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Transpersonal Psychology: The Role of the Afrocentric Paradigm

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Conspicuously absent in the literature of transpersonal psychology in its search for a paradigm is an exploration of traditional African culture and world view. Such a legacy of omission from philosophical and psychological endeavors is common. This is due to the fact that until recently African culture has been so badly misunderstood because of the imposition of alien world view in its analysis. The unity and integration of knowledge that we seek in a transpersonal paradigm has its framework already existent in the African world view and is identified in Afrocentric psychological theory.

Transpersonal psychology seeks to expand the field of psychological inquiry to include the study of optimal psychological health and well-being. The potential for experiencing a broad range of states of consciousness is recognized, allowing identity to extend beyond the usual limits of ego and personality (Walsh & Vaughn, 1980). Within this frame it is understood that the reality one perceives is shaped by an underlying system of beliefs often implicit, assumed, or unquestioned, that serve as self-fulfilling, self-prophetic organizers of experience. From this basis all psycho-

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logies have evolved as implicit or explicit models of human nature. The pervasive dynamic interplay between cultural beliefs and psychological models is now being recognized. The models posed by psychologists are a part of their own beliefs and experience and reflect both the culture and individual that produce them.

Transpersonal psychology represents a paradigm shift in Western psychology, benefitting from exposure to cross-cultural beliefs about the nature of consciousness and reality. Changing the prevailing limiting cultural beliefs about our basic nature and our relationship to the world may be one of the most important tasks confronting psychology today. Recognition of the upper reaches of psychological development supports the investigation of maximal positive well-being and higher states of consciousness. This awareness has always been characteristic of non-Western psychologies. The failure of materialistic external strivings to provide the satisfaction, peace, and well-being has led some people to look for a more adequate source. One of the principle aims of transpersonal psychology must be to help us overcome the perceptual distortions identified by the many consciousness disciplines, yielding a view of reality more consistent with that which modern physics has shown to be the true nature of the material universe.

The purpose of this article will be to present a paradigm that unifies the insights of modern physics and Eastern mysticism under the philosophical structure of traditional African philosophy. This endeavor will be pursued in four phases. First, African philosophical-cultural tradition as a missing link in human history will be briefly discussed. Second, the resultant Afrocentric paradigm of psychological functioning will be delineated, based on the philosophical legacy of ancient Africans exemplified through the Egyptian Mystery Systems. Third, an example of the unfolding of Afrocentric psychology will be reported. The last stage will outline some future research directions for adherents to the paradigm.

The Missing Link

A cursory review of the literature in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* over the past ten years reveals that, for the most part, search for a paradigm has been focused toward Oriental philosophy and modern physics. But as Capra (1975) notes neither of these approaches have been fruitful in terms of offering clear applicability and implications for day-to-day existence. This limitation appears to be a function of the world views of the cultures from which these fields of study come. The modern physicist experiences the world through an extreme specialization of the rational mind; the mystic through an extreme specialization of the intuitive mind (Capra, 1975).

According to Capra (1975; 1982) the mystical experience is necessary to understand the deepest nature of things, and science is essential for modern life. What we need, therefore, is not a synthesis, but a dynamic interplay between mystical intuition and scientific analysis. The world view implied by modern physics is

inconsistent with the dominant view of our present society. The prevailing Western world view does not reflect the harmonious interrelatedness we observe in nature. In order to achieve such a state of dynamic balance, a radically different philosophical, social, and economic structure will be needed: a cultural revolution in the true sense of the word. The survival of our whole civilization may depend on whether or not we can bring about such a change.

Looking at contemporary cultures, Cook and Kono (1977) state that each of the three primary races exhibits an overdevelopment of one aspect of being, producing three cultural extremes: a materially advanced but spiritually bankrupt culture in the West; a spiritually developed and socially stagnant culture in the East; and a developed social consciousness and fluid social structure, but relatively undeveloped material culture in Africa. They concede that significant exceptions tend to indicate the oneness of humanity and the possibility for a universal psychology. In the West there are genuine religious and spiritual traditions that are pervasive. In the East there originated the concept of advancement in government service through merit alone in the Chinese examination system. And in precolonial Africa there was metal technology, commerce, medical science, and architecture far surpassing that of Europe and Asia at the time. Yet, they perceive that the general priorities of these races, then and now, pushed each culture toward a particular extreme.

