

Creativity and health in Integral Psychology

I would like to begin my lecture, in the frame of this wonderful city, symbol of the human creativity, by underlining that I have always been a researcher of creativity, which I pursued in a past professional activity as a flamenco dancer. My quest, at that period, was aimed to go beyond the ordinary, an experiment and a creation of something to be regarded as special, to be realised by my own body. Afterwards, in my personal development, I have been looking for a more inward creativity, less related to the results and to a public acknowledgment.

The epistemological frame of reference of my lecture, whose title is “Creativity and health in integral psychology”, will be the Integral Psychology, which stems from the wider transpersonal approach. So, my lecture is aimed to outline the relationship between creativity and health within the integral approach of the transpersonal psychology. Transpersonal psychology sinks its roots in the pioneering works of Carl Gustav Jung and Roberto Assagioli, the latter founder of Psychosynthesis, and is based on the work and thinking of Abraham Maslow, who in the Sixties coined the term “transpersonal” and stated the necessity to go towards a “Fourth Force” in psychology, which goes beyond the limits imposed by the other three (Psychoanalysis, Behaviorism, Humanistic Psychology). Transpersonal psychology later continued to develop in Europe as a new field of research and commitment, by proposing a revolutionary approach to the theories of mental health, based on a unified paradigm between the scientific psychology and the traditional wisdom. Integral psychology, as an advanced field within the transpersonal psychology, is based on the theoretical work of the american scholar Ken Wilber and has been developed and enhanced in Italy by Laura Boggio Gilot, founder and president of the Italian Transpersonal Psychology Association and of the European Transpersonal Psychology Association, who is my trainer. The integral approach, combining psychology and meditation, promotes the expansion of awareness, so as to include the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions toward the completeness of the Self, or Self-realisation, where the qualities of harmony, love and wisdom become manifest and express themselves in behavior, culture and society. Integral psychology has become a specialised field in the developmental studies, because it addresses the states of identity and of consciousness in which the highest talents, the creativity and the intuitive intelligence flourish as optimal well-being and behavior, so contributing to the peaceful evolution of the planet. In this frame of reference, the integral approach within the transpersonal psychology aims to provide not only a context for mental healing, but also a growth system in which the latent potentialities of the unconscious can be integrated so as to reach the spiritual goal of the Enlightenment, corresponding to the direct realisation of the Self, the spiritual essence, and to Liberation from suffering due to the ontological ignorance.

Assagioli outlined a comprehensive map of the individual unconscious, subdividing it in three domains: the lower, the middle and the upper unconscious. The lower unconscious contains: psychic activities which preside over the organic life and coordinate the physiological functions, primitive tendencies and drives, psychic complexes, “unfinished business”, remainders from the past, dreams and basic imaginative work, phobias, obsessive ideas and drives, objects refused or suppressed from ego. The middle unconscious contains: psychic contents which are easily accessed by the waking consciousness, phenomena which will emerge within the consciousness, experience processing, preparation of future activities, most of the intellectual work performed by the personality. The upper unconscious contains: superior intuitions, artistic, philosophic and

scientific inspirations, ingenious creations, burst to unselfish action, enlightening, contemplative, ecstatic states. It is the locus of spiritual energies and of supernormal powers. Within the middle unconscious there is the field of consciousness, that is, the part of our personality which we are immediately aware of, stream of psychic elements and any kind of mood (sensations, feelings, thoughts, desires, drives, will) that we can observe, analyze and judge.

