

CHTP Symposium at IONS
May 6, 2005
Evening session

Orientating Remarks (Colette Fleuridas)

- Brainstormed about where do we want to go from here, to collaborate better as institutions and organizations, to move forward in a collaborative way.
- Mission statement and goals were developed over time in concert with a group of students and faculty.
- This document will inform the process for the weekend, particularly in discussion of theory and practice, collaboration between the different arms of the field.
- Great panel set up for tomorrow.
- Discussion with graduate /undergrads who will present perspectives in tomorrow's session.
- Ideas of how to collaborate—create a minor for students at more traditional institutions that can offer comparative experiences.
- In afternoon, topic is research discussion; then institutional collaboration to bring it all together.
- Tomorrow evening session, how to bring it all together—get current with where we are now, guide us on project for the future.
- Do homework tonight! (Read the outline)

A Bedtime Story—Presented by Chris Aanstoos
Challenges and Opportunities for Humanistic Psychology:
The State of the Art in 2005 (Expanded version from written and symposium notes.)

1. Why Are We Here?

As members and representatives of organizations and institutions in Humanistic, Transpersonal, Existential, Positive and Integral Psychologies, we sense that this is a time of profoundly important challenges and opportunities and that we can best meet both by collaborating.

Yes, synergy is now a very widely recognized strategy for success for almost any organization, but such successful collaboration requires that we know what the challenges

and opportunities are, and that's why we are here now: to spend the next couple of days identifying these and exploring ways to collaboratively meet them.

My goal tonight is to offer a state of the union, to present a general overview of the state of the art of the field, sketching in broad brushstrokes the major issues underlying our contemporary situation—those themes that precipitate and fuel our specific challenges and opportunities.

I do not claim these will be an exclusive tabulation—they are certainly not complete. Rather, I present these to provoke discussion. Our purpose this weekend is not, after all, to read papers at each other, but to talk together. So I will present my analysis of the issues underlying our current challenges and opportunities very succinctly in order to save most of this session for discussion.

I will take each in turn, starting with the challenges. It's usually best to get the bad news out first—then close with a consideration of our opportunities.

2. Underlying Challenges in the Contemporary Situation

A generation after the emergence of a humanistic paradigm in psychology, much has changed. Indeed, looking back over the past half-century, we can almost say that we've witnessed the rise and fall of the paradigm, from its burgeoning during the 1960s and '70s, to its decline since then.

At its peak, its spokesmen, such as Rollo May, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow were “household names,” known and read by millions; indeed, Presidents of the APA and even advisors to the Presidents of the United States. For a while the annual meetings of the Association of Humanistic Psychology rivaled those of the American Psychological Association, and a third of all psychotherapists identified their practice modality as “humanistic.”

How things have changed! When was the last time a book by a humanistic psychologist sold a million copies? Well...it was those of May, Rogers and Maslow. But this current dearth of powerfully influential humanistic psychologists signifies a larger shift: not only has our professional stature changed, the popular culture has changed as well. In the past quarter-century, the U.S. has seen the rise of right-wing politics and right-wing religion. The ideologies of the movements have demonized humanism. Now, the alleged “humanism” they attack is what they call “secular humanism”—really a sort of Newtonian, materialistic metaphysics embraced and defended even by the likes of B.F. Skinner. Humanistic psychology has, I think, been rather unfairly tarred by that attack. From religious fundamentalists who still want to replace evolution with creationism to moralists who decry self-awareness as a self-absorbed culture of narcissism, humanistic psychology has indeed been the target of a virulent and sustained attack for the past quarter-century.

In its current version, this right-wing movement's favorite whipping boy is "moral relativism"—you may have noticed that was the first target attacked by the new pope, for example. And, again, humanistic psychology gets rather unfairly maligned by this critique, which is more accurately aimed at post-modernism (although some points are shared). Now, there are interesting points of convergence between humanistic psychology, secular humanism, and post-modernism, as well as points of divergence. But this is not the occasion to examine those. All I mean to imply here is that humanistic psychology has been a target of a very effective culture war for the past quarter-century, with the result that our perspective, indeed our voice, is no longer in the mainstream of the public discourse as it was in the 1960s and '70s.

