

**GROF, Stanislav (1985): *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death and Transcendence in Psychotherapy*, State University of New York Press**

*Stanislav Grof graduated as a doctor of medicine in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1957. He went on to qualify in psychiatry, specifically in Freudian psychoanalysis, in 1965. The dissertation that gained him his qualification in psychiatry at that time was not, however, of the usual mold. It was entitled "LSD and its use in Psychiatric Clinical Practice."*

*Grof was first introduced to LSD in 1956 after one of the teaching professors in the medical faculty invited his students to volunteer for a study of the effects of LSD-25 on brain function. Grof later commented that the experience, "evoked in me a powerful mystical experience that radically changed my personal and professional life. Research on the heuristic, transformative, and evolutionary potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness became my profession, vocation and personal passion."*

*"Beyond the Brain" documents the first fruits of the transformation in thinking that occurred in Grof after 30 years of active participation in LSD research. In this book, he addresses the complete inadequacy of mechanistic and reductionistic modes of thought as ways of interpreting not only human experience, but the nature of the phenomenal world itself.*

*Grof's sympathies are more aligned with the thought of Jan Smuts, who coined the term Holism in 1926 than with the certainty and the unyielding materialism of such commentators as molecular biologist Jacques Monod who famously wrote in 1972: "Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution: this central concept of modern biology is no longer one among other possible or even conceivable hypotheses. It is today the sole hypothesis, the only one that squares with observed and tested fact. And nothing warrants the supposition – or the hope – that on this score our position is likely ever to be revised."*

*For Grof, our lives are charged with and moved by a divine, a transcendent, a mystical dimension that is accessible to human experience. In countering Monod's absolutism, Grof reflects: "The probability that human intelligence developed all the way from the chemical ooze of the primeval ocean solely through sequences of random mechanical processes has been recently aptly compared to the probability of a tornado blowing through a gigantic junkyard and assembling by accident a 747 jumbo jet."*

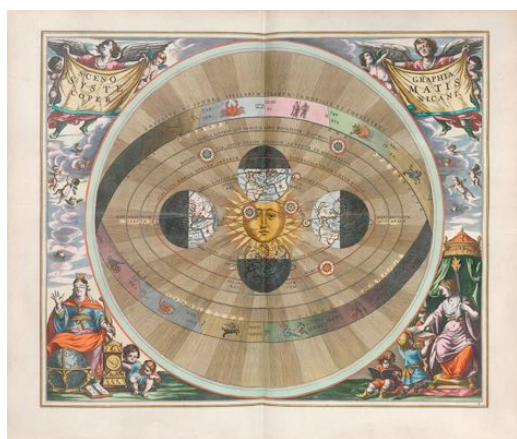
*As one of the founding fathers of Transpersonal Psychology, Grof strove to extend the boundaries of what was considered acceptable in human psychology far beyond the limits imposed by materialistic and mechanical thought and into realms that his earlier training in Freudian analysis could never have possibly accommodated."*

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"The textbooks of various disciplines tend to describe the history of science as a linear development with a gradual accumulation of knowledge about the universe that culminates in the present state of affairs. Important figures in the development of scientific thinking are thus presented as contributors who have worked on the same set of problems and according to the same set of fixed rules that the most recent achievements have established as scientific. Each period of the history of scientific ideas and methods is seen as a logical step in a gradual approximation to an increasingly accurate description of the universe and to the ultimate truth about existence.

Detailed analysis of the history and philosophy of science reveals that this is a grossly distorted and romanticized image of the actual course of events. One can make a very powerful and convincing argument that the history of science is far from linear and that, in spite of their technological successes, scientific disciplines do not necessarily bring us closer to an ever more accurate description of reality." p 2

"The history of science is by no means a process of gradual accumulation of data and formulation of ever more accurate theories. Instead, it shows a clearly cyclical nature with specific stages and characteristic dynamics. This process is lawful, and the changes involved can be understood and even predicted; the central concept of Kuhn's theory, which makes this possible, is that of a paradigm. In the broadest sense, a *paradigm* can be defined as a constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by the members of a given scientific community. Some paradigms are of a basic philosophical nature and are very general and encompassing, others govern scientific thinking in rather specific and circumscribed areas of research." p 3



"A really new and radical theory is never just an addition or increment to the existing knowledge. It changes basic rules, requires drastic revision or reformulation of the fundamental assumptions of prior theory, and involves re-evaluation of the existing facts and observations. According to Thomas Kuhn, only events of this nature represent true scientific revolutions. These can occur in certain limited fields of human knowledge or they can have a sweeping influence on a number of disciplines. The shifts from

Aristotelian to Newtonian physics, or from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics, from the Ptolemaic geocentric system to the astronomy of Copernicus and Galileo, or from the phlogiston theory to Lavoisier's chemistry are salient examples of changes of this kind. Each of them required rejection of a widely accepted and honored scientific theory in favor of another that was in principle incompatible with it." p 6

