



Modern Transpersonal Theory

Modern Transpersonal Theory: Thematic Configurations and Cognitive-Epistemological Potential

Nataly Nikonovich, PhD

*From the consciousness of one's own deepest nothingness
a person draws new strength, in order to strive to be everything.
M. de Unamuno (1864-1936)*

Abstract

In the article, there is presented the theoretical-methodological and conceptual analysis of modern transpersonal paradigms of humanitarian knowledge. There are investigated the main directions and thematic configurations of transpersonal theory; the pluralism of ontologies of transpersonal discourse is explicated. There are structured and differentiated the main stages of formation and conceptualization of the problem field of transpersonal paradigm in a wide range of its modifications: there are identified such varieties as classical (S. Grof, A. Mindell and others) and modernized (J. Ferrer) versions. There was offered consideration of the concept of "peak experiences" by A. Maslow in the cognitive-religious dimension. Theoretical-methodological significance of the discussed paradigms and this subject is the possibility of building epistemology of mythological and religious knowledge, and deeper penetration into "cartography" (S. Grof's term) of human consciousness in its archetypal and religious forms. Consideration of the questions of religious anthropology, phenomenology of religious consciousness and being within the framework of transpersonal paradigm is theoretical base for solving the problem of ontology of the subject and development of modern interdisciplinary strategies that expand the boundaries of transpersonal theory. There is suggested the idea that such basic areas of humanitarian knowledge as philosophy of culture, ontology of myth and religion, transpersonal theory can be the conceptual core of paradigm synthesis.

Introduction



Transpersonal theory is a productive approach in modern humanitarian science, a new paradigm in the study of mythological-archetypal and religious constants in consciousness and culture. The theoretical provisions of this paradigm are based on multidimensional study of the states of consciousness that turn out to be filled with content, which has a cultural significance. Traditionally, the appearance of transpersonal paradigm is associated with the works of S. Grof and A. Maslow. In the context of A. Maslow's existential- humanistic and transpersonal psychology, transpersonal experiences are associated with deep processes that transcend the "Ego" of human and expand the boundaries of their personality. In our previous works, there were analyzed the features of transpersonal paradigm; the ways of synthesis of the theoretical-religious, transpersonal and analytical-psychological approaches were identified (Nikonovich, 2017). From the scientific point of view, the theme of explication of the features and differentiation of paradigms within the transpersonal theory is interesting. In this study, there is discussed the structuration of approaches within the framework of transpersonal philosophy, and if we talk more broadly, within the framework of philosophy and anthropology of myth, religion, religious philosophy. There are distinguished the following stages in the development of transpersonal theory: classical (S. Grof, A. Mindell and others) and modernized (J. Ferrer) versions. The modernized version, which contains a certain revision of the conceptual grounds of transpersonal ideas, includes, first of all, the works by J. Ferrer – a modern American researcher, Professor of the California Institute of Integral Studies, the specialist in the field of East and West, Integral and Transpersonal Psychology.

In this article there is postulated the idea that analysis of the methodological potential of these strategies lets to conceptualize the specifics of functioning of religious,

mythological consciousness in different angles – transpersonal, psychoanalytical, phenomenological ones, from the point of view of humanistic and existential psychology. In the research there was used the analytical, comparative, cross-cultural, hermeneutical methodology.

Phenomenology of Archetypes and Mythological-Religious
Forms as Constitutive Elements of Consciousness and Culture in the Context of
the Discourse of the Transpersonal Paradigm

It is advisable to conduct the theoretical-methodological analysis of genesis, development and differentiation of transpersonal approaches on the base of explication of change and dynamics of paradigms in



modern humanitarian knowledge

– from the analysis of mythological and religious forms, ontology and epistemology of the subject within the framework of religious philosophy and philosophy of myth, discourse of analytical psychology to formation of the actual transpersonal ideas in psychological and philosophical science.

