

## Section 2: Theory and Research

# History and Clinical Applications of Moreno's Contribution to Transpersonal Psychology

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J. L. Moreno had an enormous influence on the development of both humanistic psychology and transpersonal psychology. As early as 1918, he was led to the development of psychodrama by his ideas and philosophy, his intuitive, insightful understanding of human nature, his investigation of the social structures of groups and community, and his spiritual beliefs. Moreno's creative ideas had a decided influence on the emerging trailblazers in psychology as they struggled to compose a new paradigm for psychotherapy in the 20th century. Only a few gave credit to Moreno for his formative, groundbreaking work that inspired their collective minds. This article will pay tribute to Moreno's contributions to both the humanistic and transpersonal schools of psychology as described by Abraham Maslow and a group of collaborating psychotherapists. A literature review of the many innovative applications of transpersonal psychology will be followed by a four-step model that will focus on the transpersonal roles and resources and how they can be used for healing. Clinical examples are provided for psychodramatists eager to incorporate more transpersonal processes into their work as clinicians or educators.

**KEYWORDS:** Psychodrama; transpersonal psychology; humanistic psychology; *daimon*; "Godhead"; here and now; future projections.

The ambitious aim of psychodrama is to reconnect a person with God. Psychodrama was Moreno's way to reunite mortals momentarily with an eternal world of all-spontaneity. It is a method for people who have fallen from their dreams. . . . Through a therapeutic procedure, psychodrama picks up fallen angels and points them toward the realization of hopes and desires.

(Kraus, 1984, p. 48)

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As clinical psychologists, educators, and trainers in psychodrama, we have often been dismayed by the lack of recognition given to Jacob Levy Moreno in much of the literature of the larger field of mental-health counseling. In this article, we will build a bridge between psychodrama and transpersonal psychology which may begin to rectify that omission. During the early part of the 20th century, Moreno—father and founder of psychodrama, group psychotherapy, and sociometry—was also a pioneer in many areas of the developing field of psychology, including experiential and group methods of psychotherapy. Moreno explored the spiritual philosophy of the “Godhead” (1918, 1919a, 1919b) as he began his initial development of psychodrama as a therapeutic modality. He conceived of the Godhead as the source of all creativity and spontaneity in the cosmos. This Being is unlimited in his ability to perceive all dimensions of the universe without bias (Moreno, 1953, p. xli). Today, the transpersonal is an intervention that is offered to the protagonist for the purpose of healing and transformation in our therapeutic work. In the following pages, a review of Moreno’s contributions to the field of psychology is provided. Next, some of the transpersonal aspects of Moreno’s work are explained. A short synopsis that describes the development of transpersonal psychology will demonstrate how Moreno, ever the groundbreaker and expansive innovator, was creatively including the transpersonal as early as 1918. A four-step process is then offered that shows how to incorporate some of the transpersonal elements of psychodrama into therapy or experiential classroom settings. Clinical examples are provided demonstrating psychodrama principles as they are used in transpersonal counseling and training settings.

### **MORENO’S EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRANSPERSONAL IN PSYCHODRAMA**

Moreno, whose life spanned the years 1889–1974, designed psychodrama based on his love of Greek theater and his passion for social justice. Moreno visualized that a healer should be a “spontaneous, creative protagonist in the midst of a group” (1989b, p. 62). Moreno saw his own work as that of a social scientist and a prophet who researched “primitive religions” with the desire to create a new social order (1989b, p. 62).

His legacy lives on in other fields as well. Corsini (1955) and Thomas and Biddle (1966) credit Moreno as one of the founders of group psychotherapy, and Campenole (1981) wrote about him as an unrecognized pioneer of family therapy. Maslow (1968) attributed many of the Human Potential Movement’s exercises to Moreno, writing, “I would like to add one credit-where-credit-is-due footnote. Many of the techniques . . . were originally invented by Dr. Jacob Moreno” (p. 15). Similarly, Berne (1970), founder of transactional analysis, noted, “that (Fritz) Perls, founder of the Gestalt movement shared with other ‘active’ psychotherapists the Moreno problem: the fact that nearly all known ‘active’ techniques were first tried out by Moreno in psychodrama, so that it makes it difficult to come up with an original idea in this regard” (p. 164). Moreno’s theories and the practice of psychodrama are now enriching other fields, such as trial law, education, and social-justice practices, as well as psychology in general.