Although I do not agree with all of their conclusions, their underlying premise is consistent with the point being made here regarding the outcome of a particular world view or cultural orientation. Each world view will yield its own particular consequences and what is needed now is the unity that contains and transcends all opposites. The Western materialistic construction of reality culminates in the modern physicist's examination of materiality and conclusion that the material world constitutes the world of appearance and that the "stuff of the world is mind stuff" (Eddington, 1931). However, despite the fact that science points toward this view, a fragmented, mechanistic world view is adhered to on a daily basis. Eastern religion philosophies, so long concerned with timeless mystical knowledge, see it lying beyond reasoning and inexpressible in words, therefore unknowable in the general realm and inapplicable in the state of non-transcendence. Africa offers the middle ground, a centering. The fullest potential of what Africa can provide may be identified in contemporary times by her displaced children, African-Americans. For it is they that are the inquiring offspring of the strongest 100,000,000 ancestors (some estimates range upwards to 200,000,000) torn from the motherland during over three hundred years of European slave trade. African-Americans represent the union of opposites, culturally and racially.

Conspicuously absent in the literature of transpersonal psychology in its search for a paradigm is an exploration of traditional African culture and world view. Such a legacy of omission from philosophical and psychological endeavors is common. Until recently, African culture has been badly misunderstood because of the imposition of alien world views in its analysis. The unity and intergration of knowledge that we seek in a transpersonal paradigm has its framework already existent in the

African world view. This is discussed in detail, as it relates to Afrocentric psychology.

The Afrocentric Paradigm

Within the past several years a number of psychologists have independently converged on an approach to the science of mind and behavior that is rooted in the traditional African world view (Akbar, 1976, 1981; Baldwin, 1981; Frye, 1980; Khatib & Nobles, 1978; Myers, 1981a, 1981b; Nobles, 1972, 1974; X Clark, McGee, Nobles, & X Weems, 1975). The Afrocentric paradigm of psychological functioning that has been developed is consistent with and reinforces the paradigmatic shift currently taking place in the sciences in Western culture (Bateson, 1979; Capra 1975, 1982; Gelwick, 1977; Jantsch, 1980; Polyani, 1967) and the "new philosophy of science" (Bhaskar, 1975; Harre, 1972; Manicas & Secord, 1983). In addition, being psychological theory, it adds the dimension of practical applicability to everyday life.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), in discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence. The evidence, then, from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept. In terms of African-American psychological theory an entire set of conceptual categories and properties has been generated from the evidence presented by traditional African culture, and its correspondent world view. Many scholars have detailed the existence of such a generalized world view and certain cultural ethos continually predominate (Asante, 1980; Diop, 1978; Forde, 1954; Gerhart, 1978; Levine, 1977; Mbiti, 1970; Nobles, 1972; Sowande, 1973; Thompson, 1974; Williams, 1976; Zahan, 1979). Dixon (1971) and Nichols (1976) have been particularly clear in delineating and articulating the philosophical aspects of the world view.

A brief discussion follows of some of the conceptual categories and properties of the paradigm/theory. Each category represents one of the philosophical assumptions that comprises the conceptual system, which is the basis of the paradigm/theory (Myers, 1984). The Afrocentric conceptual system of the paradigm is truly holistic, because ontologically it assumes reality to be both spiritual and material at once. In this regard everything becomes one thing, spirit manifesting. Spirit refers to that permeating essence that is known in an extrasensory fashion (e.g., energy, consciousness, God). For our purposes, consciousness manifesting will be assumed; and, if the properties of the conceptual system are followed in a highly structured fashion starting with ontology, all is God manifest.

Drawing from the teachings of ancient Africans (i.e., Egyptians over 5,000 years ago), the aim of the conceptual system is to structure reality such that man/woman can achieve everlasting peace and happiness (James, 1954). This deification process seeks to transform the finite, limited conception of human consciousness into an infinite consciousness that is supremely good or divine. In order to accomplish this task, one must begin to know that everything, including self,

is the manifestation of one permeating essence that is the source of all things good. When the spiritual/material ontology is adhered to completely, one loses the sense of individualized ego/mind and experiences infinite mind or consciousness manifesting as oneself. Remember that any other ontological assumption (e.g. material, or material and spiritual) falls within the realm of nonreality or illusion to one adopting the Afrocentric conceptual system.

