



### Table of Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Presidential Address.....</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| What is Transpersonal Psychology?.....                                      | 3        |
| What are the Historical Origins of Transpersonal Psychology?.....           | 7        |
| How Do Transpersonal Psychologists View Experience and Behavior?.....       | 14       |
| How Is Transpersonal Research Done?.....                                    | 17       |
| ➤ Figure 1. Varieties of Transpersonal Research Methods .....               | 21       |
| ➤ Figure 2. Transpersonal Research Review.....                              | 24       |
| ➤ Figure 3. Studies Providing “Best Evidence” for Authenticity of Psi ..... | 28       |
| Reading List.....   | 29       |
| Biographical Note.....  | 40       |





### **Presidential Address**

#### **44<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the New England Psychological Association (NEPA)**

October 16, 2004, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI

Paul F. Cunningham, Ph.D., Professor and Chair

Social and Behavioral Sciences Department

Rivier College, Nashua, NH

[pcunningham@rivier.edu](mailto:pcunningham@rivier.edu)

I dedicate today's talk to Abraham Maslow, one of the founders of transpersonal psychology, the third President of our esteemed Association, and 76<sup>th</sup> president of the American Psychological Association (APA). Maslow's election as APA president in 1969 provided an extraordinary opportunity for the ideas behind transpersonal psychology to assert themselves throughout the discipline. Unfortunately, Abe Maslow died the following year at the age of 62 before his vision of transpersonal psychology could be developed beyond the tentative outlines presented in his books *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Maslow, 1968) and *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (Maslow, 1971). One of the purposes of my address today is to describe some of the developments that have occurred since the founding of the field by Maslow and others more than 35 years ago. My presentation will address the following four questions: What is transpersonal psychology? What are its historical origins? How do transpersonal psychologists view experience and behavior? How is transpersonal research conducted?

Before I describe the nature of transpersonal psychology, the problem of stereotypes that are often associated with transpersonal psychology first needs to be addressed. As I have written previously in the *Winter and Summer 2004 NEPA Newsletters* (see [www.nepa-info.org](http://www.nepa-info.org)), many transpersonal concepts run directly counter to much "official" knowledge and contemporary thought as far as mainstream orthodox Western psychology is concerned. Transpersonal

concepts, however, are quite ancient, expressed by many religions and cultures from the past and continuing into the present, and are based upon experiences and phenomena that are psychological facts, regardless of the interpretations that might be made about them. This data represents its own kind of evidence about the nature of the psyche and the nature of reality - evidence that science up to this point has ignored. The strength, vitality, and worth of transpersonal psychology have been greatly undermined, however, by distortions, negative ideas, superstition, fanaticism, stereotypes, and some sheer nonsense (Adeney, 1988; Ellis & Yeager, 1989). Historian of psychology, Eugene Taylor, who is being given NEPA's Distinguished Contribution Award this afternoon, tells us that

Transpersonal psychology, if known to mainstream psychologists at all, is most often associated with New Age crystal gazers, astrologers, believers in witchcraft, drug users, meditators, occultists, spiritual healers, martial artists, and other purveyors of pop psychology, in short; everything that a truly legitimate scientific and academic psychology is *not*. The stereotype is, of course, inaccurate. For, like the fabled philosopher's stone, its seemingly weird exterior masks a more important philosophical challenge, the full articulation and subsequent flowering of which may yet prove to be the undoing of the reductionist mainstream. (Taylor, 1992, p. 285)

### **What Is Transpersonal Psychology?**

#### ***Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology***

One way to gain an accurate understanding of the nature of transpersonal psychology is to look at published definitions of the field. Based on a thematic analysis of over 200 definitions published between 1968 and 1991, Denise Lajoie and S. I. Shapiro, both at the University of Hawaii, synthesized this definition of transpersonal psychology: "Transpersonal psychology is concerned with the study of humanity's highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness" (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992, p. 91). In a later study, S. I. Shapiro and Phillippe Gross, co-editors of *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, with Grace Lee of the University of Hawaii conducted a thematic analysis of 80 English-language definitions appearing in the transpersonal literature between 1991-2001 (Shapiro, Lee, & Gross, 2002). The thematic analysis revealed that the most frequent category, occurring in 66.2% of all citations, was "Going beyond or transcending: the individual, ego, self, the personal, personality, or personal identity; existence of

a deeper, authentic, or true Self” (p. 31). The second most frequent thematic category, occurring in 61.2% of all citations, was “Spirituality, psychospiritual, psychospiritual development, the spiritual, spirit” (p. 31). Other, less frequent, themes included: “Special states of consciousness; interconnectivity/unity; going beyond other schools of psychology; emphasis on a scientific approach; mystical experience/mysticism; study the full range/spectrum of consciousness; emphasis on recognizing greater human potential; inclusion of non-Western psychologies; meditation; and the existence of a wider reality” (p. 31).