Maslow was the first humanistic psychologist who spoke about a psychology of potentialities to be not only horizontal; here the field of potentialities outreaches the vertical dimension, toward the psychic reservoir Assagioli described as the Upper Unconscious. I think the major merit due to Maslow consists in his clearly accessible description of the effects on the personality of the Upper Unconscious's influence and the need for the individual to be receptive to that influence, if he aims to preserve and go toward ever more healthy states. "The new health model" – Maslow states – "is based on the following premises: 1) each of us has his essential inner nature, biologically established, which is in some degree 'natural', intrinsic, inborn and, in some limited sense, inalterable or, at least, immutable; 2) the inner nature in everybody is partly specific of the individual and partly characteristic of the entire species; 3) it is possible to study in a scientific way this inner nature and find out what it seems to; 4) this inner nature does not seem intrinsically, nor primarily, nor necessarily evil; 5) if we allow it to rule our life, we will develop towards health, prosperity and happiness; 6) if this essential nucleus of the individual is denied or repressed, the individual becomes ill; 7) this inner nature is faint, delicate and subtle and the habits, the cultural pressure, the wrong attitudes towards it, overbear it; 8) even if being faint, and even being denied, it continues resisting in the underground, and pursuing its realisation; 9) every single diversion from the positive virtue of the species, every crime against the very nature itself, every evil act, is recorded with no exception in the unconscious, and makes us despise ourselves".

The health model proposed by Maslow overcomes the limits imposed by the mechanical culture; he defined the so called psychopathology of the normality, cause of the developmental block which destructs self-realisation. As a matter of fact, Maslow declares, "our culture has rejected all the models: the saint, the hero, the gentleman, the knight, the mystic. And almost all that has remained is none but the well adapted and without-problem man, which is actually an extremely pale and uncertain substitute". The stage of the adapted man, goal of the development wished by the classical psychoanalysis, has to be regarded as a painful achievement according to the new psychology, being a stage in which the individual who is receptive to the higher influences suffers terribly, often becoming ill. The anger following the betrayal of one's self-realisation, more or less conscious, represents its symptom. For that reason, Maslow states, "if you make a determined project to be less than you can become, I assure you will suffer terribly".

The psychopathology of the normality stems from the conflict between the safety needs and the self-realisation ones, that is, between the deficiency motivation and the growth one. The former relates to those drives which tend to fulfil deficiencies, both affective and not, and is related to the need of "having", while the latter seems to be valuable in itself, apparently, and is connected to the delight of the pure growth. It is therefore related to the need of "being". Being so conditioned to the material level of life, common people are often led to think of the growth motivation as foolishly ambitious, if it has not a match on the gross level, and this is why perhaps a few patients rely on therapy only in case of severe disease, that is, when the symptom prevent them from living in a normal way.

Maslow points out that healthy children manifest clearly their delight in growing and progressing, in achieving ever more capacities, abilities and powers, in opposition to what happens with troubled children who, living in a deficiency condition, are occupied in achieving safety, then they are more oriented to the adaptation. Maslow's hierarchy of

needs, described as a pyramid, has towards its base the deficit needs and towards its top the being ones. We are fully aware, and agree with Maslow, that the fulfilment of the higher needs is not possible if the lower ones remain unfulfilled, because the latter could restrain the development. But at the same time we are aware that the true healing comes from the activation of the potentialities of the higher unconscious. This fact makes us trust on our capacity of self-healing and self-care, without neglecting the usefulness of the psychotherapeutic intervention and its need, in some cases.

Maslow distinguishes the creativity due to a particular talent from the one due to self-realisation, which is widely expressed in the matters of ordinary life and is similar to the creativity existing in all happy and steady children. Furthermore, he distinguishes primary from secondary creativity, which make use mainly and respectively of the primary and secondary processes. The secondary creativity, Maslow says, "includes a broad percentage of what is produced in the world: bridges, houses, new models of cars, and even a large amount of scientific experiments and the most literary work. We will call 'integrated creativity' the one which makes use of the two processing modes, easily and correctly, well fused or in correct sequence. The great work of art, of philosophy or of science stems from this type of creativity". So, we come to a wider, non conventional conception of creativity.

The path of the creative person is often lonely. "Essentially" – Maslow states – "the individual motivated by deficiency needs is by far more dependent on other people than the individual mainly motivated by growth needs. He is more 'interested', more greedy, more attached to things". This happens because the deficiency needs can only be satisfied from the outside. On the contrary, the self-reliant individual is much less dependent: "far from needing the others, people motivated by growth could actually feel annoyed by them". The sense of loneliness is illusory. It expresses the fear of getting lost alone, the fear of dissolution. Having a lot of relationships, even superficial, is often a way to avoid this feeling of fear. This is an important topic, because the authenticity of life depends on it, intended in terms of distance by one's own inner nature. The need of social membership is a legitimate one, it is real; but it turns to alienation when subdued to fear.