Moreno posited that human beings could be more productive by acting out their fantasies and symptoms rather than trying to constrain or talk about them, as most psychiatrists under Freud's tutelage recommended (Marineau, 1989). He was not as interested in what was wrong with people as he was with what would empower them to have more meaningful relationships and be able to experience more spontaneous and creative fulfillment in life (Moreno, 1953). In these revolutionary ideas, Moreno foreshadowed the humanistic psychological movement that emerged some 40 years later (Maslow, 1971).

Moreno understood the Greek theater as an experiential event fostering transformation in whole audiences of people. He drew his concepts about catharsis from Aristotle (Moreno, 1985) and described how Aristotle (McKeon, 1941) used the word *catharsis* in his work *Poetics* to describe the purifying effect of the drama on Greek spectators by eliciting certain emotions that created relief from their pent-up passions. Aristotle suggested that the task of the tragedy was to encourage liberation from such emotions as fear and pity. In psychodrama, the emphasis shifts from the spectators to the group members. Moreno (1985) went on to describe catharsis as an experience that is not just mentally realized but also must be felt within the body. It can be experienced more powerfully in a group, hence the need for the drama. These ideas were formative in experiential and transformational education settings, group psychotherapy, and the Human Potential Movement.

Moreno's philosophies also demonstrate the foundations of transpersonal psychology. Transpersonal psychotherapies often use storytelling, myths, and dramatic enactment as sources of ancient spiritual wisdom. Moreno combined his love and knowledge of the theater, his storytelling with children, and his wellspring of spontaneity and creativity with his background in psychiatry and group dynamics to develop psychodrama. In the arts, muses have long assisted artists with inspiration. Moreno's background in the arts likely led him to connect the muse or inspiration with an internal, spiritual voice. Psychodramas frequently embody the inspiration or soul; this embodiment demonstrates a foundational transpersonal concept.

In therapeutic psychodrama, both verbal and nonverbal communication are utilized in scenes that are brought to life. These may depict, for example, memories of events from the past, unfinished situations, inner dramas, fantasies, dreams, preparation for future risk-taking situations, or expressions of here-and-now feelings or experiences. The scenes may approximate real-life situations, inner mental processes, fantasies, past lives, or future projections. Each of these interventions can have an element of the transpersonal.

Moreno (1985) also noted that the Greek word *therapeutes* meant attendant or servant. The earliest therapeutic measure was meant to drive the demons out of the bodies of patients, who were unable to do this for themselves; thus, they needed a *therapeutes* to do it (p. 179). A priest or shaman would use a magic charm or potion to relieve the other's suffering. From primitive times, drama was a place for therapeutics and catharsis, long before it was used for art or entertainment. The concept of an attendant or person in service to others was also

very different from the role of the doctor, fixing an illness. This too is an ancient and transpersonal view of the healer.

Moreno believed that human beings were infinitely creative and responsible to their own creator, and ultimately could choose to be cocreators in a world of interpersonal relationships that were interdependent upon each other (Marineau, 1989; Moreno, 1953, 1993). This philosophy underlay his development of psychodrama as a therapy that would allow people to increasingly develop their spontaneity and creativity in relationship with others. He described the theories of spontaneity and creativity in all his major texts, including *Words of the Father* (1971), *The Theatre of Spontaneity* (1973), *Who Shall Survive?* (1953, 1993), *Psychodrama Volume 1* (1985), and nearly every article he wrote.