One of my favorite descriptions of transpersonal psychology comes from James Fadiman and Robert Frager, both faculty members at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, CA, who published one of the first college-level personality theory textbooks to include chapters on both Eastern personality theories *and* transpersonal psychology.

Transpersonal psychology contributes to the more traditional concerns of the discipline an acknowledgement of the spiritual aspect of human experience. This level of experience has been described primarily in religious literature, in unscientific and often theologically biased language. A major task of transpersonal psychology is to provide a scientific language and a scientific framework for this material.... One basic tenet of transpersonal psychology is that there is in each individual a deeper or true self that is experienced in transcendent states of consciousness. Distinct from the personality and the personal ego, it is the source of inner wisdom, health, and harmony... One of the premises of transpersonal psychology is that we do not know the full range of human potential. The sense of a vast potential for growth within the individual provides a context for transpersonal psychology. (Fadiman & Frager, 2002, p. 452)

More recently, Jorge Ferrer, faculty member at the California Institute of Integral Studies and author of the constructive postmodern critique of transpersonal psychology, *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality* (Ferrer, 2002), defined transpersonal psychology in the following way:

Situated within the wider umbrella of transpersonal studies, transpersonal psychology is a modern academic discipline concerned with the *psychological* study of the transpersonal and spiritual dimensions of human nature and existence (e.g., mystical phenomena, transpersonal states of consciousness, spiritual organizations, the sacredness of nature, spiritual transformation and awakening, archetypes, subtle and ultimate realities, and so

forth) as well as with the *spiritual* and *transpersonal* study of human psychology (e.g., memory, cognition, love, empathy, regression, trauma, anger, gender, sexual identity, intimate relationships, psychopathology, psychotherapy, birth, development, death, and so forth). (cited in Caplan, Hartelius, & Rardin, 2003, p. 147)

### ***The Scope of Transpersonal Psychology***

Another way to gain an adequate understanding of the nature of psychology is to look at the *topics* that transpersonal psychologists study. According to psychiatrist Roger Walsh and psychotherapist France Vaughn in their 1993 book *Paths Beyond Ego*, “Transpersonal experiences may be defined as experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (*trans*) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche, and cosmos” (Walsh & Vaughn, 1993, p. 3).

Topics of particular interest include consciousness and altered states, mythology, meditation, yoga, mysticism, lucid dreaming, psychedelics [entheogens], values, ethics, relationships, exceptional capacities and psychological well-being, transconventional development, transpersonal emotions such as love and compassion, motives such as altruism and service, and transpersonal pathologies and therapies. (Walsh & Vaughn, 1993, p. 5)

Palmer and Braud (2002), faculty members at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, CA, identify over 100 transpersonal-type experiences classified into five major categories: (a) mystical/unitive, (b) encounter-type, (c) psychic/paranormal, (d) unusual death-related, and (e) exceptional normal. Even though transpersonal psychologists may not all agree on what exactly constitutes transpersonal experiences and phenomena, I would identify all of these exceptional human experiences as defining the scope of transpersonal psychology today.

### ***Transcendence and the Nature of Creativity***

It is one thing to be theoretically convinced that transpersonal phenomena exist; it is quite another thing to find oneself experiencing such phenomena first-hand. As someone once said, “Reality is above all practical,” and so when we *expand* our established ideas about the nature of the psyche and the nature of reality, we are likely to find ourselves having experiences that support them. Such experiences may either delight and excite us or disorient and frighten us, depending upon whether our new perceptions agree or disagree with our established worldview. Though we may be theoretically fascinated by concepts that hint at the multidimensionality of

our being, we are just as likely to be scandalized by evidence that supports such a possibility. We are apt to interpret such evidence in terms of the conventional beliefs with which we are already familiar in order to make such experiences more acceptable. Knowledge of transpersonal concepts and experience with transpersonal phenomena by itself, therefore, does not work magic. To effectively transform ordinary life, it must be utilized (Mahoney, 1991). A lifetime of habit and conditioning is rarely overcome in one fell swoop. If one's curiosity and creative abilities are flexible enough so that learning can take place, however, and if these experiences are attended to fully and reflectively worked with, then they *can* help bring about extensive and profound transformative changes in awareness, worldview, and sense of meaning in life in the experiencer (Leonard & Murphy, 1995; Miller & C' de Baca, 2001).

