

Integral Psychology and Foreign Policy: Lessons From the Fulbright Scholars Program

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Humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychological principles have many applications for social and foreign policy, but concrete examples are needed to illustrate this connection. The Fulbright Scholars Program represents one concrete example of an effort in U.S. foreign policy that closely reflects the values of humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychology. The implications that such a program has for the purposeful involvement of humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychologists in other social policy efforts is discussed. The need for integral psychologists to expand beyond the traditional boundaries of professional psychological practice into such realms as foreign policy is emphasized.

It is the task of education, more than of any other instrument of public policy, to help close the dangerous gap between the economical and technological interdependence of the peoples of the world and their psychological, political, and spiritual alienation.

U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright (D-AR)
1963

When we seek the well-being of one country at the expense of other countries, it leads to exploitation and imperialism. As long as we think exclusively of our own country, it is bound to create conflict and war.

Krishnamurti
1963

The suggestion that a particular element of U.S. foreign policy constitutes a clear example of humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychology might initially sound like a forced juxtaposition. It is the case, however, that one of the most successful innovations in U.S. foreign policy was conceived as a humanistic mission, and was largely articulated in psychological, as well as educational, terms. This effort, the Fulbright Scholars Program, was shaped 58 years ago by a freshman U.S. senator from

Arkansas who, in 1945, began to seek a plan for the promotion of peace following the destruction of World War II. Senator J. William Fulbright arrived at an idea that involved an exchange of scholars from throughout the world community—scholars who would foster good will and nonviolent international solutions by gaining a greater understanding of cultures outside their own. Fulbright believed that by promoting cross-cultural understanding, even (or particularly) among nations with sociopolitical tensions, future conflicts, and even wars could be avoided. This understanding would be gained, according to Fulbright's vision, through a process of direct experience in other nations and cultures. The result of this idea has been the most prominent cross-cultural exchange program in the world, a program that represents a hybrid of foreign policy and humanistic principles that are well represented in humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychology. This hybrid policy can serve to encourage the integral psychologies to seek involvement and influence in realms far removed from those typically associated with professional psychology or clinical practice. A profile of the Fulbright Scholars Program provides evidence that the same principles that inform humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychology also informed the development of this exemplary effort in foreign policy, suggesting more

overlap between these domains than is typically recognized, and suggesting that integral psychologies have the potential to influence other aspects of social policy if those who are invested in this realm of psychology pursue these opportunities.

The Fulbright Scholars Program

The idea for the Fulbright Scholars Program emerged in 1945, when Democratic Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas began looking for a means to promote peace and mutual understanding in the wake of World War II. Fulbright reflected upon his own experience as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and as an American participant in a 1944 conference on the restoration of Europe's educational system (Powell, 1996, p. 43). Based on these personal experiences, he began to consider how international collaboration and exchange might occur among scholars from many countries, across many disciplines. His vision was one of a program that would foster "a constant search for understanding among all peoples and all cultures—a search that can only be effective when learning is pursued on a worldwide basis" (Powell, 1996, p.45). This search for understanding would occur through American scholars studying or teaching abroad for extended periods, and scholars from other nations coming to the United States to do the same.

Fulbright's idea was dependent upon public funding, but he also knew that proposing a new budget item appropriation would meet with resistance, particularly for what was already likely to be a controversial program during the post-war period of heightened nationalism, ongoing economic recovery, and emerging McCarthyism. Fulbright therefore proposed that the massive amount of tangible American surplus assets still stored in other nations from during the war—trucks, jeeps, railroad equipment, bulldozers, and so forth.—represented a significant amount of potential currency located abroad (Arndt & Rubin, 1993; Powell, 1996, p. 46). If the countries in which this surplus equipment was stored were given the option of purchasing it with their own currency, that source of revenue would serve to support much of the Scholars Program, and would circumvent the need for appropriations from the treasury (Powell, 1996 p. 463). Paradoxically, then, it was largely surplus war equipment that served to initially fund a humanistic program to promote education and peace. On August 1, 1946, President Truman signed Fulbright's bill into

law, and with the Fulbright Act, the Fulbright Scholars Program was born.