In 1918, Moreno was editor in chief of the publication *Daimon*, a monthly journal of existential philosophy based on the Socratic philosophy of the *daimon* (Moreno, 1989b). *Daimon* (the journal) was intended to be the creative inspiration that empowered individuals to transcend mundane social rules while encouraging a greater knowledge to bring about a new world order (Marineau, 1989; Moreno, 1989b). The Greek word *daimon*, according to Moreno's biographer Marineau, meant "both a good or evil spirit; it was also referred to as an individual's genius. Thus, the *daimon* was every individual's 'interior double,' his inspiration and secret advisor" (1989, p. 56). Moreno used the *daimon* as a role or double in psychodrama. The double plays the intrapsychic part of the client's self that offers both inspiration and advice to the part that has forgotten that wisdom. The idea to employ one's own personality subparts for healing foreshadowed Assagioli's psychosynthesis theories based on subpersonalities (1965), Perls's theories of gestalt (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951), and contemporary parts therapies such as Internal Family Systems (Schwartz, 1994).

Moreno published three protocols: "The Godhead as Author" (1918), "The Godhead as Preacher" (1919b), and "The Godhead as Comedian" (1919a). These three texts are examples of axiomatic protocols: dramatizations based on explorations of social and ethical values with the purpose of bringing out Moreno's philosophy of spiritual truth. In his autobiography (1989a), he attempted to recapture the mystical ideas which shaped his personal philosophy on "Godplaying" and were based, in part, on the life of Christ.

Moreno also emphasized existential concerns about one's place in the universe. He noticed that people, since time immemorial, have tried to understand the values and morals of the laws of the universe and their implications for birth, sex, and death. He said, "In the psychodramatic world the fact of embodiment is central, axiomatic and universal" (1975, p. 21). Gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines all appear on the psychodrama stage (Garcia & Buchanan, 2000; Moreno, 1975). Moreno believed that everyone could play God on the psychodramatic stage—not just the prophets and leaders, but the epileptic, the schizophrenic, the prostitute, the poor and the rejected, each one fully embodied. Everyone could play his own version of God; there is no age, no death, and no sex differentiation in psychodrama. God, instead of coming down from the skies, comes in via the stage door. Moreno demonstrated through dramatic action and creative

imagination that a person could create their own meaning in life and discover their own place in the universe.

While working for *Daimon*, Moreno also developed the idea of the *encounter* within the context of group therapy, a concept later found in gestalt texts. He reproduced "Invitation to an Encounter" in *Daimon*. When he first wrote about the encounter in 1914, it was an invitation to a meeting between self and inner self, self and other, and self and God. The word *encounter* succinctly and uniquely prefaced psychodrama as a relational form of therapy.

Moreno reshaped Freudian and psychoanalytic theories that had emphasized looking into a person's past to understand the cause of their problems. As early as 1914, Moreno was a proponent of the here and now, the dynamics of living in the moment. He described his emphasis upon the encounter and the value of recognizing the therapeutic process as it took place in connection between the client and the group. He believed that focusing only on what happened in the past would diminish one's spontaneity for the now. In psychodramatic intervention constructs, a person can be given the opportunity to revisit the past to correct the scene or experience it with a renewed spontaneity and therefore change history. Time is collapsed as the client enters scenes from childhood as both an adult and as the child. The client can view it through the lens of both the past and the present concurrently. Transpersonal psychology would see this as a nonordinary state of consciousness, being able to function in a collapsed time frame.

Moreno's focus on the healthy side of people's lives, their creativity, and meaning are all ideas later prioritized by humanistic, existential, and transpersonal psychology movements. Finally, his ideas demonstrate the fundamental reality of human beings in relationship with others, embedded in their social contexts and influenced by each other. He showed that healing is often a social collective need in addition to an individual one.

## HISTORY OF HUMANISTIC AND TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

In 1969, American psychologist Abraham Maslow wrote about the limitations of the two major schools of psychology practiced at that time, psychoanalysis and behaviorism. He called them the first and second forces, with Freud's emphasis on psychopathology and the behaviorists' exclusive focus on behavior. He proposed that a third force be called humanistic psychology, placing more emphasis on a human being's capacity to be internally directed and motivated to achieve self-realization and fulfill their potential. This multidimensional perspective was an inclusive umbrella for a wide range of effective therapeutic approaches including gestalt, bioenergetics, Rogerian therapy, family-systems therapy, and encounter groups. These therapies were more experiential with a new awareness of the body-mind connection. Of course, Moreno's development of psychodrama had prepared the way for a number of these theorists, including Maslow, Virginia Satir, Fritz Perls, and Will Schutz, who attended his open groups at the New York City Psychodramatic Institute during the 1940s. As noted, Moreno had introduced the concept of the here and now years before the humanistic movement claimed it as their own. In addition, he distinguished the psychosomatic, interpersonal, and psychosocial aspects of treating the whole person.