***The transpersonal nature of animals.*** The insights received during a *spatial* extension of consciousness, for instance, often brings with it a sympathy with life that may have earlier been lacking, a feeling of intimate connectedness with all beings, and a compassionate regard toward all forms of life, especially for animals. Individuals may realize, perhaps for the very first time, that our humanness did not emerge by refusing our animal heritage, but upon an extension of what that heritage is. They may understand that it is not a matter of rising above our animal nature to truly appreciate human spirituality, but of evolving from a fuller understanding of that animal nature. They may become aware that we are not separated from animals and the rest of existence by virtue of possessing an eternal, inner consciousness; but rather, such a consciousness is within all life, whatever its form or perceived status in our eyes, a consciousness that is as valid and legitimate as our own, "an individualized segment of the universe, a beloved individual, formed with infinite care and love, uniquely gifted with a life like no other" (Butts, 1997, p. 148).

***The nature of creativity.*** Although not well understood by mainstream psychology, surveys indicate that transpersonal phenomena are prevalent and widely distributed in the general population today (Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000). As someone once said, "There is nothing abnormal in the world – there is only the lack of understanding the normal." While transpersonal phenomena may all sound quite esoteric, they are highly practical experiences and behaviors. In certain terms, we are dealing with the very nature of creativity itself, as Maslow himself correctly understood. We are dealing with creativity both as an *expansion* of normal capacity (in the sense of enhancement, opening up, or improving upon existing capabilities) and as the

*surpassing* of normal capacity (in the sense of exceeding, rising above, or going beyond existing capabilities) (Gowan, 1980; Maslow, 1971). Provocative demonstrations of the nature of creativity though they may be, transpersonal experiences and phenomena are understood to be natural kinds of phenomena of human life that can, just like other events of nature, be studied by the scientific method (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

### **What Are the Historical Origins of Transpersonal Psychology?**

When addressing the question: “What are the origins of transpersonal psychology?” two approaches can be taken: a personalistic approach and a naturalistic approach (Schultz & Schultz, 2004, chap. 1). The personalistic “person-makes-the-times” approach assumes that the ideas and actions of specific individuals create the impetus for historical events. The naturalistic “times-make-the-person” approach assumes that it is the *Zeitgeist* or nature of the times that creates the opportunities for individuals to influence the events of history. Let us briefly look at the history of transpersonal psychology from both of these perspectives.

#### ***The Personalistic Approach***

***Gustav Theodore Fechner (1801-1887).*** If we take a personalistic approach to the history of transpersonal psychology, an argument can be made that the roots of modern psychology itself lie in a spiritual tradition that is thoroughly transpersonal in character. Not surprisingly, most textbooks about the history of modern psychology fail to report that Gustav Theodor Fechner - whose 1860 book *Elements of Psychophysics* marks the beginning of experimental psychology – maintained in many of his writings that the whole world is spiritual in nature, with physical reality being a material manifestation of the primary spiritual one, and that consciousness an essential constituent of all that exists (Kelly, 2002). Fechner even authored a book in 1835, titled *The Little Book of Life After Death*, that gave an explicit defense of the idea of life after death. In fact, according to Saul Rosenzweig’s 1987 article published in the *American Psychologist*, “Fechner developed his psychophysical science [of psychophysics] for the purpose of providing a scientific foundation for his belief in the survival of the human spirit or soul” (Rosenzweig, 1987, p. 788). It appears, then, that modern experimental psychology, in its very origins, was thoroughly transpersonal in nature.

***William James (1842-1910).*** Many transpersonal psychologists consider William James the father of modern transpersonal psychology. Historian Eugene Taylor, in an article appearing

in the *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology*, lists some of the many contributions that William James made to the development of transpersonal psychology.

[William James] was the first to use the term *transpersonal* in an English-language context, and the first to articulate a scientific study of consciousness within the framework of evolutionary biology. He experimented with psychoactive substances to observe their effects on his own consciousness, and was a pioneer in founding the field that is now called parapsychology. He helped to cultivate modern interest in dissociated states, multiple personality, and theories of the subconscious. He explored the field of comparative religion, and was probably the first American psychologist to establish relationships with or to influence a number of Asian meditation teachers. He also pioneered in writing about the psychology of mystical experience. (Taylor, 1996a, p. 21)

**Frederick William Henry Myers (1843-1901).** F. W. H. Myers, like Fechner and James before him, attempted to address those elements of the soul that religion refused to examine and that mainstream psychology denied to exist. A classical scholar by training and a founder of the great Society for Psychical Research in Britain, Myers was an early pioneer of transpersonal psychology who developed a conception of conscious life beneath the ordinary threshold of normal waking consciousness (Myers, 1961). Myers's conception of "subliminal consciousness" became the basis for some of William James's contribution to the experimental psychology of the subconscious (Myers, 1976). "Myers's formulations were...central to the development of James's psychology and philosophy in the 1890s, and they form the epistemological core of James's scientific activities in abnormal psychology and psychical research" (Taylor, 1996b, p. 79).