"In their historical accounts, the texts tend to cover only those aspects of the work of individual scientists that can be seen as contributions to the contemporary point of view. Thus, in discussing Newton's mechanics, they do not mention the role Newton attributed to God, or his deep interest in astrology and alchemy, which were integral

to his philosophy. Similarly one does not read that Descartes' dualism of mind and body implied the existence of God. It is not usually mentioned in standard textbooks that many of the founders of modern physics, such as Einstein, Bohm, Heisenberg, Schroedinger, Bohr, and Oppenheimer not only found their work fully compatible with the mystical world view, but in a sense entered the mystical realms through their scientific pursuits." p 13

"Western science is approaching a paradigm shift of unprecedented proportions, one that will change our concepts of reality and of human nature, bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern science, and reconcile the difference between Eastern spirituality and Western pragmatism." p 16

### **On mechanistic thinking**

"The disciplines that modeled themselves after Newton and Descartes have elaborated in detail an image of the universe as an immensely complex mechanical system, an assembly of passive and inert matter, developing with no participation of consciousness or creative intelligence. From the Big Bang through the initial expansion of the galaxies to the creation of the solar system and the early geophysical processes that created this planet, the cosmic evolution was allegedly governed solely by blind mechanical forces. According to this model, life originated in the primeval ocean, accidentally, as a result of random chemical reaction. Similarly, the cellular organization of organic matter and the evolution to higher life forms occurred quite mechanically, without participation of an intelligent principle, through random genetic mutations and a natural selection guaranteeing the survival of the fittest. This eventually resulted in a ramified phylogenetic system of hierarchically arranged species with increasing levels of complexity." p 21

"The probability that human intelligence developed all the way from the chemical ooze of the primeval ocean solely through sequences of random mechanical processes has been recently aptly compared to the probability of a tornado blowing through a gigantic junkyard and assembling by accident a 747 jumbo jet. This highly improbable assumption is a metaphysical statement that cannot be proved by existing scientific methods. Far from being a scientific piece of information - as its proponents so fiercely maintain - it is, in the present state of knowledge, little more than one of the leading myths of Western science." p 23

"A paradigm is more than a simply useful theoretical model for science; its philosophy actually shapes the world by its indirect influence on individuals and society. Newtonian-Cartesian science has created a very negative image of human beings, depicting them as biological machines driven by instinctual impulses of a bestial nature. It has no genuine recognition of higher values, such as spiritual awareness, feelings of love, aesthetic needs, or sense of justice. All these are seen as derivatives of base instincts, or compromises essentially alien to human nature. This image endorses individualism, egoistic emphasis, competition, and the principle of "survival of the fittest" as natural and essentially healthy tendencies. Materialistic science . . . has been unable to recognize the value and vital importance of cooperation, synergy, and ecological concerns." pp 26-27

"Scientific thinking in contemporary medicine, psychiatry, psychology, and anthropology represents a direct extension of the seventeenth century Newtonian-Cartesian model of the universe. Since all the basic assumptions of this way of viewing reality have been transcended by twentieth-century physics, it seems only natural to expect profound changes sooner or later in all the disciplines that are its direct derivatives."  
p 51

"The concept of the cosmos as a gigantic super-machine, assembled from countless separate objects and existing independently from the observer, has become obsolete and has been relegated to the historical archives of science. The updated model shows the universe as a unified and indivisible web of events and relationships; its parts represent different aspects and patterns of one integral process of unimaginable complexity. As predicted by James Jeans (1930) over fifty years ago, the universe of modern physics looks far more like a system of thought processes than like a gigantic clockwork."  
p. 64

"The exclusive image of the human being as nothing but a biological machine is no longer tenable. In serious logical conflict with this traditional model, the new data support quite unambiguously the view that has been held by the mystical traditions of all ages: under certain circumstances, human beings can also function as vast fields of consciousness, transcending the limitations of the physical body, of Newtonian time and space, and of linear causality."  
p 73



"We are approaching the time of a major paradigm shift. At present, there is a rich mosaic of new theoretical concepts that share certain general characteristics, as well as the fact of radical departure from mechanistic models. The synthesis and integration of these exciting new developments in science will be a difficult and complex task and it is questionable whether it is at all possible. In any case, it seems that such a comprehensive paradigm of the future, capable of accommodating and synthesizing all the diversity of data from quantum-relativistic physics, systems theory, consciousness research, and neurophysiology, as well as from the ancient and Oriental spiritual philosophies, shamanism, aboriginal rituals, and healing practices would have to involve complementary dichotomies on three different levels: those of the cosmos, of the individual, and of the human brain.

The universe would have its phenomenal, explicate, or unfolded aspects and its transcendental, implicate, or enfolded aspects. The corresponding complementarity on the level of the human being would be the image of Newtonian-Cartesian biological machine and that of an unlimited field of consciousness."  
p. 91

"In deep experiential psychotherapy, biographical material is not remembered or reconstructed; it can be actually fully relived. This involves not only emotions but also physical sensations, pictorial elements of the material involved, as well as data

from other senses. This happens typically in complete age regression to the stage of development when the event happened.