However, on reflection and input from many colleagues, Maslow as well as Anthony Sutich (1976) realized they had left out an important vital element, the spiritual realm of the psyche. In the late 1960s, there had been a renaissance of studying Eastern spiritual philosophies, meditation, and anthropological research on the practices of indigenous shamans. This included experimentation with psychedelic drugs to explore other states of consciousness. A small working group of psychologists including Maslow, Sutich, Stanislav Grof, Jamie Fadiman, and Miles Vich met in Menlo Park, California, in 1967 with the combined purpose to create a new psychology that encompassed the whole spectrum of consciousness including the “non-ordinary” (Grof, 1985). The development of the fourth force, or transpersonal psychology, as a branch of its own came because of these meetings. They launched the Association for Transpersonal Psychology and started their own journal. In 1975, Robert Frazier founded the California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. The transpersonal branch of psychology has also grown a large umbrella to include early pioneers such as Carl Jung, Spinoza, Albert Einstein, and Michael Harner, as well as religious mystics and saints. Their paradigm is inclusive of the collective unconscious, the nature of God, archetypes, and quantum physics. All of these men in their work were exploring a person’s relationship with the cosmos and an individual’s own divine essence, just as Moreno had 50 years earlier. As Moreno’s philosophy expanded during his lifetime and on into the 21st century through the contributions of many others, so too has transpersonal psychology expanded with new developments in science, art, and refined research into genetics, astrophysics, and cybernetics.

### **A FOUR-STEP MODEL FOR USING ROLE THEORY IN TRANSPERSONAL HEALING**

As role theory is one of the cornerstones of Moreno’s theory, one application of it in our transpersonal work is helping people connect to their resources. These may be categorized into three types (Hudgins, 2002):

- Personal or intrapsychic—personal qualities that we see as strengths, such as courage, humor, and intelligence;
- Interpersonal—people who support us now or in the past, especially someone or something from childhood with whom we felt safe, such as a grandparent, a pet, etc.;
- Transpersonal—a belief in something greater than the self, such as music, art, nature, God, Goddess, or a Higher Power.

During a session when a client is struggling with personal or professional challenges, they can be invited to tap into or create one of these roles for support. Sometimes the transpersonal arises organically; sometimes it is part of the “prescription” needed prior to doing trauma work. Sometimes the transpersonal is even a part of the trauma itself, such as a hurricane which someone believes has been an act of nature or God. Their belief system may be deeply affected by such a traumatic experience, and their sense of betrayal and loss are clinical concerns.

Here is an example that demonstrates how the transpersonal resource may arise organically and spontaneously in a therapeutic session. It is incumbent on the therapist to recognize that the transpersonal may be present and to explore more deeply. In a gestalt class, John was working as a client, in a “continuum of awareness dialogue” (Naranjo, 1993). The dialogue began with, “Now I am aware of . . .,” and John began tracking body sensations, emotions, and thoughts, speaking them aloud and beginning every sentence with “Now I am aware of. . . .” John began to track the sensations in his body and soon began speaking about a memory of being in the ocean. The therapist asked John to describe the ocean, then to role reverse and become the ocean, and next to speak in the present tense as the ocean. In the role of the ocean he noted his awareness of the sensations in his body and said, “I am vast, I am holding you, I am healing you.” It became clear to John and to the other students that the ocean was a transpersonal resource for him. The therapist then moved into the double role and encouraged him to expand his resource by mirroring and exaggerating his movements. He began to sway his arms and torso and dropped deeper into the sensation of being the ocean with movement and sound. When he moved back to the role of himself, he began to cry, recognizing the ocean as a power greater than himself that he is deeply connected with. He then expressed gratitude to the ocean for being so healing for him.