Since its inception, the Fulbright Scholars Program has grown significantly, weathering numerous threats to its existence from those who consider it a risk to national security or an unnecessary expenditure (the Fulbright Program is now funded by the U.S. Information Agency, as well as through public funding provided by participating countries). By 1995, the Fulbright Scholars Program had provided more than 210,000 scholarships, with 72,000 Americans and 140,000 international scholars receiving them. Approximately 140 countries have participated in the program, and alumni include highly distinguished names in diplomacy, journalism, health care, and education from across the globe (Powell, 1996, p. 456). The Fulbright Scholarship Program has come to represent a highly visible example of successful international cooperation and cross-cultural exchange based on humanistic principles.

The Fulbright Program's Relationship to Humanistic, Transpersonal, and Integral Psychology

When considering the broadest goals of humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychology, the Fulbright Program serves as an example of how the values that inform these psychologies have virtually limitless application. Ken Wilber (1981) has pointed out in his last chapter of *Up From Eden*, entitled "Republicans, Democrats, and Mystics," "...men and women are unfree not primarily because of horrid appetites or oppressive institutions, but because they manufacture both of those forms of unfreedom as a substitute for transcendence" (p. 338). If this is so, then it becomes necessary to identify those occasional institutions that have been created to be anything but oppressive, and that serve to *promote* various forms of transcendence rather than pander to hollow substitutions for it. The Fulbright Scholars Program is one such example, and therefore serves as a useful case study of the form and function some policy institutions might take if guided by humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychological perspectives.

In the case of the U.S. Senator from Arkansas, it appears he shaped his ideas for an international exchange program based on ideas and principles drawn from liberal arts education; a value for personal growth through direct experience; and the belief that mutual respect and understanding are bred through

the promotion of empathy, even (or especially) on an international and cross-cultural level. These are some of the same core principles upon which integral, transpersonal, and humanistic psychologies have been built. This fact suggests there is a potential for integral psychology to influence seemingly distant realms of endeavor, including social welfare and foreign policy, when the potential application of humanistic values is present in those realms. In other words, what appear on the surface to be distantly related realms of endeavor—integral psychology and foreign policy, in this case—may actually be quite closely related when they share the same underlying humanistic convictions, intellectual roots, and goals of transcending the typical. It follows, then, that by continuously identifying other realms of endeavor that might share these values, integral psychologists can become engaged in efforts that do not look much like the practice of professional psychology on the surface at all, but in fact benefit tremendously from the involvement of integral psychologists in their conceptualization and execution. The unwittingly close correspondence between the values promoted by both the Fulbright Scholars Program and humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychology serves as an example of the relevance these psychologies might have for something as presumably far afield as a foreign policy program.

As pointed out by Art Lyons (2001), “If humanistic psychology is going to make a profound impact on the way in which citizens of the world live their lives during the 21st century, then it must focus on the larger social arena in some fashion” (p. 633). Indeed, this will not require unwanted visitation on the part of the humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychologies in public affairs, since an increasingly vocal call for the greater inclusion of psychology into realms such as social policy, including foreign policy, is already evident. For example, the Rabbi Michael Lerner (1996) articulates an approach to political and societal healing that is very much in concert with humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychological principles:

Many of the distortions of daily life are rooted in our responses to misrecognition and the denial of our desire for meaning, and in our accommodation to a society based on selfishness and materialism. If one could look at all other people, and oneself, as having lives that are in part shaped by this dynamic, one could then take a much more compassionate attitude toward people drawn to xenophobic

nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia, or religious fundamentalism.