This decline is also evident within our professional world. Over the past quarter-century the health care field has been transformed by its takeover by "for profit" corporations. The predictable result is that "managed care"—managed, that is, by administrators with backgrounds in business—has reduced psychotherapy to "management by objectives" of ten sessions—or less—manualized by templates, predetermined by operationally defined diagnostic categories. And soon to be reduced further by the medicalization of psychopathology which aims to replace psychotherapy altogether with psychopharmacology. There will certainly be no third party recompense for existential therapy—much less for growth centers of the human potential movement.

In our academic world the situation is no less grim. After defeating behaviorism in the 1960s and 1970s, (humanistic psychology was credited by Skinner in 1987 as the #1 obstacle to psychology becoming "a science of behavior") we watched as cognitive psychology overtook the field. Its newer, computational version of a mechanistic model of persons supplanted the older, cruder mechanism of behaviorism, but it was ultimately a case of old wine being poured into fancy new bottles as the essential mechanistic metaphysics were preserved. And what humanistic insights that couldn't be effaced by cognitivism got co-opted by "positive psychology"—with the added indignity that the positive psychologists loudly and critically misrepresented humanistic psychology even as they stole from it.

All this paradigm clash has taken its toll. When I first joined the American Psychological Association's division of humanistic psychology in the early '80s, its goal was to grow to 7,000 members. Today it struggles to remain near 700. The Association of Humanistic Psychology has likewise experienced a fall-off in numbers and revenue, having to close its central office and annual meeting. The Association for Transpersonal Psychology has also had to retrench. Journal subscriptions, memberships, conferences, and publications all across the academic field reflect the precipitous decline.

Indeed, we need look no farther than this room, right now. Why are there so few of us here? Representatives from other schools were also invited. Are the challenges and opportunities confronting humanistic psychology really the purview of such a small group? Well, if so then our challenges are mighty formidable, indeed.

3. Underlying Opportunities in the Contemporary Situation

Yes, our challenges are indeed formidable—enough even to convince some that humanistic psychology is/was a one-generation phenomenon, spawned by the 1960s, and doomed to expiration as that counterculture is beaten back by the neoconservative counter-revolution of corporate power and fundamentalist religion. Certainly the past presidential election seems to inaugurate an era of right-wing dominance.

Should we just give up then, and go home and tend our own gardens? Certainly we all must have more personally rewarding things to do than spend a weekend discussing the challenges and opportunities of humanistic psychology. So, why *did* we come then? Well, speaking for myself, I came because I still see the possibility of humanistic psychology to be a vital and important force in the world. Not the caricature of humanism, but the true humanism of ancient traditions. Not the hackneyed portrait of a narcissistic and self-absorbed humanism, but a humanism that is critical and emancipatory. This is the true spirit of humanism rooted in classical Greek and Renaissance visions, inspiring the best in humanity, naming our birthright of human potentiality and calling us forth to live our lives as human persons, rather than predetermined mechanisms. To live a life of self-realization, and fulfillment, and yes, enlightenment, is no pipedream, no shared hallucination now dissipated by corporatized materialism. But neither is self-fulfillment an automatic given, or a hypostatized reality. Full humanness is our possibility-to-be, our task, our responsibility. It is the call of being to own our destiny.

This timeless summons is urgently timely. Precisely as the mechanistic metaphysics threaten to overwhelm psychology, and culture, we need humanistic psychology now, more than ever. Consider some of the hidden costs not calculated in this “cost/benefit” supposedly “bottom line” oriented corporatized culture: In the past 15 years in the United States, over-eating and insomnia have reached epidemic proportions. Also in the past 15 years, the number of new alcoholics per year has increased 67%; the number of people suffering from chronic migraine has increased 400%; the number of people suffering from chronic ulcers has increased 450%; and the number of people chronically using non-prescription pain relievers has increased 900%.

Clearly the quest for human fulfillment is not being met by contemporary mainstream psychology. There is a void, a widespread hunger for something deeper than a bigger house or SUV. This may perhaps be most evident by the bewilderment, discontent and searching of those just coming into their adulthood. At West Georgia, we have been witnessing a sharp decrease in both the quantity and quality of our graduate student applications. I’ve talked with other Humanistic/Transpersonal programs and found this to be a national trend.