Myers began with the hypothesis that we possessed an inner subliminal Self of extraordinary creativity, organization, and meaning – psychology's nearest corollary to the soul. Distinct, though not separate, from the outer ego of the personality this inner, subliminal self forms our larger identity, orders the intricate involuntary systems of the body, and makes available superior inner knowledge in dreams and states of creative inspiration. Myers collected a wealth of supporting material for his theory, numerous and relevant facts concerning latent knowledge, skills, and abilities within the human personality that could suddenly awaken, and emerge into normal waking consciousness as a "subliminal uprush" of ideas, impulses, or



communications matured below the threshold, transforming the individual's life (Myers, 1961, 1976).

Myers's theories concerning the subliminal self, after making early inroad, however, vanished from the mainstream of academic and philosophic life. At the beginning of the twentieth century, psychology was at a crossroads. It could have followed one of two paths that were basically in direct opposition to one another. One was the path of F. W. H. Myers. The other was the path of Sigmund Freud. Most unfortunately psychology followed Freud. The reason was that Freud's concept of the self was "the only kind of a self that could logically survive the theories of Darwin as popularly understood, the end result of an organism that survived by triumphing over other life forms in an endless battle for life... Evolution's dogmas became Freudianism's justification" (Roberts, 1978, pp. 65-66). When Freudian psychology merged with Darwinian ideology, Myers's subliminal self became replaced with Freud's id, as the concept of the soul slipped away and disappeared, only to be recast in terms of the mechanical reactions of instinctive impulses that were stamped upon the psyche in its infancy. Myers's subliminal consciousness became a kind of psychological chamber of horrors that required only the most expert of guides (the psychoanalyst) to navigate its hall of distorted mirrors, lest the unwary pilgrim be swallowed up in the subjective recesses of one's own primitive, savage, and infantile impulses. In all of this, contemplation of the soul had little place for Darwinian-Freudian man could have no soul, you see. In an age that gave us both Freud and Myers, psychology followed Freud, taking science and medicine with it.

**Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961).** If William James is the father of transpersonal psychology, then Carl Gustav Jung is its godfather. According to transpersonal psychiatrist Bruce Scotton (1996) "Jung's work in the transpersonal realm prefigured much of what is current in the field" (p. 39). Some of Carl Jung's important contributions to the development of modern transpersonal psychology include (a) his notion of the spiritual reality of the psyche and his criticisms of the materialistic bias of modern experimental psychology, (b) his concept of a *collective* or *transpersonal unconscious* to which we each contribute and from which we all draw, (c) his open espousal of the cause of parapsychological research, (d) his elucidation of the role of symbols and archetypes in psychological life and the shadow side of the human psyche, and (e) his development of effective techniques for investigating the spiritual life of the mind,

notably the method of Active Imagination, the method of Dream Amplification, and the Dream Series method.

**Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974).** Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli - founder of the theory of “Psychosynthesis”- incorporated the idea of soul explicitly into his theory of the human personality and transpersonal development (Assagioli, 1991, 1992, 1993). He pioneered a religiously neutral, psychologically oriented, and experientially based approach to the subliminal realms of human consciousness that assumed that each human being is a soul as well as a personality (Firman & Gila, 2002; Hardy, 1987). According to psychiatrist John Battista (1996a), Whereas Maslow explored fundamental issues in transpersonal psychology, Roberto Assagioli pioneered the practical application of these concepts in psychotherapy. Assagioli proposed a transpersonal view of personality development and discussed psychotherapy in terms of the synthesis of personality at both the personal and spiritual levels. He dealt with the issue of spiritual crises and spiritual emergencies and introduced many active therapeutic techniques for the development of a transcendent center of personality. (p. 52)

### ***The Naturalistic Approach***

We get an entirely different picture of the nature of transpersonal psychology when we take a naturalistic approach to its history. Someone once said, “Conventional psychology is at least 150 years old, whereas transpersonal is 45,000 years old”. While this is true depending upon what aspects of transpersonal psychology are emphasized, it is also true that transpersonal psychology in its modern incarnation is a uniquely American phenomenon.

***American’s visionary folk psychology tradition.*** Drawing upon the account presented in Eugene Taylor’s 1999 book, *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America*, the roots of modern transpersonal psychology can be traced back to (a) 1720 and the Puritans and the religious revivals of the Quakers and the Shakers, (b) the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg and the New England transcendentalist movement and the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and environmentalist John Muir that re-affirmed the spiritual nature of the mind and the idea that God speaks to humanity through nature, (c) the Utopian communities of the Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists, with their recognition of the importance of community, service, and social justice in evolving a rich inward spiritual life in contemporary America, and (d) Spiritualism and the “New Thought” and Christian Science movements in the mid-to-late

19th century that gave rise to an entire era of mental healing, alternative medicine, and so-called “new age” religious movements that remain an integral part of American folk culture today (Taylor, 1999).