The transpersonal paradigm presented by S. Grof, a Czech scientist and a doctor, is very important for understanding the essence of the concept of “archetype” and the functioning of mythological-religious consciousness. He is the author of developments in the field of religious experience of the individual. Numerous studies conducted by S. Grof using LSD and techniques of holotropic breathing let to see the functioning of archetypes at the level of the unconscious in a new perspective. Theoretical provisions of this paradigm are based on the multidimensional study of the altered states of consciousness that turn out to be full of cultural content. The transpersonal approach is significant in psychological and philosophical science. Its use in this article for making a deep interdisciplinary analysis of mythological-religious consciousness is appropriate. S. Grof’s studies show that in such states of consciousness, there is a universal nature of archetypes and mythological forms, which proves C.-G. Jung’s ideas about the validity of archetypes.

One of S. Grof’s achievements is detailed study of a new area of the human psyche – perinatal area, which contains all kinds of human experiences. The personality is formed depending on the nature of perinatal experiences. According to S. Grof, the perinatal area is structured with “Basic Perinatal Matrices” (BPMs). Their content is different, but mostly it includes the motives of death-birth. It is also the level of manifestation of archetypes of different cultures – Mexican, Indian, Ancient, Christian, etc. Perinatal experiences are characterized by the fact that the dilemma of “death- regeneration”, as well as the mythological and cultural images associated with it are the most fully represented in them (Grof, 1985).

One of the most significant and profound experiences is transpersonal experience. The actual transpersonal experiences in the

transpersonal approach are the experiences that transcend the person's "Ego", which can be called meta- anthropological. Their typical feature is indeterminacy with personality traits. According to S. Grof, they transcend the "Ego" of person. Transpersonal states of consciousness are characterized by the relationship between external and internal reality, which has the ability to interpenetration. Regression to the unconscious, which occurs in the altered states of consciousness leads to discovery of archetypal primal forms that exist beyond the threshold of consciousness. In addition, in similar experiences, there takes place rethinking of the category of "death", which stops to be perceived as the end (Grof & Halifax, 1977). It is also important to note that in experiments conducted with consciousness, the time continuum is transformed; the ideas of person about existence and non-existence, form and emptiness undergo changes (Grof, 1985).

Existential-humanistic and transpersonal psychology (A. Maslow) is interesting in the framework of the analysis of specificity of modern transpersonal theory. The studies of American scientist touch not only deep psychological structures of the personality, but also meta-anthropological and transpersonal experiences. In this context, it is interesting to study the so-called "peak experience". The study of these experiences is important for the discourse of phenomenology and the ontology of religion. A. Maslow's characteristic of "peak experience" can be extrapolated to the sphere of scientific research of the features and essence of religious experience. This is existential experience accompanied by the sense of completeness of being, harmony, sometimes religiously colored. A person is self-identical in "peak experiences", which offers opportunities for integration; it is similar to the way the Self appears as the final point of development of personality in Jung's psychology. The Self is ultimate realization of all human capabilities, the center of their being, to which they should come in their personal development. A. Maslow's "peak experiences" also fit into the general concept of the phenomenology of religious and mythological forms that we develop on the base of transpersonal philosophy and phenomenology of religion. It should also be noted that B-cognition (in A. Maslow's terminology) and peak experiences become impersonal, incorporated into the matrix of being. Peak experiences go beyond the boundaries of the Ego and become transpersonal in this sense.

The sacred status of "peak experiences" in various religious types should be discussed in the angle of this study. This is the "substitute of the



whole world”, which lies outside the plane of the individualizing consciousness. Here one can draw an analogy with the sacred experience of ancient cultures, which belonged to a specific historical time, but it was universal and meta-historical at the same time. One of the dominant features of “peak experiences” is the change of perception of time. Confirmation of this idea can be found in the works on phenomenology of myth of famous religious scholar M. Eliade and Egyptologist J. Assmann. According to J. Assmann, the Egyptians had a specific concept of time – it is not time-eternity, but it is not time in one’s own understanding (neheh (nhh) and djet (dt)). “Neheh and djet both have properties of our “time”, as well as of our “eternity”, and as a practical matter, either can sometimes be translated as “time” and sometimes as “eternity”. The terms refer to the totality (as such, sacred and in a sense transcendent and thus “eternal”) of cosmic time” (Assmann, 2001, p.74).