They come because they sense that it is this kind of post-positivistic psychology that can speak to the deeper questions, and the deeper meanings of human-being-in-the-world, of the human spirit, and the human destiny. And therein lie our greatest opportunities. Because a culture that is commodified, desacralized, narcotized,

depersonalized is, after all, a culture that is senescent. The seeds of its own senility are already given, and they portend the paths of its own overcoming.

And we are the pathfinders. What paths am I thinking of here? Many, many. Let me mention just four, as examples of applied areas that represent key anomalies for the mechanistic paradigm but are urgent issues ripe for revision through a more humanistic paradigm.

1. holistic health
2. eco-psychology
3. spiritual development
4. global community

Let's start with health as an example. It is now finally recognized that the old "germ theory" of disease is woefully inadequate. It is not the case that you become sick because a germ invaded and infected your body in some biomechanical fashion. In fact, you already have enough germs in your left nostril to infect a whole city. Rather, we become ill when our bodies stop successfully resisting the impact of such organisms. And that, it turns out, is not some mechanistic causal process but a holistic one, reflective of the meanings we are living. This changed perspective began in the United States in the 1950s with the realization of the impact of "stress" as a factor in such major diseases as ulcers, and then eventually even for heart attacks. But now we are in a position to understand how even our immune systems are actually not mechanical, but our attunement to a meaningful world.

Now we are learning that everything from bleeding during surgery to recovery from cancer to longevity are all correlated to the meanings that we are living. Thus, for health care to be most effective, it must become holistic, and must find a partner in a psychology capable of explicating the body-mind's embodiment of the implicate meaningfulness of human experience.

This task never has been more urgent than it is in our own time, when our immune systems are now under assault as never before, not only due to lifestyle changes, but also from chemical pollution. And that raises my second example into view: eco-psychology. Here too we find an example of an anomaly so crucial and so urgent as to require a paradigm shift. From acid rain to soil depletion, from deforestation to global warming, it is now quite evident that the old perspective that viewed the world as a large pile of "material resources" to be exploited and consumed is simply no longer sustainable. As the ecological crisis becomes ever more unmistakably manifest, it also becomes evident that what is required is a new vision, and a new relation of human being in the world. Specifically, what is needed is a holistic understanding. While environmentalists have recognized this need for the past quarter-century, what they have lacked is a partner in psychology capable of supporting that new ecological vision with the appropriate psychological vision of humans' experience of the world, not as a storehouse of energy reserves, but as our primal home with which we are intrinsically and inextricably intertwined. The recovery of these interconnections is the work of a psychology capable of explicating the human experience of place, of our belonging to the web of life, within the deep harmonies and paradoxes of the natural world.

That shift brings up my third example: spiritual development. One impact of the triumph of the Cartesian/Newtonian metaphysics of natural science in the West has been the eclipse of religion as the guiding epistemological authority. Few of us, for instance, see the drought as God's punishment, most watch the Weather Channel for the meteorological bases for explanation and prediction. But when religion no longer occupies the role of the central organizing principle in the constitution of reality, people's spiritual development becomes a much more complicated matter. And we in the 21st century have certainly reached a point where—finally!—questions of spiritual development are no longer theological questions, to be resolved by reference to the doctrines of a particular religious authority. But how then does such a people's yearning for spiritual growth get fed? This is the Achilles' heel of modernism, and its inability to recognize, much less address, this gap that has left it so vulnerable to the resurgence of atavistic fundamentalisms. But in the end, the human destiny is not to go back to "that old time religion," but to go forward and discover and cultivate a spiritual life not enforced by a belief system, but facilitated by direct experience. For, ultimately, it is the experience of the numinous, not beliefs about it, that can enable us to transcend the spiritual vacuity of modern natural science, and even provide it with a deeper and more holistic foundation. But, again, we are now talking about accessing and understanding human experience—and again, then, we are indicating a role for a psychology capable of addressing experience on its own terms, rather than reducing it to the effect of infra-human informed mechanisms.

Lastly, all of these other exemplar opportunities are subtended by the hugely impactful trend toward globalization acceleratingly underway. While this trend has certainly inaugurated gigantic challenges through its tendency to undermine the local and the indigenous, it also offers the powerful promise of the insight that, in the end, we are *one people*.