*Americanization of Eastern systems of thought.* Transpersonal psychology’s interest in developing theories that integrate Asian ideas with Western concepts can be traced directly to the Americanization of Eastern systems of thought that began at the end of the 19th century and continued through the 1960s with the writings of Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley, P.D. Ouspensky, D.T. Suzuki, Tenzin Gatsso (14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama), Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Thich Nhat Hahn, Chogyam Trungpa, and Ram Dass (Richard Alpert). The unprecedented cross-cultural exchange of ideas between East and West gave rise to a spiritualized version of the unconscious that has proved productive for understanding the functions and structures of consciousness as well as providing direction for contemporary transpersonal psychologies to come.

*The Counterculture movement.* The social and political upheavals of the 1960’s also drew psychology into the social movement that was popularly referred to as the “Counterculture,” that launched the Cultural Revolution in consciousness and transformed Humanistic psychology. The infusion of ideas from Eastern contemplative traditions, the institutionalization of humanistic thought in academic psychology, and the growing interest in altered states of consciousness that was triggered by the widespread use of psychedelics, paved the way for the birth of the transpersonal psychology movement in California in the late 1960s. According to historian Eugene Taylor (1999), “in the 1970’s, humanistic psychology graduated to transpersonal psychology” (p. 280) as a result of several factors. One factor was the widening interest among humanistically-oriented psychologists into matters of ultimate meaning and purpose, and into phenomena that traditionally occupied only the interests of psychologists of religion. A second factor was the increasing interdisciplinary and holistic character of explorations into mind and consciousness that were taking place, especially in cognitive science. There was also the growing recognition that mainstream orthodox Western psychology had to overcome its highly limited concepts about the nature of the self if it is to achieve its greatest fulfillment as a discipline and true “logos of the human psyche” (Allport, 1969, p. 98).

***The birth of modern transpersonal psychology.*** The birth of contemporary transpersonal psychology can be traced to Abraham Maslow and his studies of metamotivation, peak-experiences, and self-actualization which led him to propose a model of human personality “beyond self-actualization” that could form the basis of a new psychology which was, in Maslow’s (1968) words, “trans-personal, transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interests, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like” (pp. iii-iv). Abraham Maslow, of course, did not found transpersonal psychology alone. He had a great deal of help from other humanistic psychologists including Menard Boss, J.F. Bugental, Charlotte Buhler, James Fadiman, Viktor Frankl, Stanislav Grof, Sidney Jouard, Arthur Koestler, Clark Moustakos, Michael Murphy, Walter Pankhe, Ira Proffoff, Miles Vich, and Alan Watts - all of whom served on the Board of Editors of the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* in 1969. Of particular help was Maslow’s long-time friend Anthony (Tony) Sutich, a remarkable individual who played a pioneering role in founding both humanistic and transpersonal psychology (Fadiman, 1999).

***After the founding.*** With Abraham Maslow’s death in June 1970 and Anthony Sutich’s passing in 1976, the transpersonal movement passed into the care of numerous individuals - including Jeanne Achterberg, Seymour Boorstein, William Braud, Brandt Cortright, Duane Elgin, Robert Frager, Jorge Ferrer, Daniel Goleman, Christian Grof, Jean Houston, Jack Kornfield, Stanley Krippner, Rupert Sheldrake, Huston Smith, Richard Tarnas, Charles Tart, Ronald Valle, Frances Vaughn, Roger Walsh, Michael Washburn, John Welwood, and Ken Wilber among others - who would help transpersonal psychology become the independent, evolving, and self-developing orientation that Abraham Maslow and Anthony Sutich envisioned it to be.

After the founding, professional associations were established to facilitate productive interaction among people involved in transpersonal therapy and scientific research, including the Association for Transpersonal Psychology ([www.atpweb.org](http://www.atpweb.org)) founded in 1971, the Institute of Noetic Sciences ([www.noetic.org](http://www.noetic.org)) founded in 1973, the European Transpersonal Psychology Association ([www.europsy.org/etpa](http://www.europsy.org/etpa)) founded in 1999, the Mind & Life Institute founded in 1987 ([www.mindandlife.org](http://www.mindandlife.org)), and the Society for Scientific Exploration ([www.scientificexploration.org](http://www.scientificexploration.org)) founded in 1982. Peer-reviewed journals were started, providing a forum for the communication of theoretical and empirical research, including the

*Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* ([www.atpweb.org](http://www.atpweb.org)) established in 1968 by the same Tony Sutich who founded the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Shift: At the Frontiers of Consciousness* (formerly *Noetic Science Review*) in 1973 ([www.noetic.org](http://www.noetic.org)), the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* ([www.panigada.hypermart.net](http://www.panigada.hypermart.net)) in 1981, *Revision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation* ([www.heldref.org/html/body\\_rev.html](http://www.heldref.org/html/body_rev.html)), and the *Journal for Scientific Exploration* ([www.jse.com](http://www.jse.com)) in 1987. Scholarly books about transpersonal psychology were published, including the series in *Transpersonal and Humanistic Psychology* published by the State University of New York Press. Book anthologies that serve as excellent introductions to transpersonal psychology include Tart's (1975/1992) *Transpersonal Psychologies*, Walsh and Shapiro's (1983) *Beyond Health and Normality*, Walsh and Vaughn's (1993) *Paths Beyond Ego*, Boorstein's (1996) *Transpersonal Psychotherapy*, and Scotton, Chinen, and Battista's (1996) *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology*.

Colleges and universities across the United States instituted academic courses and degree-granting programs in the field of transpersonal studies, including the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology ([www.itp.edu](http://www.itp.edu)), John F. Kennedy University ([www.jfku.edu](http://www.jfku.edu)), Saybrook Graduate Institute ([www.saybrook.edu](http://www.saybrook.edu)), California Institute of Integral Psychology ([www.ciis.edu](http://www.ciis.edu)), and Naropa Buddhist University ([www.naropa.edu](http://www.naropa.edu)). International schools and programs in transpersonal studies were developed in other countries including Belgium, Brazil, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Scotland, Spain, and Switzerland. The Association for Transpersonal Psychology at its website ([www.atpweb.org/public](http://www.atpweb.org/public)) identifies over 60 degree-granting institutions offering graduate and undergraduate courses in transpersonal psychology throughout the United States.

With such a distinguished history and extraordinary development as a full-fledged scientific, professional, and academic discipline, is it not now time for transpersonal psychology to find its niche within the behavioral and social sciences, establish its place within the framework of official psychology, and have adequate representation within mainstream college and university curricula?

## **How Do Transpersonal Psychologists View Experience and Behavior?**

### ***Contemporary Perspectives in Transpersonal Psychology***

***The integral approach.*** The integral perspective (or what Ken Wilber calls the 1-2-3 of consciousness studies) arguably represents one of the field's most important and original contribution to the study of psychology (Wilber 2000a, 2000b). An integral approach provides a comprehensive, interrelated, multi-layered, holistic account that allows 1st-person ("I") subjective verbal reports of phenomenological experience, 2nd- person ("We") intersubjective psychoanalytic, cognitive, and social-cultural interpretations that give the facts of experience their shared meaning, and 3rd-person ("It") objective descriptions of corresponding biological mechanisms, environmental events, and overt behaviors that give the interior subjective experience and intersubjective meanings their physical expression and material form *without reducing one into the other* (or committing what philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1949) called a "category mistake"). All transpersonal experiences and transformative capacities are inextricably embedded within their phenomenological, psychoanalytic, cognitive, social-cultural, biological, and environmental correlates and cannot be easily understood without those correlates. The integral perspective focuses on the integration of all these aspects of human life into a comprehensive, logically-coherent, multi-dimensional view of transpersonal experience and behavior.

***Key ideas that define a transpersonal orientation.*** What differentiates transpersonal psychology from other schools of thought that are committed to other goals and subject matter is its affirmation of four key ideas that were first articulated in the 1969 *Articles of Association for Transpersonal Psychology* (Sutich, 1972).

1. Impulses toward an ultimate state are continuous in every person.
2. Full awareness of these impulses is not necessarily present at any given time.
3. The realization of an ultimate state is essentially dependent on direct practice and on conditions suitable to the individual concerned.
4. Every individual has the right to choose his [or her] own path.

Beyond these four minimal assumptions, transpersonalists are free to accept any of a number of theory-laden philosophic assumptions about the nature of the psyche and the nature of physical reality. Some transpersonal psychologists, for instance, affirm what is called the "Perennial

Philosophy,” a phrase coined by the philosopher Leibniz (Huxley, 1970; Valle, 1989; Vaughn, 1982; Wilber, 1977, 1994).

Philosophia perennis... the *metaphysic* that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the *psychology* that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the *ethic* that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being. (Huxley, 1945/1970, p. vii)

It is called “perennial” because it shows up across many religious traditions from ancient to modern times, and is believed to be a statement of the universal, common, esoteric core of the world’s major wisdom traditions which unites the apparent diversity of all its exoteric religious forms.

Not all transpersonal psychologists believe that transpersonal theory needs the perennial philosophy as its foundational metaphysical framework, however (e.g., Ferrer, 2002). Some prefer Whiteheadian process philosophy as the framework for understanding transpersonal phenomena (de Quincey, 2002; Griffin, 1988, 1997). Others, such as psychiatrist Stanislav Grof prefer to “leave the field wide open for surprises and new discoveries” (Grof, 1998, p. 114). Grof, a co-founder of transpersonal psychology, states: “What truly defines a transpersonal orientation is a model of the human psyche that recognizes the importance of the spiritual or cosmic dimensions and the potential for consciousness evolution” (Grof, 1985, p. 197).