Creativity does not equate ever and necessarily to health. At this regard, Maslow states: "I had to change my mind about creativity as far as I began to study positively healthy, highly developed and mature, self-realising people. First of all, I had to abandon the stereotyped notion that health, genius, talent and productiveness are similar. A large amount of my patients" – Maslow continues – "even being healthy and creative in a particular sense, were not productive in the conventional sense, nor possessed a great talent or genius, nor were poets, nor composers, inventors, artists nor creative intellectuals. It was also obvious that among the best human talents many of them were mentally unhealthy; so were Wagner, Van Gogh, Byron. Furthermore, I soon found out that, as many others had that, I had been thinking of creativity as being a product; and, secondarily, I had unwarily confined creativity only to some conventional areas of human behavior, unwarily considering that every painter, every poet, every composer, led a creative life. Then I learned to apply the term 'creative' not only to products, but also to people, depending on their own character. Besides, I had to begin to apply the word 'creative' to many products very different from the standard, accepted ones, like poems, theories, novels, experiments or paintings".

Creativity combines well with the idea of an uninterrupted flow of ideas, reflexions, intuitions. In this condition, the creative production can be realised, giving rise to a joyous emotion in the individual. This situation is well represented in the awareness-excitement-contact cycle by the gestalt psychotherapist Joseph Zinker. The cycle starts with sensation ("I feel my stomach contracted"), which turns to awareness ("I'm aware of being angry"). Awareness makes me mobilize the energy for performing an action. At this point, comes

the contact, which results in satisfaction, followed by a withdrawal phase. This cyclic model applies to the processes of organismic regulation – like the sexual intercourse – and to the need satisfaction processes, according to Maslow's needs hierarchy. It also applies to relationships and creativity, seen as a flow. So as a block at every point of the contact cycle is made responsible of the difficulties in the completion of a gestalt, so that the flow between figure and ground is no more regular, but defective, so also for creativity the impossibility in letting the cycle flow harmoniously causes a disease resulting in stiffness and stereotypies, which are opposites of creativity.

In transpersonal terms, and particularly within the integral approach, the block of creativity, understood as an impossibility to draw from inspiration and insight capacities, is represented by the diseases in the tripartite structure (super-ego, id, ego). In order to draw from the faculties of the upper unconscious, in fact, it is necessary for the ego to be receptive to that influence, and this cannot occur when the subpersonalities are not integrated, that is, if the tripartite structure is affected by narcissism and idealisation.

I would give an example of the influence of idealisation on the creative processes, by telling an anecdote which happened to me when I was a dancer. In my idealised image of what had to be creativity in flamenco dance, which I had chosen as a means for expressing my creative potentialities, the true artist was a dancer who succeeded in manifesting the emotions connected to dance and in playing a masculine role capable to elicit emotions in the public, a person able to attract on himself, mainly by the eyes, an impassive but resolute face, a body firm and ready to discharge his energy at the proper moment, with decision and incisiveness. Among my masters, Raul was undoubtedly a world-famous artist, with a formidably advanced technique, for me unattainable. When we became closer, I asked him what he used to think of when he was dancing on the stage. I expected him to reveal me the secrets of a true flamenco dancer on how to attract, both by the body and by the gaze, the public and how to hold it with bated breath. His answer was very simple, and even disappointing to me. Raul answered me, merely: "I am concerned in not failing the steps". I was so disappointed, for so high was my idealisation about the dance. After a long time, I understood that Raul's true art was that of being himself and in doing it at his best. Since that moment, I began to truly enjoy the stage, living the here-and-now and being, accordingly, more natural, authentic and concentrated.

