

Transpersonal Psychotherapy Graduate Certificate

Comparisons Essay Group - #1

Discuss the educational ideas of Maslow, Adler, and Lowenfeld, and their theoretical position concerning Beingness and Creativity.

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Introduction

Since July last year (2003) I have consciously been undergoing a much deeper process of transformation than usual. The accelerated journey has included the recognition of shadows and projection, the recognition of the existential grief of existence and disconnection from G-d, the destruction of my foundation of knowing (burning down the house), the recognition and owning of lifelong resentment towards those who had hurt me, and the recognition and breaking of the 'mother complex' that bound me to my mother's own fears. From January to March this year I began to develop a new way of knowing; not the old intellectual knowing based on ego, but a more intuitive knowing that comes from the heart: something I only trusted sometimes.

This part of the process of individuation was quite deep and complex, however I was aware of the process taking place as it was happening. I have been keen to write about it and believe this essay on Maslow, Adler, and Lowmefeld will give me the opportunity to explain in part the subjective experiences I had in context to their teachings. This is important because they are pioneers of different schools of psychological inquiry that have influenced the Transpersonal, so this essay could form the basis of a deeper inquiry at a later stage.

A.H. Maslow

Maslow's work influenced many schools of thought; however, none more so than psychology. In psychology Maslow sought scientific proof of the subjective, 'intrapsychic' abilities of humanity and the process of psychological change towards self-actualisation. Maslow saw psychological states not as an illness, but dialectically as, 'a kind of moving forward toward health and toward fullest humanness' (Maslow, 1998, p24). Extrapsychic conceptions drawn from objective scientific studies can't account for the quality of human consciousness, says Maslow (1998, p29), so he endeavoured to study the quality of human consciousness through other means which formed the roots of Humanistic Psychology.

Maslow's most quoted contribution to the field of psychology is his Hierarchy of Needs. From many years of research of animal and human behaviour Maslow found that motivation for human life can be structured around specific needs in a hierarchy of less or greater priority or potency. For example, the need for food and water is of a higher life priority than the need to feel safe. The need for safety is of a higher life priority than the need for being loved. The need for being loved is of a higher life priority than self-confidence. The list goes on. But the important fact is that some psychic illnesses develop out of the, 'absence of certain gratifications' of these needs (Maslow, 1993, p365, 1970, p43). If specific needs aren't met then psychological illnesses will prevail. Equally important, if the basic needs aren't met then the development of the individual to their fullest potential is impossible.

Maslow's main focus of study was on healthy people. He saw it was important to focus on the healthiest, the top fraction of a percent of people who were

psychologically healthy – who were self-realized, fully in their humanness, people who manifested the gratification of all their needs. He wanted to know how they got that way. One important observation Maslow made of the life of a self-realized person was on what he called, 'peak experience', the climax of self-actualisation.

A peak experience is a coming into the realization that what "ought to be" is, in a way that requires no longing, suggests no straining, to make it so. It tells human beings something about themselves and about the world that is the same truth, and that becomes the pivot of value and an ordering principle for the hierarchy of meanings. (Greiger in Maslow, 1993, ppxvi, xvii)

Due to certain changes that have happened in my life, as explained in the Introduction, I experienced, over a period of two weeks (in March) a profound opening of my emotional and spiritual heart that brought me into a higher state of consciousness and vibration. I was witnessing myself in a deeper state of awareness, in the realization that everything is as it should be, right now at this exact moment – and all I had to do was just be and resonate as much love and light as I could. These states of mind (and perhaps the states of my soul, spirit, and self) seemed to slowly increase in me over a few days. The darkness fell away, leaving room only for love and light. Even though there was no instant moment of realization I believe this was a 'peak experience'.

Peak experience 'is individuality freed of isolation.' (Greiger in Maslow, 1993, xvii) In this new state of being I felt free for the first time in my life - truly free on the inside. It is as Greiger says; my individual self seemed to be freed from the isolation the ego had put itself into probably since birth. This is where subject and object emerge (ibid). So to come out of isolation is to come out of duality. Far more subtle than what I experienced in those few precious minutes in the void during Processing a year or so ago, I had the feeling of oneness, resonating within me on many levels.

Peak experience is transitory. It never lasts for too long, simply because 'we are just not strong enough to endure more', says Maslow. (1993, pp36, 37) The study of the healthiest humans leads to the question, what is it that stops the rest of us from becoming equally healthy? What is it inside of us that perpetuates the 'fear of our own greatness'? This is what Maslow called the Jonah Complex. It is, 'the fear of our highest possibilities (as well as our lowest ones)'. (ibid, p34)

Somewhere between the highest and lowest, the subject and the object, is a place of being, where we can put aside our fears and simply allow ourselves to be in the moment. This is when individuality is truly free from isolation. It is what Maslow calls Being-cognition: which is where a person enjoys, 'nonecstatic serenity, calmer happiness, and the intrinsic pleasures of clear contemplative cognition of the highest goods'. Being-cognition is the state of being that resonates directly after the peak experience has subsided. (ibid, p37)

Maslow's Being-cognition seems to describe exactly what I experienced in the following three weeks after the peak experience. I feel more confident, more grounded, more in the moment with myself and with others. But above all else I feel

happy. Not deliriously happy but yes, a calm and constant happy that I've never felt before.

Alfred Adler

A pioneer of Individual Psychology Adler found that none of life's problems lie outside of the occupational, social, and sexual realms of human experience¹ (Adler, 1962, p12) and that the healthiest state of being is in fact to be interested in others.