I do not propose here to take a tolerant attitude toward the manifestations of any of these hateful behaviors. To be compassionate toward the people involved does not mean accepting their behavior. A central element in a meaning-oriented strategy for societal healing is compassion. If one can learn to see oneself, one’s parents, and eventually all people as having been denied the opportunity to actualize their most fundamental ethical and spiritual needs, one can develop this compassionate attitude. (p. 156)

In advocating meaning-oriented change in our political and social system, Lerner is essentially promoting an integration of humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychological principles into public life. One could point to this proposal for social change as one that depends upon an interdisciplinary knowledge of (at least) spirituality, sociology, political science, and psychology for sustenance. It is also a contemporary proposal that is highly consistent with the aims of the 58 year-old Fulbright Scholars Program, since both approaches advocate the need to improve widespread cross-cultural understanding through individual transformative change, and both draw upon the same intellectual and moral roots as do the integral psychologies.

The point here is that since the Fulbright Scholars Program can be conceptualized as representing one of the first Anglo-American examples of an integral psychology-oriented effort at foreign policy, the potential for greater involvement of integral psychologists in the shaping of foreign policy must be recognized. So, while the Fulbright Program was never explicitly defined as an extension of humanistic, transpersonal, or integral psychology, it can, based on the principles that inform it, be defined as such now. Furthermore, current proposals for innovative social policy—such as Rabbi Lerner’s—some of which are more or less descendents of Fulbright’s efforts, *are* explicit in their promotion of humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychological concepts. Therefore, the possibility can be said to clearly exist for integral psychology to become more explicitly involved in contemporary foreign and social policy efforts, building upon Fulbright’s intuition and foresight, recognizing Ken Wilber’s proposed etiology for why so many institutions *lack* a transpersonal purpose, acknowledging the

urgency of Lerner's contemporary proposal for meaning-oriented politics, and fulfilling Art Lyon's call to social action.

Humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychologists, however, will need to be highly attentive in order to recognize potential avenues for social policy involvement. They will also need to be open to engaging in these endeavors, which have not traditionally been defined as pertaining to professional psychology. This evolution of perspective and action will require an extension of the interdisciplinarity that marks the field of humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychology, as well as a *relaxation* of professional identity. This relaxation of professional identity will need to occur during a period when the profession of psychology as a whole is actually engaged in efforts to further cordon off professional turf and *fortify* professional identity. Interestingly, this professional siege mentality is not unlike some aspects of the political environment in which Fulbright found himself when he first pursued his idea for the Fulbright Scholars Program, when American nationalism served as a potential barrier to gaining support for a cross-cultural scholars program. As in Senator Fulbright's case, however, only a willingness to break with convention, and pursue collaboration rather than isolation, will result in the innovative change that is most needed.

Conclusion

The point in reviewing the nature of the Fulbright Scholars Program in the context of humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychology is to emphasize the potential reach of these psychological principles into foreign policy programming, and to provide a concrete example of a foreign policy effort that reflects these principles. If an innovation in foreign policy such as the Fulbright Scholars Program can reflect integral psychological principles, the potential clearly exists for integral psychologists to contribute to social policy and foreign policy endeavors in various ways. While this involvement will likely require additional interdisciplinary knowledge for those psychologists who choose to pursue such directions, humanistic, transpersonal and integral psychologists have the advantage of already being unusually interdisciplinary in their perspective and adventurous in their orientation. The unusual breadth of humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychologists

makes involvement in an interdisciplinary realm like foreign or social policy an ambitious but natural step. Furthermore, as the need for new perspectives on broad and complex social issues becomes increasingly urgent, humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychologists will have an obligation (indeed, possibly a moral imperative) to become engaged in the promotion of quality of life across many realms and at many levels. Fortunately, the realm of integral psychology is well suited to such evolution, even when the profession of psychology in general remains turf-bound. The challenge at this time, however, may be convincing humanistic, transpersonal, and integral psychologists themselves that their relevance extends far beyond the boundaries circumscribed by the conventions of any single profession.

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