One method of working with the transpersonal within the course of therapy is the following four-step model. Using the example of John along with other clinical examples, will illustrate the transpersonal and how to apply it in therapy.

### **Step 1: Name or Identify the Resource or Belief That Will Be Role-Played**

First the client chooses, names, and describes the resource that will be role-played. Sometimes what is being named is a resource, other times it may be a distorted or internalized message that no longer serves the person but can be worked with in a similar way—for example, “Choose a person or animal who loved you when you were a child,” or “Let’s bring your grandmother into the room.” In the example with John, his memory of swimming in the ocean arose spontaneously during his “continuum of awareness” dialogue. The therapist asked him to describe the ocean, which is an example of Step 1.

### **Step 2: Deepen and Explore the Resource or the Internalized Belief**

This step involves exploring this resource in action, through role reversal or doubling. The director interviews the client in role reversal with one of their resources—for example, John was invited to reverse roles with the ocean and speak as the ocean. The psychodramatic technique of the double also supports connection and deepening. With John, the therapist was in a nonverbal double role standing next to him in the role of the ocean and mirroring his movements, supporting him to embody this role more fully.

### **Step 3: Build the Relationship between the Client and Their Resource**

In this step the client has embodied the resource and can then distinguish between their role as the resource and their experience of self. This is where they are invited to directly address themselves from the role of resource. The purpose is to offer the client a different perspective on their issue. They are less identified with their normal thought patterns or emotions and can experience a possibility for new choices. In the example of John, he spoke to himself from the role of the ocean, saying, “I am vast. I am holding you. I am healing you.”

### **Step 4: Support the Client to Have an Experience in the Here and Now with Their Connection to Their Resource or Belief**

In this step, the client returns to their self-identity and integrates the experience of receiving what their resource has offered. They have had an encounter with a different aspect of themselves or another, which is likely to shift their experience and support a deeper connection to the transpersonal. When John returned to the role of self and took in the support the ocean offered him, he was quite moved, began to cry, and expressed deep gratitude to the ocean. This is an example of a here-and-now connection with a resource that can be deeply healing.

Early in therapy, it may be important for clients to be connected to their resources. This creates more internal support so that they may progress toward their goals. The therapist explains the three categories of resources: personal, interpersonal and transpersonal. In an individual session, a client is asked to look around the office and choose three objects, one to represent each resource. The examples of Susan and Judy in the following demonstrate ways of working with transpersonal resources using the four-step model.

In Step 1 (Name the resource), Susan, a client in her 50s, chose a small wall hanging of Ganesh (Hindu elephant-headed god) as a symbol to represent her transpersonal strength. Judy, a graduate student in counseling, was raised in a fundamentalist religious family and was working on individuation and self-identity issues. It seemed likely that she had many introjects from the fundamentalist church that needed to be made overt for her to discriminate between what her personal beliefs were and what belonged to the church fathers. Perls wrote, “Introjection is the neurotic mechanism whereby we incorporate into ourselves standards, attitudes, ways of acting and thinking, which are not truly ours” (1973, p. 35). To help clarify the introject, an empty chair (originally developed by Moreno) was used and Judy placed a colored scarf on the chair to represent the church. The therapist encouraged her to have a conversation with the church.

In Step 2 (Deepen and explore the resource), a client might reverse roles with a part of the self, the resource, or another person. This gives them an embodied, felt sense of being in another’s shoes, to gain empathy and perspective from the other person’s side.



Susan was invited to sit in the chair opposite her self and to role reverse and become Ganesh. She was first asked to physically describe herself as Ganesh. What is most important is to keep the client in the role of their transpersonal strength and develop that role by becoming and playing its part. The purpose of the inquiry is to bring the transpersonal resource more into an embodied life within the client. The director would then interview Susan in the role of Ganesh and ask these questions:

“Ganesh, how long have you been in Susan’s life?”

“Tell me more about you, Ganesh.”

“Tell me how/when Susan first connected with you.”

“How do you feel about Susan?”

