



Essay

The Notions of Spirituality In the Brazilian Transpersonal Psychology Study Field

As Noções de Espiritualidade do Campo de Estudos da Psicologia Transpessoal Brasileira

Las Nociones de Espiritualidad del Campo de Estudio de la Psicología Transpersonal Brasileña

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Abstract

Transpersonal psychology appeared on the Brazilian scene in the late 1970s with a research and study agenda linked to the inclusion of spirituality as a human dimension and a fundamental aspect in health promotion. From a systematic review taken as a problematization, we present the five main notions of spirituality mobilized in the transpersonal Brazilian academic field: 1) spirituality as non-religious; 2) spirituality as a transforming experience; 3) spirituality as a cultivation of fundamental human values, 4) spirituality as an integral view and 5) decolonial participatory spirituality. The set of these notions can contribute not only to the complexity of spirituality studies, but also to expand the perspectives of health and the cultivation of good living.

Descriptors: Spirituality; Transpersonal Psychology; Health.

Resumo

A Psicologia Transpessoal surge, no cenário brasileiro, no final dos anos 70, com uma agenda de pesquisa e estudos atrelada à inclusão da espiritualidade como dimensão humana e aspecto fundamental na promoção da saúde. A partir de uma revisão sistemática tomada como problematização, apresentam-se as cinco principais noções de espiritualidade mobilizadas no campo acadêmico brasileiro transpessoal: 1) a espiritualidade como o não religioso; 2) a espiritualidade como experiência transformadora; 3) a espiritualidade como o cultivo de valores humanos fundamentais; 4) a espiritualidade como visão integral e 5) a espiritualidade participativa decolonial. O conjunto destas noções pode contribuir não apenas para a complexificação dos estudos da espiritualidade, como também para a ampliação das perspectivas de saúde e o cultivo do bem viver.

Descritores: Espiritualidade; Psicologia Transpessoal; Saúde.

Resumen

La psicología transpersonal apareció en el escenario brasileño a fines de la década de 1970 con una agenda de investigación y estudios vinculados a la inclusión de la espiritualidad como dimensión humana y aspecto fundamental en la promoción de la salud. A partir de una revisión sistemática tomada como problematización, se presentan las cinco principales nociones de espiritualidad movilizadas en el campo académico transpersonal brasileño: 1) la espiritualidad como el no religioso; 2) la espiritualidad como experiencia transformadora; 3) la espiritualidad como el cultivo de valores humanos fundamentales, 4) la espiritualidad como visión integral; y 5) la espiritualidad participativa descolonial. El conjunto de estas nociones puede contribuir no solo a la complejidad de los estudios de la espiritualidad, sino también a la expansión de las perspectivas de salud y el cultivo del buen vivir.

Descriptor: Espiritualidad; Psicología Transpersonal; Salud.

Background

Transpersonal Psychology entered the international psychological movement in the late 60's as an offshoot of the then nascent Humanistic Psychology. Abraham Maslow¹, one of the main representatives and founders of both approaches, highlighted this new perspective as the "fourth force" in psychology and, together with Anthony Sutich, Stanislav Grof, James Fadiman, Miles Vich and Sonya Margulies, defined a study and research agenda in which spirituality was considered a fundamental dimension to think about the human being and health promotion.

According to Vich², Taylor³, Friedman and Hartelius⁴, the term "transpersonal" was first used by William James in a lecture held in 1905 at Harvard University, placing him, according to Scotton et al.⁵, as the father of modern Transpersonal Psychology alongside Abraham Maslow and Stanislav Grof, its main founders.

Ryan^{6:20} highlighted four major contributions of James to the field of transpersonality: first, "his interest in psychic and religious experience; second, in his definition of true science and his refutation of materialism; third, in his concept of consciousness; and fourth, in his defense of the validity of spiritual experience."