These four examples point out that our task is far from finished, time is far from over, these are urgent and pressing issues, that we as humanity must get right in the next three generations or we will self-destruct. Challenges are enormous as well. Have to organize in order to meet the challenges.

Discussion about how to meet these challenges and way to discover paths:

Chris: Shift from generalizing to finer grained analysis. What are we really going to do about it? Action plans.

Organize: together we can do more than as individuals or individual institutions. (Intent of CHTP—to foster collaboration as umbrella organization).

Mike Arons: Chris' vision realistic in both negative and positive sense. Humanistic has entered into the bloodstream, so that we don't notice it or call it by name. Tremendous amount of co-option (Be all you can be in the army, etc.) How to take back this stuff and put it into more original terms?

Chris Aanstoos: It isn't how, but so few of us are even trying. If we get together we can take it back better than if each tries to take it back as individual.

Matt from CIIS: Enrollment burgeoning. Embarrassment of riches, expanding to other sites. Problem of managing growth,

Chris: At the entry point, the national trend is that enrollments are going up: the optimistic evidence that there is hunger for people entering (young adults getting their degrees). Problem is after graduation—where do you go from there. California is a special case, not so in other parts of the country.

Art Warmoth: The future of Humanistic Psychology is polycentric, poly-all-kinds-of-things. Nostalgia for an overarching label is the same that lets people believe there is some generic answer. Some people are doing things as brilliant as the giants of the past, but are doing it in a lower profile society---epistemologically heterogeneous, more dispersed. What are the ways that are worth networking on a larger scale? Moving forward in geographical areas. Artifact of American politics that makes the situation look worse than it is. Pretending to have a mandate (right wing) can only go so far,. It would be a mistake to see us as being somehow on the defensive. More accurate to say that in the blue states we're still alive and well, and pockets in the red states. Mass media has given more importance to red states; lots of Humanistic Psychology efforts are put on the back page, etc. Need to think globally, act locally, And the reverse. Act globally is the challenge. What things are worth doing in the national and international network?

Maureen O'Hara: What's missing from the conversation is power. BA/MA level is burgeoning. Where are the humanists and transpersonalists leveraging influence where larger groups are reached. Ideas are stripped of their origins in order to leave behind a lot of perceived baggage—whether propaganda spin by the right or a desisting of heavy lifting by people in the discipline. Adam Kahane (others) doing amazingly important work in countries where intractable problems have existed for years. Taking their leverage from corridors of ordinary power (oil companies, etc, government) have never learned to hold on to our vision and also work with power. Can we hook that to systems of organization, power, actually doing the work to link up with the institutions that can amplify the ideas into international action.

Chris: What are the universal benefits worth pursuing?

Maureen: I have found plenty of opportunities to put my humanistic vision into action through other institutions—with people who don't even think they're doing humanism—but not coming back into this kind of conversation—two different worlds. One where we talk about how well we are doing, how much students like it and the other where we don't link ideas to the applications in the world. Not in encounter groups because that doesn't extrapolate out.

Art: Notion of getting into a relationship with political, economic and social power. Implications of our ideas are in context and defined by society at large. Local community

oriented dealing with power has proved that state politicians are very nearly brain dead, local politicians don't see opportunities because of taking orders from the center. All are in denial about nature of money and financial institutions. We have not developed some of the critical insights that are necessary to achieve power in terms of humanistic values.

Related a conversation about images, eternal. Film: *Dark Crystal*. Crystal has a missing piece, heroes trying to get it back together. Subplot benign, lumbering creatures vs. the bad guys: culminating moment, the crystal is made whole and the benign and bad guys come together. Turtles are humanistic values, plodding away, continuing the path. Bad guys are the design flaws that are unsustainable and self-defeating. Humanistic values need to get into a relationship with design flaws and economic systems so we can get whole.

Zeno Franco: No representative from UC. Narrow group of institutions. Would like to have this conversation heard by major research institutions.

Chris: UC Santa Cruz was closest—their faculty was not replaced after retirement by like-minded professors.

Zeno: Students hungry for this, not even knowing vocabulary. Need to capture those students, need to bring UC in to the conversation. Okay for vision to become diffuse, but at the same time, students need to touch something, someone to go to.