Before discussing other conceptual categories and properties of the paradigm/theory, an example of this conceptual system functioning in African culture might be appropriate. However, the purpose of identifying such a paradigm/theory is not to replicate the surface structure (i.e. rituals, specific practices or beliefs) of African culture. What is being articulated is a conceptual system in pure form, which will be reflected, in the way one views the world and can be adopted by anyone across cultures and time. It is also important to note in this regard that what is being advocated is at this point not exclusively African, nor could or should it be, if the paradigm/theory is valid. The point is that the conceptual system seems to have originated in Africa (Diop, 1974; James, 1954; ben-Jochannon, 1970) and among Black people who would in modern context likely be labeled of African descent. Equally important, however, it is in the process of people of African descent (African-Americans) rediscovering their heritage that this way of viewing life in total is recaptured, and is consequently termed Afrocentric.

Nobles (1972, 1980) and Zahan (1979) discuss the African concept of extended self, which is particularly illustrative of the Afrocentric spiritual/material ontology at work. Self in this instance includes all of the ancestors, the yet unborn, all of nature, and the entire community. In addition, consubstantiation was assumed. In other words they believed "I am because we are; we are, therefore, I am." Holonomy, the whole being somehow contained in each of its parts, may be a universal property of nature and is characteristic here.

It is critical to note, however, that one's "being" did not automatically make one a part of the community nor admit one to the position of ancestor at a later date. Both positions held requisite the adoption of a "proper" belief structure (conceptual system). This adherence is evidenced through behavior and attitude (Zahan, 1979). The role and importance of consciousness in African thought is further evidenced in concepts such as Nommo (the power of the word) and the belief that one had not "died" until the last person who knew him/her by name "died." Then the person was believed to enter the realm of ancestral spirits (universal consciousness).

The second conceptual category to be discussed is epistemology. In order to be internally consistent with the ontology, self knowledge would have to be viewed as the bases of all knowledge, and it is. One knows through symbolic imagery and rhythm (Nichols, 1976). In order to make this idea more easily comprehensible to those of us more familiar with the dominant epistemology of Western culture, which is that external knowledge is the basis of all knowledge, Polyani's notion of tacit knowledge will be introduced. Michael Polyani is one of the foremost Western scientist/philosophers being identified as fostering the general paradigm shift in

science (Gelwick, 1977; Manicas & Secord, 1983). Polyani (1966) believed that all knowing has a tacit dimension, and this "hidden" dimension is the greater part of knowledge. Within knowing there are two awarenesses: the subsidiary, those unspoken assumptions we rely on which are very close to us or proximal; and the focal, that to which we attend to as though far from us, or distal. We use our body to attend from it things outside of it. We interiorize and dwell in "clues" as the proximal terms of our existence. The idea that all knowing is a form of indwelling, overthrows centuries of the Western dichotomy that separates mind and body, reason and experience, theory and practice, subject and object, the knower and the known. Whenever we form an integration (perception) or recognition, the subsidiary particulars (assumptions being relied on, i.e., aspects of conceptual system) appear in the phenomenon of the pattern they produce. Focal awareness or distal terms are dependent on subsidiary awareness or proximal terms to determine what we mean. Tacit knowing guides us to the comprehension of something real.

In many ways Polyani's notion of tacit knowledge is analogous to the Afrocentric epistemology of the paradigm/theory. Within the Afrocentric conceptual system all knowledge is assumed to be self knowledge or tacit knowledge from the beginning. In other words, the Afrocentric epistemology starts out assuming the interrelatedness of all things and that whatever you believe is, is for you, given your conceptual system (interplay of subsidiary and focal awarenesses). Power in this world view is the ability to define reality. Symbolic imagery and rhythm as a way of knowing is in itself an open acknowledgement that focal awareness (symbolic imagery) is merely a reflection of the nature of subsidiary awareness (indwelling rhythm). Both are inextricable parts of how one knows. One can structure reality in order to experience infinite divine consciousness or whatever else one chooses. The power of God is within us. Polyani noted the use of the body in experience, and the false inside/outside dichotomy. In the Afrocentric conceptual system an additional role of the body/mind as an important affective/cognitive barometer must be mentioned. As symbolized in the architecture of the pyramids, ancient Africans believed that the heart, symbolic of how one is feeling about things or processing them, must be dealt with before the ascension to higher consciousness (infinite consciousness) could be achieved.