The paternity of the term can be further shared with Carl Jung, for, as Daniels⁸ pointed out, although Jung did not directly use the term transpersonal in his writings, the "collective unconscious" is "überpersönlich" or "beyond the personal", which, according to Strohl⁹, led the English and American translators of Jung⁷, from 1942 on, to use the term *überpersönlich* as a synonym for "transpersonal" to refer to the "collective unconscious".

Jung⁷ introduced the German word *überpersönlich* into his psychological theory in the first publication of the article "The Structure of the Unconscious", in 1916, in which *über* is equivalent to over, beyond, and *persönlich*, to personal. In the 21st Brazilian edition of Jung^{7:133}, the word suprapersonal was chosen to translate this term.

In Brazil, Transpersonal Psychology had, as its initial reference mark, the IV International Congress of Transpersonal Psychology, held in Belo Horizonte, in

1978, with the support of Leo Matos and Pierre Weil, its main representatives at that time. Besides gathering the main national and international representations of this approach, this congress, according to Grof et al.¹⁰, propitiated the creation of the International Transpersonal Association (ITA).

Brazilian psychology matured as a profession at the same pace of the approval of the Federal Constitution of 1988, the effectiveness of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, the first years of UHS, the Paulo Salgado Law proposing an anti-manicomial logic, to remember the quick moments in health and assistance. And it matured even more as a profession in the first decade of the 2000s, starting with the reformulation and approval of the profession's Code of Ethics, in 2005, in consonance with other advances, such as the Maria da Penha Law, in 2006, encompassing a broad discussion on human rights in Brazilian society. In that period, the theme of spirituality went beyond the agenda of transpersonal studies and began to be recognized as an important vector of education and health¹¹⁻¹⁸, in order to "[...] include traditional areas and concerns, to which it adds an interest in facilitating growth and insight beyond traditionally recognized levels of health"^{19:18}.

Grof and Grof^{20:22} indicated that "[...] the dominant philosophy of Western science has been materialistic monism. This means that the different scientific disciplines, by describing reality as the development of matter, accepting as true only what can be quantified, have ended up marginalizing the experience of spirituality as a transforming and fundamental element of human experience.

Spiritual values have been highly ignored and replaced by worldviews that limit and reduce the human being and life to rationalistic and materialistic considerations. However, it is stressed that this way of thinking and relating to spiritual values is exaggerated, immature, and unnecessary. Genuine science and spirituality do not need to compete for the same territory. As Wilber²¹ and Grof and Grof²⁰ have rightly pointed out, the conflict that has arisen between science and

spirituality stems from the fundamental mistake surrounding these terms.

Based on the preceding arguments, and in order to avoid this kind of confusion, it is necessary to delimit the concept of spirituality from the Transpersonal point of view. This task is essential for different reasons. First, because the term has usually been confused with the strictest dogmatic religious aspect; second, because it is a complex concept; but, above all, because it is a field in which the literature is not only vast, but mainly diverse - leaving margins for varied meanings, interpretations and analyses.

It has long been observed how the theme of spirituality has opened a range of perspectives that can bring controversial and conflicting meanings, giving rise to made or (mis)made ideas that, many times, intend to make its use or application unfeasible. "A literary stroll through the pages that deal with the theme of spirituality takes us to landscapes that show various nuances that end up leaving us with a certain perplexity in the face of its amplitude in the face of the horizons of our humanity"^{22:153}.

For this reason, the purpose of this paper is to present the main notions of spirituality mobilized in the Brazilian Transpersonal academic field in order to smooth out some rough edges and clear up certain misconceptions and mistakes about the theme presented here.

The systematic review as problematization

This work had the systematic review as a specific research strategy. The choice for this strategy was not casual, once the objective in question presents the dealing with categories and theoretical concepts that demanded and asked for a direct contact with what has already been registered in the literature about the theme. The power of this type of research is, therefore, not in repeating theories or other thoughts; it is, rather, in how the research subject gives his very being to thinking at the moment he meets and debates with a bibliography.