'Human beings live in a world of meanings', says Adler, and 'the realm of meanings is the realm of mistakes' (Adler, 1962, p9). Human perception is extremely limited. The interpretation of an object or experience is limited in that humans can't take into account its entire truth. Therefore the meaning is never fully finished so it is never entirely true. However, if we try to escape meanings, explains Adler, we isolate ourselves from others (ibid, p9). This is true on the individual level, where someone can completely shut themselves off from people and the environment, and on the social level, where industrialized culture alienates itself from other cultures and the rest of nature. In isolation a person lacks interest in anything except themselves, therefore their actions 'would be useless to himself or to anyone'. The isolated individual, and society as a whole, would develop, amongst other things, anger towards others, which would ultimately turn into violent conflict with 'the enemy' and cause massive degradation and destruction to the planets ecosystems.

'Their actions would be meaningless' (ibid, p9) and would not be conducive to their spiritual, mental, and emotional development. The person and the culture gets stuck in meaninglessness and becomes more and more alienated from everything, including spirit, soul and G-d. They have failed to address the real 'meaning' of life.

This relates to Maslow's idea that a non self-actualised person can't experience freedom because they are in one way or another isolated. From my past experience this isolation harbours deep feelings of loneliness and stuckness. I can also say that my new state of being, described above, has got me more interested in people. I want to know how they feel and what's going on for them on the many levels they experience. For the first time in my life I yearn to be with people rather than by myself licking my wounds, holding my resentment and waiting endlessly for sympathy to come along and save me. I feel a great energy in my work and see once more the potential and the power of my life. This is a feeling of creativity. It goes beyond the feeling of the need to be creative - to paint, to pot, to garden - but to actually create a way that feeds the soul. This is Gurdjieff's 'Work', the magnum opus where the universal energy splits into three, feeding the work, the outcome of the work, and the worker. This feeling envelopes the 'meaning' of my life. And according to Adler in 1932, this comes from being interested. If you look at it from his scientific, non-mystical side of things then he is right: for what is science (and art) but a creative way in seeking truths and Truth – which is finding meaning.

Maslow agrees, saying that, 'the concept of creativeness and the concept of the healthy, self-actualising human seem to be the same thing' (Maslow, 1993, p55).

#1: This is arguable. From what I've read this view doesn't account for existential experiences such as abandonment and grief.

Adler expounds the importance of contribution (1962, p12). To contribute is to be creatively involved. However one must be interested to be involved. To be interested is to come out of isolation. The creativity that takes place in isolation benefits no one, not even the doer. Their creative action becomes merely, 'fictitious personal superiority and their triumphs have meaning only to themselves' (ibid, 12). This is true on both the personal and the cultural level. Even more questions arise when we think how many mixed cultures there are in the modern world and what happens when these cultures within cultures all act in isolation of each other. This reminds me yet again of Gurdjieff's concept of 'The Work'. People who are not working for others are working in isolation of their own humanity and full potential.

Mistakes given to 'the meaning of life' can only be corrected by recognising the situation in which the mistake was made. Adler teaches that by the age of five a child has already, 'reached a unified and crystallised pattern of behaviour'. So, to change one's pattern of mistaken behaviour one has to explore their childhood, finding the patterns that caused the misunderstanding of the meanings of life. (Adler, 1962, pp 15, 16). In psychotherapy, particularly in the Transpersonal, we have many creative ways of taking the client back into childhood issues – clearing the past clears the present that ensures a clearer future. However, Sandplay is the one method that can actually help children also realise the truth in the moment, giving them the opportunity to realise true meaning, thus giving them every chance of growing up to be a loving and compassionate human being.

Margaret Lowenfeld

Lowenfeld discovered the therapeutic benefits of play for children. She set up the Institute of Child Psychology in the UK in 1930, and devoted her time in developing play as therapy. She utilised play objects as symbols to help the child reveal what was going on inside of them and articulate concerns. She called this therapy World Technique. Dora Klaff, a student of Jung, learned the technique and developed it into what is now called Sandplay, which she then adapted for adults. (Pearson, et.al, 2001, pp 8, 9)

Lowenfeld's research revealed that, 'the need to make sense of meaning', is with us from the day we are born. As babies we have no words as yet to help us understand what it is we experience, so instead, we use images. In pre-verbal thought, says Lowenfeld, 'clusters' of feelings are made on the basis of one shared property. Eg., 'How do these things make me feel?' The articulation of these clusters of stored up feelings is done most successfully with Sandplay therapy. (De Domenico, 2000)

Lowenfeld was aware, perhaps more than Adler and Maslow, that her World Technique worked on the Transpersonal level. Lowenfeld knew that the healing of the child was not just psychological but also energetic. According to her the entire person was energised by what she called 'E', which is split into three parts, like a river into three channels (paralleling Gurdjieff's teaching explained above). The first channel is the physical, the second the emotional, and the third is the intellectual. Sandplay works at these levels, helping to shift energetic blockages in the body, in the emotions, and in the mind – creating a free flow towards full creativity and full

humanness. (De Domenico, 2000)

A recent sandplay of my own, facilitated by Marg, found that the symbols in the sand revealed a deep set resentment which seemed unshakable. It took me a while to actually see and own this resentment but the sandplay succeeded in taking me to a deeper level of understanding that resonated with my subconscious. In hindsight I feel that that process was a major factor in the recent peak experience and Being-cognition state. The Transpersonal work uncovers the multiple layers of life in action.

Conclusion

From writing this essay I feel I understand more how my recent experiences fit into the global scheme of things in regards to community and my contribution to society. I feel less angry now at society and more open to its capacity to change. This is what I wanted from it when I started my 'Work' back in 1987 – I wanted society to promise me it would change for the better, and I promised to help it change. Such youthful ultraism turned out to be the energetic dance of my destiny – the creativity of my being – the search for truth - getting closer to G-d.

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