The logic, process, and axiology of the paradigm will be examined together because of the way their interrelatedness follows so closely from the two major categories of ontology and epistemology and for the sake of brevity of this article. That the nature of reality is perceived to be both spiritual and material at once, speaks to a type of logic that emphasizes the union of opposites, diunital logic. In line with the schema of general systems theory, the process is ontology, all sets are interrelated through human and spiritual networks and through them all goals will be achieved. The highest goal in this framework is to achieve everlasting peace and happiness. The highest value lies in the interpersonal relationship between man/woman. Such an axiological position rests on the realization of the interrelatedness of all things and the role of consciousness as that permeating essence. These ideas place humankind in a highly responsible position in terms of perpetuating the natural order. Self knowledge

being the basis of all knowledge, the unconditional positive regard for the natural order must begin within and be generated outwardly, manifesting at a critical point in terms of interpersonal relations among people. Self love as the basis of all love, starts within and moves outward in phases of the most similar to most dissimilar. Taken together the philosophical assumptions of this paradigm form a conceptual system that structures consciousness such that everlasting peace and happiness will be achieved.

An Example of the Unfoldment

In December, 1981, I attended a meeting of the Southern Regional Education Board Black Psychology Task Force in Atlanta, Georgia. At that meeting Wade Nobles, a leading theorist in development the African perspective in psychology, outlined the requisite characteristics of a theory worthy of the name Black Psychology. Among other important characteristics, he stressed that it must come from the deep structure of African culture (i.e., philosophy, cosmology, axiology). Na'im Akbar, another noted figure in the field, discussed our destiny as the authors of scientific revolution. He noted expected differences in the application of psychological models from African versus European world views. Of particular interest here is the difference in normative standards. Nature provides the standard in the African world view, the Western world view utilizes an ethnocentric (e.g., White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, property-owning male) or relative standard (Akbar, 1981). Joseph Baldwin, an Afrocentric theorist of personality, defined Black personality structure in terms of an African self-extension orientation or spiritual core. Edwin Nichols elaborated on the philosophical aspects of cultural difference. Other papers included the reconceptualization of the African-American woman, interpersonal relationships between Black men and women, and the strengths of the Black community. My paper described the Afrocentric paradigm of psychological functioning discussed here. I reference this experience to make a point of the independent convergence of thought among scholars of the Afrocentric persuasion at that meeting.

The consistency between what Nobles called for, what Akbar prophesied, and the subsequent theory I presented was uncanny. If I had seen their particular papers I could not have matched their ideas any better point for point. Baldwin's paper on the African personality, especially his ideas of the spiritual core, also mirrored my thoughts. I was familiar with Nichol's work, but I did learn more about the differences between the African and Asian philosophy/culture/world view, which needed greater clarification in my work at that time. The topics and issues covered in other papers were readily and effectively addressed when the Afrocentric paradigm was applied in their solution.

To a degree, psychological theory is shaped by autobiography, and the personal history of the theoreticians directly influencing their articulation of and emphasis in theory (Walsh & Vaughn, 1980). I believe this to be true in my case and that of Afrocentric psychology. Afrocentric psychological theory has evolved in such a

manner that it has reinforced the relationships I see between personal experience, culture, and psychological paradigms. The experience I cited is but one small example of how consciousness has unfolded and continues to unfold vis-à-vis Afrocentric psychology.

Future Research Directions

The Afrocentric paradigm being proposed offers a method for structuring consciousness, which unless you already adhere to it, would yield an altered state of consciousness (ASC). This particular ASC seeks to unify finite human consciousness with infinite consciousness or God consciousness. Although this conceptual system characterizes most of the consciousness disciplines philosophically, what differs is the assumed methodology and process. Despite having been identified in African culture first, the world view is by no means exclusionary. Utilizing the conceptual system and assuming a single gene pool, if we accept the most current archeological/anthropological evidence and what biogenetics tell us about dominant versus recessive genes for color, all people are African people if they go back far enough into their ancestry. From this view it is not surprising that the same basic ancient wisdom has been found throughout the world. According to Homer and Herodotus, in early times Black people were the inhabitants of what we now refer to as the Sudan, Egypt, Arabia, Palestine, Western Asia, and India (James, 1954). The English word Egyptian comes from the Greek word Aiguptos, which means Black.