Therefore, from the operational point of view, the methodological process materialized in three interconnected movements: a) in the first movement - which was called heuristic - the heuristics translated the

traditional stage of survey and bibliographic review, since this is characterized as the art of locating, searching for and mapping those documents that were of interest to the research problem; b) the second movement - called critical fishing - concentrated on the process of tasting, by reading and fishing the documents selected in the previous stage - those documents focused strictly on the central categories of this work: spirituality and subjectivity¹; c) The third movement - called problematizing synthesis - materialized in the process of discussion-analysis around what was systematized in the process of reading and summarizing. In this way, the analytical parameters of the critical reading process were followed. In a practical way, with the summaries in hand, the findings were cross-referenced. This allowed us to perceive the divergences and convergences around the use of spirituality in Transpersonal Therapy, as well as the heterogeneity and consensus of the data found.

Spiritualities from a Transpersonal Perspective: five events

The understanding of the uses of the term spirituality was grouped into five categories: (1) spirituality as a non-religious event; (2) spirituality as an event of change and transformation; (3) the spiritual happening as supreme and altruistic values; (4) spirituality as an integral event; and (5) decolonial participatory spirituality. These five happenings have led to a consensus: although at times the Transpersonal approach includes and values religious experiences as important to human life - as noted in Ken Wilber's integral view^{23,24} - At no time is spirituality synonymous with dogmas, rites, institutionalization, or belief of any kind. In a very direct way, the spiritual emerges as a transpersonal experience.

Spirituality as a non-religious event

In analyzing the different uses of the concept in question, the first thing that jumps out is the spiritual as an event distinct from the religious phenomenon. Therefore, it is important to make the caveat that the

nature of this discussion is around spirituality and not religiosity. As Tart²⁵ has stated, although these terms cannot be integrally separated, because such a differentiation is a simplification of a complex phenomenon, the distinctions between one and the other are essential in any investigation. For theorists who advocate this usage, the religious, unlike the spiritual, concerns a system of social organizations and beliefs that have become institutionalized.

"These organizations and belief systems generally come into existence after the spiritual experiences undergone by the founder of the religion, and both incorporate and develop (with more or less fidelity) these initial experiences into permanent social structures, relationships, beliefs, needs, and customs"^{25:26}.

Thus, "to avoid the lack of understanding and confusion that has compromised similar discussions in the past, it is essential to draw a clear distinction between spirituality and religion."^{20:25} in religion, what one finds are doctrines and practices that have been institutionalized and, consequently, socialized. In the words of Grof and Grof²⁶, the religious episode comprises an institutionalized and organized group activity that can tend toward spirituality. This will depend on whether it is able to provide a field for personal discovery or for the flowering of certain kinds of qualities in the subject's way of life.

However, the situation is completely different when thinking about spirituality. This is because spiritual experiences are not to be understood as a belief system or dogma to be followed. A belief system is a limited, rigid and formalistic way of dealing with this phenomenon. This is the main reason to distinguish between spirituality and religion, and to prevent miscommunication and misuse.

Spirituality as a process of change and transformation of the subject

In this second use, unlike religion, spirituality does not appear as a system of dogmas and beliefs to be internalized and in which nothing changes the way of life of the subject. In this case, the spiritual phenomenon

appears as fundamental experiences capable of transforming a person's life. If you want to stick with the strictest explanations of this usage, Tart²⁵ continued, it is important to understand that, in spirituality, one finds those experiences capable of modifying the life of an individual and, therefore, they are called, by the researcher, fundamental experiences, since they transform the subject not on an external level - such as the way he dresses, eats, or drinks - but in the way he lives his life entirely. Here, "[...] it must be emphasized that this applies to genuine spirituality, based on personal experience, and does not mean an endorsement of ideologies and dogmas of organized religions."^{20:25}.

Unlike religion, the spiritual points, within this second use, to personal experiences that provide, to an individual's life and to existence in general, a numinous quality^{20,26}. The numinous quality resides in the capacity to perceive oneself and relate to the world and reality from other referentials than the common, the normal, the same. It is an experience capable of modifying the vision of the subject and the subject as a whole.