The study of narcissism is Laura Boggio Gilot's elective research field. She states: "narcissism is not only a mental suffering per se, but also the base and the nucleus of all kinds of mental suffering, of which constitutes the destructivity nucleus [...] narcissism, more than a simple pathology, can be regarded as an immune illness of the psyche, because it represents a ground of fragility and illusoriness on which the clinical symptoms can easily flourish". The narcissistic character is symbolized by the unsatisfiable need to be regarded as the best and "the narcissistic character is rooted on the idealistic expectation that all is due to happen according to one's desires and beliefs, which are ego-centered. The rejection of the frustration, the search for confirmation, always and everywhere, the extreme vulnerability to criticism, the close insecurity, presumption and arrogance are the most evident aspects of the narcissistic character". Besides, Laura Boggio Gilot sustains: "by penetrating the phenomenology of the narcissistic suffering it can be recognised that the narcissist represents the psychological typology more set apart from the true nature of the Self; embodying a magnificent and illusory 'false self', the narcissist is the personality farthest from the knowledge of his real nature, from the expression of his own potentialities and talents, so as from the awareness of his weakness and of his real needs [...] Around the nucleus of the self unawareness and of the consequent wrong life choices and relationships, stands a set of disastrous experiences that develop in the narcissist an impoverished self image, bringing a sense of inferiority and shame, contrasting with the grand ideal lying behind his motivations, and a negative

image of the reality, too powerful and threatening, which produces fear, aversion and envy. The dysfunctional relationship with himself and with the world builds in the narcissistic mind an amount of conflicts (both inner and outer) complexes (inferiority and abandonment) and painful emotions (fear, anger, impotence and shame), that enhance more and more defensive activities and compensatory choices, materialistic, extroverted and hedonistic [...] The psychotherapy knowledge teaches that the narcissism manifests itself as a disease of the personality organization, which is produced by a pathology of the super-ego, that is, by the dysfunctionality, till the complete absence, of that fundamental structure of the mind imposing the moral limits, rules and realistic prescriptions. By means of this directive *opus* of the super-ego the ego itself regulates the absoluteness of delight, evokes the sense of guilt in case of real damage and pushes to reparation, so preserving the self-esteem. Without a well-structured super-ego, the moral and duty sense is lacking, an abuse of the delight principle against the reality one, with a consequent absence of self-criticism and of a realistic vision of life, which necessarily results in a dysfunctional relation with reality and neighbour. From this kind of relation stems the sense of inadequacy, weakening the self-esteem and the relationship with life". Laura Boggio Gilot outlines several degrees in the narcissistic structure, depending on the developmental level, or stage, in which the individual stands. In the therapeutic treatment of narcissism, it's necessary to use some instruments, both from psychology and from wisdom, integrating them. In fact, in her effort of search and accomplishment of a psychology rooted in a spiritual path (and not the opposite), she states: "we have to take into account that narcissism stems from the need of absolute esteem, confirmation and success, rooted in a childish primary background of injured love, but is also founded upon factors regarding the basic character, which represent a fertile ground for the development of selfishness, the father of narcissism. To re-own one's own injuries of love is a goal of psychotherapy, but facing selfishness and nourishing spiritual qualities is an absolutely necessary means of the integral narcissistic healing".

The person who, agreeing with a path of growth and transformation, by means of a way of knowledge of one's self as psychotherapy is, and mainly undertaking a meditative path guided by a skilled instructor, becomes able to gradually accept his own limits, that is, to heal the tripartite structure from narcissism and idealisation, and the field of his consciousness enlarges so becoming receptive to the highest inspirations, gradually activating both the heart faculties, the poetically intended feeling, and the superior intellectual faculties, expression of the intuitive and creative intelligence. In fact, the wisdom tradition states that the soul has two wings: love and intuitive intellect. Besides, Plato teaches that soul is the site of the truth, the beautiful and the good, the transcendentals by which stems every expression of human creativity. We have to make a distinction, in terms both of products and person, between the true creativity and the false one, the latter drawing inspirations not from the upper unconscious, but from the lower, arcaic, one.

After all, in the integral view, the creative process takes place by a progressive disclosing of one's true inner nature and a consequent conscious alignment to the existing spiritual source, often not recognized, in the human personality. This is the only way by which to open that channel of inspiration from the high, which allows the self transformation, and this is the eminent creative process: the discovery of the divine within oneself and the discovery of the chance of becoming instruments of the truth, the beautiful and the good; in the words of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, which he put as a starting point of his papacy: "being a humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord".

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