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 70-93, on p. 71

Some questions

- Post-Jungian archetypal and transpersonal psychologies seem to be particularly attractive to astrologers seeking to bridge astrology with psychology. Why?
- What implicit assumptions are contained in these psychological approaches? What assumptions are contained in astrologers' appropriations of these approaches?
- Are these psychologies 'religious' or 'religionist' ?
- Although Hillman's psychology appears to be pluralistic, other transpersonal currents appear to be monotheistic and aligned with Judaeo-Christian perspectives. Are they really? For example, how do Hillman's approach and Assagioli's differ?