Within the Transpersonal references, the numinous is, therefore, a term that translates the quality of perception and life that has become spiritual. In this scope, spirituality is that experience with the potential to make the vision of a subject numinous, that is, the view of oneself and the world becomes radically different. Not by chance, "spirituality is something that characterizes the relationship between the person and the universe and does not necessarily require a formal structure, a collective ritual, or meditation by a priest"^{26:47}.

In an even more simplified way, spirituality is understood here as those experiences capable of transforming a subject's relationship with himself and with the world in which he lives. The effort, therefore, is not in changing the world, or others. On the contrary, the work demands a change in the way people relate to all this.

According to Tart²⁵, the spiritual phenomenon makes an individual no longer the same man or woman he or she was before, for he or she has transformed his or her way of being and being in the world.

It could be asked then:

[...] and what do these transformations mean for our lives? The famous story of the Zen student and his

master gives a wonderfully good account of the answer. The disciple asked the master, "what did you do before you reached enlightenment?" The master replied, "I cut wood and carried water. "What did you do after you achieved enlightenment?" The master replied, "I cut wood and carried water"^{26:225}.

As can be seen, in this second usage, the term spiritual presents a connotation of transformation, of a process to be followed with the intention of leading the individual to new ways of experiencing oneself in broader modes in which the usual ways of seeing oneself are modified in their bases.

Spirituality happening as the acquisition of supreme, selfless values

Regarding the third use, it was verified that it is very common to find spirituality being used within the Transpersonal perspective as a synonym of acquiring attitudes and behaviors impregnated with altruistic values. When used in this sense, it is observed that entering into this experience means acquiring, through a spontaneity and naturalness inherent to the change in the subject's vision, characteristics of kindness, compassion, detachment, generosity, love, patience, etc.

In the words of scientist Tart: What do I mean when I use words like "spirit" and "spiritual"? I don't know if they can be defined with the same precision as material things (e.g. refrigerator), but by "spiritual" I mean a sphere of values, experiences, realities, and intuitions [...] ^{25:57}.

In these terms, the spiritual refers not only to experiences of the non-religious and of changes in the way of seeing and living oneself and life, [...] as well as to all states of consciousness and all human functions and activities that have as a common denominator the possession of higher than ordinary values - ethical, aesthetic, heroic, humanitarian and altruistic values ^{27:51}.

In a very concrete and practical way, spirituality, being this experience of radical transformation with the way one lives and not with what one does, has many consequences.

They can alleviate various forms of emotional and psychosomatic disorders, as well as difficulties with interpersonal relationships. They can also reduce aggressive tendencies, enhance your self-image,

increase your tolerance for others, and raise your quality of life ^{26:48}.

Moreover, it brings effects in reducing separateness with other people, with nature, and with the world. But, most importantly, this acquisition of supreme and altruistic values "[...] are natural consequences of transpersonal experiences; the person accepts and adopts them voluntarily, without the imposition of external injunctions, precepts, orders, or threats of punishment." ^{26:48}.

Here, the spiritual journey is "an adventure through strange lands full of surprises, of joys and beauty, of difficulties and even dangers. It involves the awakening of hitherto dormant potentialities [...]" ^{27:51}. Thus, spiritual experiences are activators of dormant values and potentials (ethical, aesthetic, humanitarian) that lead an individual, in the work of changing himself, to acquire what Wilber²⁸ called special attitudes such as kindness, friendliness, compassion, and wisdom.

Spirituality as an integral event

From a more comprehensive definition, Wilber²³⁻²⁴ presented an integral perspective of conceiving spirituality. The use that this author makes is so inclusive that it ends up encompassing the point of view of religion. Based on the integral development model, called "the great nest of being", Ken Wilber sought to overcome dichotomies and confusions around the term.