Transpersonal theory can be regarded as a meta-anthropology in a number of its statements. In the context of this article, it should be noted that the theme of relationship between transpersonal theory and meta-anthropology implies a deeper analysis and can be the topic of a separate study. Within the framework of humanistic, transpersonal and analytical psychology, as well as religious philosophy, self-identification correlates with the process of self-transcendence, i.e. its implementation is possible due to overcoming the conditionality and limitations of the human “Ego”, raising it to the meta-anthropological level. However, modern post-secular world lives in a different paradigm, which is expressed in a concentrated form in the following thought of M. Eliade: “The sacred is the prime obstacle to his freedom. He will not be truly free until he has killed the last god” (Eliade, 1959, p.203).

The Pluralism of Thematic Specifications of Transpersonal Theory: Classical and Modernized Versions



At the initial stage of creation of the transpersonal theory (developments of S. & K. Grof) conceptualization of ideas of this paradigm took place in the in the course of recognition of the basic non-dualistic constant of culture and consciousness in the form of a single base, which combines transpersonal symbols, signs, and archetypes. Classical transpersonal theory associated with the works of S. Grof, A. Mindell and others, was based

on the theoretical assumption of the unity of consciousness, based on the key meanings that exist in the altered states of consciousness.

In the course of further development of transpersonal psychology, there took place the expansion of its conceptual and problem field, which meant assimilation of the humanities (cultural studies, philosophy, etc.) in relation to the problems indicated by transpersonal psychology. This expansion of the problem field of transpersonal psychology meant its transformation into interdisciplinary transpersonal theory. If in the classical version of the transpersonal theory (S. Grof, K. Wilber) the idea of conceptual unity of transpersonal experience prevailed, then in a later, modernized version (J. Ferrer), this idea is replaced by the idea of incommensurability of the states of transpersonal experience.

Professor of the Department of psychology of East and West in the California Institute of Integral Studies J. Ferrer in his work "Revisioning transpersonal theory. A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality" (2002) offers further conceptualization of the transpersonal idea in the form of localization of introspective spiritual experience. The fundamental idea here is not the unity of spiritual experience, but its thematic specification depending on the type of religious or spiritual system. This approach we designated as a non-classical project of the transpersonal paradigm.

The modernized version of the transpersonal theory is distinguished by criticism of the previous ideas. In the reformed version of the transpersonal theory of J. Ferrer, the thesis that spiritual experience has an inter-subjective nature is questioned. One of the ideas of the criticism of



the American scientist is negation of the so-called perennial philosophy – the idea about universal character of spiritual experience. J. Ferrer offers to consider transpersonal reality in terms of participation and multilocality. In his concept, one of the postulates is the assertion about the plurality of interpretations of this reality. To clarify his ideas, he uses the following metaphor: “The Ocean of Emantipation has many shores” (Ferrer, 2002, p.147). However, it should be noted here that the universalism, which is criticized by this author, is not introduced from the outside, but it follows from the results of transpersonal experience.

J. Ferrer also opposes the subjectivism of transpersonal approach, calling it “intrasubjective reductionism (i.e., the reduction in spiritual and transpersonal phenomena to the status of individual private experiences)” (Ferrer, 2002, p.184). Therefore, the researcher outlines two extreme poles of transpersonal theory – universalism and subjectivism and opposes his “point of view of participatory” to them. Here lies the creative idea of incorporating the individual spiritual and mental experience into cultural-social reality. According to J. Ferrer, the dominant dichotomy of “universalism-pluralism” is typical for the entire preceding transpersonal theory. He criticizes S. Grof’s ideas, because they level out the features of a person’s spiritual experience. In this context it should be noted that the founders of transpersonal theory (S. Grof and others) offered the syncretic model of the individual and the universe, in which the isolated experiences of the individual became the part of one or another mythological-religious view of the world.

To expand the horizons of transpersonal theory J. Ferrer offers to consider transpersonal facts as “multilocal events”, emphasizing their cultural heterogeneous nature. Here, there are the opportunities for symbiosis of culturally-conditioned and personal beginnings. To reveal this idea the researcher uses the term “embodied presence”, in which the ontological and anthropological horizons are united.