Art: Aspire to reach the students, rather than the faculty. Real challenge. Nice to have live people to talk to.

Zeno: There is also a huge stigma if you identify yourself as humanistic. Advisors won't want anything to do with you.

Skip: Berkeley may be coming on board. Assume that contact need to be worked on more, not that it isn't happening.

Dave: Issues within the profession. Dan Goldman was once president (early 70s) of Transpersonal Psychology. Ram Dass was first person who spoke about meditation and mental health. Goldman no longer active in Transpersonal Psychology, but now a whole field of people do consciousness studies, Buddhism and mental health, spirituality and therapy, and now Harvard has conferences of spirituality and psychology. Work in the field of transformative psychology. Morphed into other things. Many people don't know the roots of this work; reinvent the wheel in area of spirituality and mental health without benefit of reading Transpersonal Psychology's canon.

Academia is still keeping Humanistic/Transpersonal Psychology alive, functioning if not thriving.

Challenge is to find the edge—smaller pool of professionals. Still be making serious contributions to this field with expectation that it will break off again. Empty nest syndrome

Institutional memory and meta-institutional memory are pieces that are missing when those connections get broken.

Training/workshops given for professionals (to Republicans for free).

Skip Robinson: Three points. As long as you ask the wrong questions you will get the wrong answers. Go deeply into how/what we ask.

Not just to go out and act but to go in and act—find center and deepen it.

Use these to go into deeper and deeper dialogue. Between institutions and within our community(ies).

Look back at germination of ideas and passions and possibilities (old Saybrook) set in motion a whole range of therapies and attitudes (psych and spirit big bang) heading out in all different directions (eco, noetics, women, etc, etc). It's just the right time to encourage dialog across these lines because it really is one family. Talk more with each other between different psychologies, and within our institutions and within CHTP. Practical actions could put us far ahead.

Matt: Edge of language, what language do we use? Look back at theorists, major institutions, big money... what audience? What are they listening to? Seems privileged? Not seeing integral piece but seeing it as cream at top of the milk.

Neoconservatives are very good at taking language—extremely important. How does it actually get languaged and spun out to the world? How is it going to be packaged? Example: Internet TV. Each of us could make a five minute pod (cultural meme). Counterpoint to corporatization of the media. If each one of us here launched a pod, we'd have 40 pods. Language and cultural change. Reach a tipping point eventually.

Lisa (OD program at SSU): On outside looking in. Here primarily because of Skip (mentee), but I'm not clear about what Transpersonal Psychology is. Talking about language, in terms of wanting to reach a wider audience. Sales, marketing, real estate, inter-culturalist, annual conferences in real decline in membership. Aware of the language especially. Transpersonal is off-putting, I don't know what it means. Often a liberal association, bias of the masses. Example: people are put off by jargon. Allay fears, find commonality. Speak from those points. Accessible to lay-people.

Chris: even within academic discourse the benefit of common terminology would be a benefit. None of existing terms would work for all of us, but finding the common core linguistically would be a great asset.

Maureen: The right didn't just wake up one morning and clean our clocks. It was a 30 year process. Early on, decided all the disparate ways you could be "right," should create a coherent counter to the liberal unraveling of the world they believed into. Began to

work together, built a common language, let go of the narcissism of small differences. Also realized they needed new social theory. Didn't have one that would carry the hearts and minds of a pretty liberal society. Created a new think tank tradition. 30 years later they have successfully created their own language, social policy groups, etc. whole infrastructure behind it. "Don't Think of an Elephant." (recommended reading). Road map on work ahead: language and structure, but also ideas. Different world. Can't use ideas of '60s and '70s. Different challenges and opportunities. Trying to open Saybrook's thinking to our own reiteration of ourselves. In very humble but very deliberate way, devise a 30 year agenda and get started. Very universal ideas; resonate everywhere on the planet. Wishful thinking won't make it true. Organized forces are against us, also inertia. Find a way to brand a worthwhile product. Get out of concern with narcissism of differences. The world is burning, has been taken over by people who don't want to think, who don't want to do transformational work on selves. Need to make a commitment in the same way that the right did. WE HAVE something to contribute to the world. Stop bickering about terminology and get to work.