Wilber's²³ effort, in elaborating a work about the use that is made of spirituality as an integral event, is to expose that the entire process of human growth is based on two great dimensions: a horizontal dimension, called translative, and a vertical dimension, called transformative. In the horizontal field we find, he said, religions in their function of offering meaning and interpretation to men and women. On the other hand, in the vertical field we find authentic spirituality, because it exercises the function of radical transformation in individuals.

The dynamics of human development from spirituality, therefore, is configured from two interconnected moments, which are offered through, first, translation (interpretative religion) and, second, transformation (authentic spirituality or religion as radical liberation). In this way, the translative function of religion plays a fundamental role for society by enabling subjects

to have an interpretive vision of the things of the world and of life situations.

It acts to create meaning for the alienated self: it offers myths, stories, tales, narratives, rituals, and revivals that together help the self to understand and endure the rocks and arrows of implacable fate. Usually, this function of religion does not necessarily alter the level of consciousness of the person; it does not bring about radical transformation. Nor does it bring about a definitive liberation from the alienated self. Rather, it comforts the self, strengthens the self, defends the self, promotes the self. As the alienated self believes the myths, performs the rituals, mumbles the prayers, or accepts the dogmas, then it fervently believes that it will be "saved" - either in this life, by the glory of God's salvation or Goddess' protection, or in the afterlife, when it will be assured of eternal happiness^{29:1}.

However, beyond the horizontal and translational offered in most cases by religions, there is a vertical dimension in the process of human formation. Access to this dimension, which can be offered by religions (in very rare cases), is called authentic spirituality or transforming spirituality insofar as the spiritual is the place of radical transformation. Or, if you will, the whole process of authentic transformation refers to the spiritual experience.

In this case,

It does not strengthen the alienated self; on the contrary, it shatters it completely - not consolation but devastation, not entrenchment but emptying, not complacency but explosion, not comfort but revolution - in short, not conventional strengthening of consciousness but radical transmutation and transformation in the depths of consciousness itself^{29:2}.

Although I know that Ken Wilber used these two dimensions to say about the different functions of religion, it seems to be clear that spirituality does not present itself in the character of dogmas, rites, beliefs, or consolation, but emerges to the extent that the ego goes beyond itself and the logic of maintenance and preservation of the little self is transcended. It should be noted that religion can and should include spiritual aspects, after all, this is its second function. However, we notice that spirituality, for Ken Wilber,

"[...] it is not a matter of belief, but of the believer's death; not a matter of interpreting the world, but of transforming it; not a matter of finding relief, but of finding the infinite on the other side of death. No importance is given to the self, it is cremated"^{29:2}.

It seems clearer that spirituality, or what should be the second function of religion, cannot be anything other than a process of radical transformation of the subject as a whole, a vertical movement that points to a transgression of the usual limits of the ego. Beyond these differentiations, the author wanted to highlight that in order to avoid confusion around the theme of spirituality and to respect the translative modes as primary and minor practices, but no less important for the process of human transformation, it is necessary to look at spirituality from an integral perspective. And "an integral approach to spirituality would have to articulate the best of the horizontal translative with the best of the transformative function"^{22:176}.

According to Wilber²⁴, due to this integral perspective, there are several ways of using the term spirituality. The fundamental thing, in this case, is not to know which is the most correct. The challenge of this use is, before any endeavor, to mention what spirituality is being referred to. According to Wilber^{24,28}, there are at least four major definitions for the word spiritual: it can be considered as the highest level of any line of development and, here, people consider spirituality as the maximum point reached whether in line with the cognitive, emotional, moral, etc. ; spiritual can also refer to an isolated line, being considered a separate line of human growth, i.e., in addition to the cognitive, affective, moral, there would also be the spiritual line of development; spiritual can also be understood as an extraordinary "peak" state or experience - meaning that spiritual can refer to those passing experiences that take an individual to non-dual or transpersonal dimensions of existence, of oneself, of life, such as, for example, shamanic practices, a meditation, a devotional practice, etc. Finally, spirituality can mean a certain special attitude such as love, compassion, generosity, thus referring to attitudes based on altruistic principles or values, as we can see in the third category addressed in this work.