J. Ferrer defines his analytical model as contextual, emphasizing the differences of transpersonal experiences. In the sphere of philosophy of religion, his views are continued in the idea of mutual influence of the divine and human, in the sphere of interreligious discourse – in postulating the equivalence of different points of view on the nature of spiritual reality. It can be stated that a later, modernized version of the transpersonal



theory, represented by J. Ferrer, shifts to the communicative pole.

Thus, the fundamental difference between two versions of the transpersonal theory – classical and modernized – is the difference of approaches to the problem of cultural determination: if S. Grof and others do not consider transpersonal experience to be culturally determined, then in the subsequent authors, such determination is present. Basic constants of the human psyche, mythological-religious experiences, archetypes and symbols have ontological status in the system of S. Grof and conventional status in the system of J. Ferrer.

The novations in Jorge N. Ferrer's works are a critical reflection on the unified spiritual reality, a unified coordinate system of transpersonal experience. Spiritual reality in the view of the scientist becomes not universal, but individualized, conditioned by the diversity of human personality. This contains a significant and cardinal difference of the transpersonal system of J. Ferrer, not only from the previous paradigms in the field of humanistic and transpersonal knowledge, but also the whole system of religious philosophy.

The classical philosophy of religion as a whole is based on the idea of ontology of a single reality (God, sacred, etc.), accessible to the individual in the religious experiences. J. Ferrer builds his concept on the denial of such unified reality, unified ontology, offering instead the multidimensionality of individual intentionalities. This point of view is not unquestionable, but it extends the theoretical perspective of understanding of the considered phenomena and shows methodological potential of the strategies of research of consciousness and culture.

For a more detailed clarification of the novelty of approach of Professor of California Institute of Integral Studies to the analysis of transpersonal discourse, it would be appropriate to make a quote from his work "Revising transpersonal theory": "In other words, as we become more aware of our intrinsic vital connection with the sacred, the transpersonal gradually reveals itself to us as more and more personal" (Ferrer, 2002, Preface, XVIII). This idea is important for both modern religious discourse, and transpersonal



discourse. At the same time, here we can notice a kind of “anthropological turn” within the framework of the transpersonal paradigm. This point of view lets to trace the development of transpersonal theory in dynamics, though it is counterpositional to previous versions of the transpersonal theory, and if to consider more widely, it is based on other postulates than classical and even non-classical philosophy and phenomenology of religion.

How does this approach solve the problem of subjectivism?

To solve this issue J. Ferrer offers the term “participatory”, which includes the intersubjective context. The scientist offers the view, which we designated as a kind of “transpersonal existentialism”, where the great importance is given to intra-subjective introspection. Ferrer’s approach contains the criticism of ontologism, which denies the universally significant nature of philosophical and religious tradition. In the framework of this approach, there takes place rethinking and refusal of subjectivist reductionism, which means “participatory knowledge” in this terminology (Ferrer, 2002).

However, there is a debatable question whether this view, which emphasizes the “multilocal transpersonal event”, removes individualistic reductionism. Considering this concept, it is appropriate to discuss methodological problems of the study. The method of elimination of reductionism, according to Ferrer, is “interpersonal verification”. Summary of the views of the American author is the above-mentioned idea-metaphor about “The Ocean of Emantipation has many shores”. This thought is one of the key ideas for understanding of this interpretation model of transpersonal experience. This model can also mean the pluralism of ontologies. Despite many methodological innovations in the J. Ferrer’s works, it should be noted that he adheres to the classical view on multidimensionality of transpersonal experience shared by many theorists of transpersonal paradigm. According to the views of the Spanish-American scientist, the transpersonal picture of the world includes multidimensionality of transpersonal ontologies, and a view of the world, which can be designated as intersubjective one. An important conclusion from the views of the American author is that transpersonal theory implies its own epistemology. Here it should be noted that the issues of epistemology of transpersonal theory are raised by R. Tarnas in his work “The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View” (1991), whose postulates of the epistemology of complicity are coherent to the ideas of Ferrer about the point of view of participatory vision.