***The Western Creed.*** A transpersonal orientation can be identified not only by what it includes, but also by what it excludes. The materialistic and mechanistic worldview that underlies much of mainstream orthodox Western psychology - a viewpoint that transpersonal psychologist Charles T. Tart (1992a, 1997a) characterizes as “The Western Creed”- is a set of beliefs that have practical consequences on the human spirit and that block progress in understanding the spiritual side of ourselves. According to the Western Creed,

I BELIEVE...in the material universe...as the only and ultimate reality...a universe controlled by fixed physical laws...and blind chance.

I AFFIRM... that the universe has no creator... no objective purpose... and no objective meaning or destiny.

I MAINTAIN...that all ideas about God or gods...enlightened beings...prophets and saviors...or other nonphysical beings or forces...are superstitions and delusions...Life

and consciousness are totally identical to physical processes...and arose from chance interactions of blind physical forces...Like the rest of life...*my* life... and *my* consciousness...have no objective purpose...meaning...or destiny.

I MAINTAIN...that the death of the body ...is the death of the mind...There is no afterlife...and all hope of such is nonsense. (Tart, 1997a, pp. 41-42)

Operating for the most part outside of conscious awareness, these conditioned psychologically invisible beliefs program our individual and collective experience to such an extent that they take on the appearance of unquestionable *facts of experience* rather than *beliefs about experience*.

Proponents of the Western Creed assert that while transpersonal psychology may be theoretically fascinating and creatively valid, it deals essentially with “non-information” and does not contain any statements about any kind of scientifically valid, hard-bed reality (Ellis & Yeager, 1989).

Why bother wasting time investigating the reality of a fiction?

***The Western Creed loves skepticism except when skepticism is applied to the Western Creed.*** I have doubts, however, about the validity of this worldview for understanding the true nature of the psyche and the nature of reality. If the Western Creed is true, then what a cosmic joke it is that the atomic and chemical composition of my own brain somehow evolved to be intelligent enough to understand the irony of its own meaninglessness. How could such a vital consciousness as my own even suppose itself to be the end product of the chance meeting five billion years ago of inert elements that were themselves lifeless, but somehow managed to randomly combine and mindlessly evolve in such a way that our species attained science and technology, literature and philosophy, medicine and space travel? Science almost makes me believe in magic!

Despite the air of authority with which the Western Creed confidently asserts its claim that mind is reducible to brain and that mind is brain and nothing more, I find no laboratory evidence whatsoever in the whole field of neuroscience that axons or dendrites or neurotransmitters are capable of producing the phenomenological experience that we call “conscious awareness.” I find it ironic that the basis of the scientific method and the framework behind all our organized structures of psychological science rests upon a subjective reality that is not considered valid by the very psychological sciences that were formed through its auspices. The design of nature and well-ordered genetic activity that sustains physical life, the precision with which we grow spontaneously from a fetus to an adult without a whit of conscious thought, the creative drama of



our dreams, the heroic themes and ideals that pervade human life, and a brain that could conceive of purpose, meaning, and order - all give evidence, in my view, of a greater purpose, meaning, and order in which we have our being.

### **How is Transpersonal Research Conducted?**

In addressing our fourth and final topic, “How is transpersonal research conducted? I would refer the interested reader to William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson’s 1998 book, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience*.

Transpersonal experiences and behaviors are natural kinds of phenomena of human life which can, just like other events of nature, be studied by the scientific method and other forms of human inquiry (see Figure 1). As St. Augustine once said, “Miracles do not happen in contradiction to nature, but only in contradiction to that which is known to us of nature.”

***Importance of non-experimental evidence.*** Physicist Werner Heisenberg reminds us: “What we see is not nature, but nature exposed to our method of questioning” which is why new methods of human inquiry better suit to the *idiographic and personal nature* of transpersonal experiences are used - methods that are as creative and expansive as the subjective and intersubjective phenomena we wish to investigate. Non-experimental evidence has always been and remains an extremely valuable source of information concerning the nature and limits, and even the reality of human experience and behavior, and is not to be maligned or dispensed with in favor of some ideal notion of what contrived animal experiments or artificial laboratory demonstrations are believed to provide (e.g., Stanovich, 2004). Most laboratory experiments are conducted in order to study under more controlled conditions the kinds of events that initially occur outside the lab in the first place, which is why William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experiences* is such a rich source of insight and understanding into dramatic forms of religious behavior and attitudes. If everything we knew about human experience and behavior were limited to the findings of laboratory demonstration, then we would have a very impoverished human psychology indeed.