This integral scheme of looking at the phenomenon under analysis can be complicated, but it is the minimum necessary, said Wilber²⁴, to be able to talk about spirituality in a more coherent and less confusing way. Integral spirituality, therefore, seeks to contemplate,

integrate, and welcome these different perspectives of spiritual experience, as long as we know where we are talking about and what we are referring to.

Decolonial participatory spirituality

Ferreira³⁰⁻³¹ and Heron³² have proposed a participatory spirituality in the field of transpersonal studies. A spirituality that goes from the individual/subjective to the intersubjective and collective of human relations, with reverberations in communities, cultural forms, and socio-political structures. For Ferrer, this perspective:

[...] introduced the participatory approach as a "Participatory Turn" in transpersonal and spiritual studies - a paradigmatic shift breaking with the prevailing epistemological strategies in transpersonal theory (inner empiricism) and ontological assumptions (perennialism)^{30:27}.

Participatory spirituality is co-created from a complex relationship of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal dimensions. Thus, spiritual phenomena are the fruit of a dialogical relationship and comprise not just one dimension, but the whole range of epistemic faculties - rational, imaginal, somatic, vital, and aesthetic. In short, there is no split between immanent and transcendent aspects.

The intrapersonal dimension is governed by the principle of equiprocity, according to which no human attribute (for example, cognition, corporeality, and affect) is *per se* superior to the others. The interpersonal co-creation of spirituality emerges from the relationships among humans; these are characterized by solidarity and mutual respect, considering that human beings carry their own particularities, more or less developed in different aspects and, therefore, cannot be elevated to a place of superiority because of a certain aspect to which the social environment attributes importance³³.

Transpersonal co-creation "[...] refers to the dynamic interaction between embodied human beings and mystery in the emergence of spiritual insights, practices, states and worlds"^{31:5}. It is structured on the principle of equiplurality, which recognizes the diversity of

experiences of spiritual enaction, all of which are equivalent and emancipatory.

The Brazilian Association of Research and Teaching in Transpersonal Psychology (Abrapet) has been carrying out, in the last years, a process of decolonization of the matrixes of power, knowledge and being³⁴, embedded in transpersonal studies, with the intention of expanding the dialogues with the local knowledge, favoring the conditions of promotion of the good life. Thus, by adding the term decolonial to participatory, it has sought to face the theoretical-practical challenges in the study of spirituality, such as: a) criticism of the perspectives of a hegemonic thinking, whether in global terms, through North-South domination³⁵⁻³⁶; b) revision of the perspective of a "center-centrism" associated to forms of racism, machismo, xenophobia and homophobia, etc. c) problematizing the bias of the universalisms of the sciences and ethics; d) critical analysis of the supremacy of formal technical-scientific rationality in relation to other ecologies of knowledge; e) revision of the notion of subject of modernity; and f) reflection on the ideology of fixed identities.

Final considerations

The five notions of spirituality mobilized in transpersonal studies converge in the intent of promoting healthier lifestyles that include spirituality as a human dimension and health promoter. It is indicated that, even with all the divergences in the use of the term, there seems to exist an articulating thread that leads to a converging point: spirituality, as an ethical-spiritual device that invites to a lived reflection on the care for the Earth - the "common home" for all, with nature, and with humans and non-humans - may present problematizations, answers, and orientations to think/feel the de/construction of the civilizational model from other processes of knowledge production that lead the human being to the cultivation of the principle of the good life.

Thus, the Transpersonal, more than a school of psychological thought, emerges as an ethical-spiritual path for the cultivation of ways of life committed to the integration of the countless divisions that mark beings as

humans immersed in a colonial culture. Spirituality, as a central term in Transpersonal, was assumed more to point out the experiences through which individuals changed the way they relate to themselves, to others and to the world in order to expand their boundaries and less to consolidate a psychological school closed in on itself or, still, to refer to something supernatural in life, dogmatic or restrictive.

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