“How do you best support Susan?”

“How/when/where does she most connect with you, Ganesh?”

“Do you have a wish, concern, or request for Susan today?”

“Please tell her more about how you support her on the issues she came to therapy to work on.”

In the example of Judy, an empty chair was used to represent the church. To begin the dialogue, the therapist offered a prompt, such as, “Tell the church, ‘You told me that as a woman I should. . . .’” Judy then filled in the blank and said, “Be nice, be sweet, be quiet, and please men.” The therapist invited her to tell the church how that message had affected her and what was true for her now. She continued with several other statements to the church: “You said I couldn’t have a career. You told me to obey men; that my job was to have children and raise them in the church. You even said I would go to hell if I didn’t follow your beliefs!” In the role of her double, the therapist said, “I am angry with you!” Following this doubling statement, Judy could say to the church, “I am furious with you and how you tried to control me!”

In Step 3 (Build the relationship with the resource), invite the person in the role of their transpersonal resource to speak directly to their self. As the interview with Susan in the role of Ganesh progressed, Ganesh spoke about Susan’s deep connection to her prior community, which she had recently moved away from. With the support of Ganesh, Susan could more deeply and honestly look at how isolated and lonely she’d felt since she left that community. In her role as Ganesh, she was able to comfort herself and offer internal support for her loss and sadness.

With each introject or distorted message that Judy explored, she was able to give back what was not hers to the church. In later sessions, she could develop and then role reverse with an emerging new spiritual self and name what was true for her now. She embodied the transpersonal role by spreading her arms and moving around the room, experiencing a new level of freedom in her

spirituality. The therapist encouraged expansion and expression via the role of the double. She spoke directly to herself with kindness, gentleness and self-acceptance. Step 4 (Experience of self in the here and now with connection to their resource) was now being internalized as Judy experienced support from her transpersonal role in the here and now. Judy began to individuate as she recognized and felt her separateness from the church, as evidenced by the chair representing the church being placed in the far corner of the room. Often, after the anger is expressed and the grief acknowledged, gratitude may arise organically, which is a signal to therapist and client that the work on this piece is coming to completion. Judy could now appreciate the church for the ways it had helped her socially as a child and adolescent, recognizing the gifts she had received from being raised in this fundamentalist community.

Similarly, after Susan's work with Ganesh, her transpersonal resource, she returned to her own role (the role of self), absorbing what Ganesh had expressed to her. She expressed deep appreciation and gratitude for the longevity and depth of her belief in her spirituality. Her tears flowed easily. This demonstrated a cathartic release of deep emotions, which led to an integration of her transpersonal resource and a fuller sense of self.

The same four steps can be built into a group activity with the intention of naming and building the connection to transpersonal resources. For example, one could bring a "talking stick" to the beginning of a group or class and ask each person to set an intention by bringing a resource into the room that would support them in their learning and growth throughout the coming year. This could be a person, a teacher, a beloved pet, someone who is no longer living who is important to them, or a transpersonal resource. Each person is invited to name their resource and then speak as the resource, explaining their purpose and what they have to offer, speaking to themselves from the role of the resource. Finally, they return to themselves and receive this message and add a bead to the talking stick. This is a valuable exercise to do in the beginning and at the end of a class or group. This structure supports participants to visually, emotionally, and kinesthetically reconnect with their resource and see how they've changed and grown personally, interpersonally, and transpersonally at the end of the year.

In conclusion, Jacob Levy Moreno was one of the first psychiatrists to invite God, in the many forms in which God is conceived, into the treatment room. He honored the transpersonal as a vital part of a person's growth and development and found specific ways to include the transpersonal in the therapeutic process. He did this through the intimate encounter, role reversal with God or the divine, and the use of the double as an inner voice of support and wisdom. He believed and demonstrated through dramatic action how a person could find and create their own meaning in life and discover their place in the universe by using their own creative imagination.

Moreno's role-development theories and the embodiment of the transpersonal as a resource for healing are powerful ways to engage clients and students. The intention is to help them become more self-aware and self-accepting and deepen their connection to their own transpersonal experience.

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