***Is transpersonal psychology a science?*** Perhaps the single greatest issue facing transpersonal psychology is its relation to empirical science (Friedman, 2002; Wilber, 1990). The original intent of Abraham Maslow was that transpersonal experiences and behaviors be understood “in a new, naturalistic, empirical, and non-churchly sense” (Maslow, 1968, p. iv). I would argue that transpersonal psychology is a science for three reasons: (a) It seeks knowledge

through material, efficient, formal, and final causes (*scientia* in the Aristotelian sense), (b) it is empirical in that it bases its conclusion on data obtained by “direct experience” (*empiricus*) from the 1<sup>st</sup> person, 2<sup>nd</sup> person, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person points of view, and (c) it applies the steps of the scientific method in its investigations of transpersonal experience and behaviors (i.e., problem identification; literature review; hypothesis construction; operational definition; research design; methodologies for the observation, control, manipulation, or measurement of variables; data analysis; public communication and evaluation of results) (see Figure 2).

***Call for new epistemological and metaphysical foundations of psychological science.***

Transpersonal psychiatrist Stanislav Grof asserts that the main obstacle to the study of spiritual or transpersonal experiences is not the scientific method, but traditional psychology’s commitment to a materialistic and mechanistic philosophy of nature, and a lack of understanding of authentic mysticism based on spiritual experiences.

There is nothing unscientific about unbiased and rigorous study of transpersonal phenomena and of the challenges they present for materialistic understanding of the world (Grof, 2000, p. 213)... The great mystical traditions have amassed extensive knowledge about human consciousness and about the spiritual realms in a way that is similar to the method that scientists use in acquiring knowledge about the material world. It involved methodology for inducing transpersonal experiences, systematic collection of data, and intersubjective validation (Grof, 2001, p. 45)... In actuality, there exists no scientific “proof” that the spiritual dimension does not exist. The refutation of its existence is essentially a metaphysical assumption of Western science, based on an incorrect application of an outdated paradigm. (Grof, 2000, p. 217)

The current materialistic and mechanistic assumptions of conventional psychological science, in other words, constitute an epistemological net that captures metaphysical fish of only a certain size as alluded to in the following parable attributed to physicist Sir Arthur Eddington.

In a seaside village, a fisherman with a rather scientific bent proposed as a law of the sea that all fish are longer than one inch. But he failed to realize that the nets used in the village were all of a one-inch mesh. Are we filtering physical reality? Can we catch consciousness with the nets we are using? (quoted in Friedman, 1994, p. 27)

Transpersonal writer and mystic Seth-Jane Roberts (1981a) develops the metaphor further when she says,

Science must change, as it discovers its net of evidence is equipped only to catch certain kinds of fish, and that it is constructed of webs of assumptions that can only hold certain varieties of reality, while others escape its net entirely. (p. 137)

Transpersonal psychology encourages us to take a more generous view of the nature of reality as a way of making sense of the broadest spectrum of human experience and behavior. What transpersonal psychology has discovered, and what ancient mystical traditions have disclosed is that there are “unexplored creative capacities, depths of psyche, states of consciousness, and stages of development undreamed of by most people” (Walsh & Vaughn, 1993a, p. 1).

The fact is that while you hold limited concepts of your own reality, then you cannot practically take advantage of many abilities that are your own; and while you have a limited concept of the soul, then to some extent you cut yourself off from the source of your own being and creativity. (Roberts, 1972, p. 92)

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, transpersonal psychology is not merely another academic discipline, but a point of view, “a perspective that can be applied to a wide variety of areas, not only in psychology but also in anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines involving human behavior” (Frager, 1989, p. 289). The transpersonal vision is a way of thinking and living that is manifested not only in transpersonal experiences and behaviors, but also in almost all areas of human thinking, feeling, and action (Ferrer, 2002). According to psychiatrist Roger Walsh:

Our task, then, is to realize the transpersonal vision for ourselves through practicing a transpersonal discipline; to test and refine this vision through study, reflection and critical thinking; to embody and express it in our lives; to share and communicate it where we can; to use it to help the healing of our world; and to let it use us as willing servants for the awakening and welfare of all. (Walsh, 1993, p. 136)

The great thing about science is that questions are so much more important than the answers. The answers are not all in; all the questions have not yet been asked – questions that can lead us to seek a greater framework than conventional psychological science currently operates from. I believe with William James that “there is no source of deception in the investigation of nature which can compare with the fixed belief that certain kinds of phenomena are *impossible*” (cited in McDermott, 1967, p. 787) (see Figure 3). As William James (1936) put

the matter when he concluded his groundbreaking account of the varieties of religious experiences:

The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also; and that although in the main their experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher energies filter in (p. 509)... No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question – for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness... At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts of reality. (p. 379)