Another important distinction is that the relevant memories and other biographical elements do not emerge separately, but form distinct dynamic constellations, for which I have coined the term *COEX systems*, or *systems of condensed experience*. A *COEX* system is a dynamic constellation of memories (and associated fantasy material) from different periods of the individual's life, with the common denominator of a strong emotional charge of the same quality, intense physical sensation of the same kind, or the fact that they share some other important elements." p 97

"A deep experiential encounter with birth and death is regularly associated with an existential crisis of extraordinary proportions, during which the individual seriously questions the meaning of existence, as well as his or her basic values and life strategies. This crisis can be resolved only by connecting with deep, intrinsic spiritual dimensions of the psyche and elements of the collective unconscious. The resulting personality transformation seems to be comparable to the changes that have been described as having come about from participation in ancient temple mysteries, initiation rites, or aboriginal rites of passage. The perinatal level of the unconscious thus represents an important intersection between the individual and the collective unconscious, or between traditional psychology and mysticism or transpersonal psychology." p. 100

"The primary focus of analysis is on the reconstruction of the traumatic past and its repetition in the present transference dynamics; it is thus based on a strictly deterministic, historical model. Freud's understanding of improvement is quite mechanistic - it emphasizes freeing of pent-up energies and their use for constructive purposes (sublimation). The goal of therapy as explicitly described by Freud is indeed modest, particularly in view of the extraordinary investment of time, money, and energy; to "change the extreme suffering of the neurotic into the normal misery of everyday life"." p. 154

"Experiential therapies bring overwhelming evidence that childhood traumas do not represent the primary pathogenic causes, but create conditions for the manifestation of energies and contents from deeper levels of the psyche. The typical symptoms of emotional disorders have a complex multilevel and multidimensional dynamic structure. The biographical layers represent only one component of this complex network; important roots of the problems involved can almost always be found on the perinatal and transpersonal levels." p. 155

"In the realm of psychopathology, psychoanalysis has failed to provide satisfactory explanations for the phenomena of sadomasochism, auto mutilation, sadistic murder, and suicide. It did not adequately tackle the puzzle of the savage part of the superego, which seems to be a derivative of the id. The concept of feminine sexuality, or femininity in general, as outlined by Freud represents without doubt the weakest aspect of psychoanalysis and borders on the bizarre and the ridiculous. It lacks any genuine understanding of the female psyche or the feminine principle and treats women essentially as castrated males. Further, psychoanalysis offers only superficial

and unconvincing interpretations for an entire spectrum of phenomena occurring in psychiatric patients. . .

The general lack of efficacy of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic tool should also be mentioned as one of the serious shortcomings of this otherwise fascinating system of thought." p. 156

"Birth and death are events of fundamental relevance that occupy a metaposition in relation to all the other experiences of life. They are the alpha and omega of human existence; a psychological system that does not incorporate them is bound to remain superficial, incomplete, and of limited relevance. The lack of applicability of psychoanalysis to many aspects of psychotic experiences, to a number of anthropological observations, to parapsychological phenomena, and to serious social psychopathology (such as wars and revolutions, totalitarianism, and genocide) reflects the fact that these aspects are characterized by substantial participation of perinatal and transpersonal dynamics and thus are clearly beyond the reach of classical Freudian analysis." p 159

"The system of psychology and psychotherapy developed by Otto Rank represents a considerable departure from mainstream Freudian psychoanalysis. In general, Rank's concepts are humanistic and voluntaristic, while Freud's approach is reductionistic, mechanistic, and deterministic. More specifically, the major areas of disagreement were Rank's emphasis on the paramount significance of the birth trauma as compared to sexual dynamics, negation of the crucial role of the Oedipus complex, and a concept of ego as an autonomous representative of the will rather than a slave of the id. Rank also offered modifications of the psychoanalytic technique that were as radical and drastic as his theoretical contributions. He suggested that a verbal approach to psychotherapy is of limited value and the emphasis should be experiential. According to him, it was essential that the patient relive in therapy the trauma of birth; without it, treatment should not be considered complete." p. 171

"The emphasis in gestalt therapy is not on interpreting problems, but on re-experiencing conflicts and traumas in the here and now, introducing awareness into all the physical and emotional processes, and completing the unfinished gestalts from the past. The client is encouraged to take full responsibility for the process and free himself or herself from dependence on parents, teachers, spouses, and the therapist. Gestalt therapy frequently uses individual work in a group context. The emphasis is on breathing and full awareness of one's physical and emotional processes as the fundamental prerequisites." p. 182

"While I share Assagioli's emphasis on the creative, superconscious and radiant potential of the psyche, it has been my experience that direct confrontation of its dark side whenever it manifests itself in the process of self-exploration is beneficial and conducive to healing, spiritual opening and consciousness evolution. Conversely, a one-sided emphasis on the light, problem-free, and joyful side of life is not without dangers. It can be used in the service of repression and denial of the shadow, which can then become manifest in less obvious forms and color or distort the spiritual process. The end result can be various spiritual aberrations ranging from an unconvincing, exaggerated caricature of a spiritual person to tyranny and control of

others in the name of transpersonal values. It seems preferable to approach inner exploration in the spirit of "transcendental realism," willing to confront all aspects of one's psyche and of the universe in their dialectic and complementary interplay of opposites." p. 194

#### **Further Sources**

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