One direction that research from the Afrocentric perspective might take is in the area of semantics and hermeneutics. The meaning and interpretation of words and concepts mark the state of consciousness of their speakers. As we observe the meanings of words and concepts changing over time and across cultures, we can note the unfolding of the consciousness of a people. For example, the term *Jew* is reputed to have originally referred to "people who follow God," and Israel, "the land of the people who follow God." When and how did these meanings change, for whom, and why? The same questions should be asked of the word Egyptian and other concepts. The answers will tell us something of the nature of the functioning of consciousness itself.

Having delineated the specifics of the deep structure of ancient traditional African culture in terms of its philosophical underpinnings, the resultant paradigm, if used to structure reality, fulfills all purposes of other consciousness disciplines and adheres to the same basic assumptions. Walsh (1983) identified six characteristics of the consciousness disciplines that can be summarized with reference to the Afrocentric paradigm as follows: (1) Consciousness is primary, the source of all pleasure and suffering is in the mind. (2) A mind untrained in the Afrocentric conceptual system is vastly less under our control than we imagine, but when trained, provides optimal means for enhancing well-being and enabling us to contribute to the well-being of others. (3) The trained mind is aware of itself as a manifestation of God (its true

nature and identity), and as such, uses this knowledge to avoid destruction and suffering.

When interpreted from the Afrocentric world view, Christ's teachings articulate these same premises. Both Christ and Moses were Initiates of the Egyptian Mysteries. Moses is said to have been a Hierogrammat: and Christ, to have taken final initiation at the Great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt after attending the Mysteries lodge at Mt. Carmel (James, 1954; Levi, 1972). Another research direction for the Afrocentric paradigm is the Afrocentric interpretation of Biblical Scripture. The following is an Afrocentric interpretation of the Lord's Prayer:

Afrocentric Interpretation of Lord's Prayer

Our being that is in Oneness inviolatible is your Truth/Law. Our realization of Oneness be with us. Thy will be done, so that we no longer believe in our separation.

Give us day by day our highest good, and grant us relief from payment for our seeing ourselves as separate, for we also grant relief to everyone that might owe gratitude and recognition to us.

And do not let us be aroused by false hope for false desires of pleasure or gain, but protect us from things that bring suffering.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

With regard to the concept of Christ and his teachings, the Afrocentric paradigm acknowledges Christ as humankind realizing itself as God manifest. According to Graves (1875) there were sixteen crucified saviors before Christ, starting with Horus, the Christ figure of ancient Egypt, to Buddha, Krishna, and Mohammed, and so on. Each manifestation and teaching is worthy of study and must be studied. The author begins with the Christ of Biblical Scripture because of her own personal experience and cultural background.

The last research direction to be mentioned here will be the psychohistorical (history of the spirit/mind) analysis of individuals through autobiography and biography, and racial groups, the sexes, cultural groups, nations, and so on through ethnography, folklore, and ethnomethodology. The premise of these analyses will be that because everything is God manifesting, it is important to see how he/she manifests through the behaviors of specified beings. What do specific individuals do, what have they done, and what of groups of individuals? In this regard it is important to note that the purpose of these analyses serves self knowledge. All that is real is God, the good, all else is illusory, nonreality. In this process the researcher must be

committed to the clear articulation and reexamination of his/her own belief system. Testable predictions must be the consequence of these investigations. The clear deliniation of the deep structure of the Afrocentric conceptual system makes state-specific science more probable in this case (Tart, 1983).

Conclusion

In sum, the paradigm that is being articulated is far too global and comprehensive to be covered in any but a cursory fashion here. Yet to be addressed is the specific therapeutic approach of the Afrocentric paradigm called Belief Systems Analysis. Also the detailed application of the paradigm to specific social problems and issues is omitted. In addition, questions arising about the implication of the paradigm and its relationship to other consciousness disciplines and traditional Western psychology must be addressed in another forum.

Eagerness to fill these gaps immediately is related to two principles, that of "adequatio" (adequateness) and grades of significance. That is, the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known, and the same phenomenon may hold entirely different grades of meaning and significance to different observers with different degrees of "adequatio" (Schumacher, 1977). Learning and practice seem to be the compensatory factors ameliorating this historic problem of knowing and understanding (Walsh, Elgin, Vaughn, & Wilber, 1980). Therefore, the sense is that the more information given, the more learning and practice and resultant enlightenment. Because of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the paradigm, what emerges is a metapsychology, which makes the task enormous. Suffice it to say that being true to the paradigm, the unfoldment will be accomplished in perfect time. Being truth, this is inescapable.

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