Solution of epistemological problems is a new vector in the framework of transpersonal theory, which deserves deeper consideration. To some extent, we have done it in the article “El proyecto de la ontología religiosa de M. Eliade y el problema de la síntesis de los paradigmas” (Nikonovich, 2016), where there were developed the issues of ontology and epistemology of mythological-religious experience, including on the base of achievements of transpersonal school. On the base of concepts of M. Eliade, S. Grof, C.-G. Jung, J. Campbell we created the integrated model of mythological-religious experience: the existential-personal level is complemented by the transpersonal one. There was offered the new approach to the problem of mythological-religious consciousness: it has both psychological and ontological nature. Within the scope of this article, it is important to note that meta-theoretical model of mythological-religious experience, its typology was built, taking into account the theoretical-mythological, transpersonal and psychoanalytic vectors.

The problem of conceptualization of transpersonal knowledge is presented in different angles from different authors. J. Ferrer sees creation of “transpersonal epistemology” one of his tasks. The problems of transpersonal cognition exist in the theoretical-methodological sphere of it. The scheme of the project of “transpersonal epistemology” offered by J. Ferrer, incorporates the following criteria for verifiability of transpersonal knowledge: universal / contextual, absolute relative a number of other categories (Ferrer, 2002). The cognitive agent, which removes such gnoseological dichotomies, is already mentioned approach of “participatory”, which in

our opinion neutralizes the basic dichotomy of “Your/Other”, which can lead to methodological and conceptual pluralism in understanding of cultural and personal differences.

Summing up the analysis of multidimensionality of thematic configurations of transpersonal discourse, we can note the following. The fields of application of the transpersonal theory are extensive – from the ontology of culture to the ontology of consciousness and the unconscious. Further consideration of transpersonal theory is possible on the following headings:



1. Epistemology of transpersonal experience.
2. Cultural aspects of transpersonal experience.
3. Ontological status of transpersonal experience (Nikonovich, 2016, 2017).

Paradigm analysis is implemented in this section, lets to identify the ontological-phenomenological grounds of the structure of consciousness of subject in connection with cultural manifestations. Consideration of the questions of religious anthropology, phenomenology of religious consciousness and being within the framework of transpersonal paradigm is theoretical base for solving the problem of ontology of the subject and development of modern interdisciplinary strategies that expand the boundaries of transpersonal theory. Research of the problem of transformation of the human personality is also research of the problem of its ontological and existential base in connection with the ontology of the subject, religion and culture.

Conclusion

Speaking about the methodological and cognitive-epistemological potential of the investigated paradigms and strategies of humanitarian knowledge, it should be noted that analysis of these approaches lets to consider such phenomena as myth and religion multidimensionally, in their structural elements and typical features, to model a more complete view of consciousness and its specifics in various modifications. This concerns, first of all, the analysis of cognitive potential of these strategies, which lets to consider the functioning consciousness in different dimensions – transpersonal, phenomenological, etc.

This gives grounds and can be the base of creation of epistemological model of consciousness, the methodology of explication of the features of mechanism of its functioning. It is obvious that analysis of the features of human psyche, including its spiritual constants from the point of view of phenomenology, transpersonal approach, humanistic psychology expands the conceptual and problem field of their multi-vector analysis in different point of view.



We offered

consideration of A. Maslow's concept of "peak experiences" in a new dimension – cognitive-religious. In the article, there is noted that the studies of the founder of existential-humanistic psychology affects not only the deep psychological structures of the personality, but also experiences that can be called meta-anthropological and transpersonal. Maslow's dominant ideas connected with the analysis of "peak experiences" fit into the paradigm of development of modern phenomenology of religious and mythological forms, which we developed on the base of transpersonal philosophy and phenomenology of religion. Thus, we can talk about the cognitive, epistemological dimension of the Maslow's concept.

Theoretical-methodological significance of the investigated paradigms and the given subject is the possibility of building epistemology and phenomenology of mythological and religious knowledge, and deeper penetration into "cartography" (S. Grof) of human consciousness in its archetypal and religious forms. Transpersonal theory has the potential for interdisciplinary synthesis and postulating interdisciplinary strategies.

Interdisciplinary synthesis gives grounds for postulating of interrelated ontology of consciousness and ontology of culture, as well as creation of the typology of mythological-religious experience. It should be also noted that modern transpersonal view of the world includes pluralism of transpersonal ontologies.

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