

**Editors Note:** Mark Waldman conducted this interview several years ago. We think the dialogue about transpersonal psychology is still viable. At the end of the article you will find a link to the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and more ideas about the definition and concepts of this new force in psychology.

**Understanding Transpersonal Psychology:  
An Examination of Definitions, Descriptions, and Concepts**

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**With Commentaries from**

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*This discussion explores selected definitions, descriptions, and concepts that are relevant to the understanding of transpersonal psychology and its literature. Issues that are addressed include: Maslow's hierarchy of values; psychological definitions of spirituality; the influence of Jung, Frankl, and Assagioli upon transpersonal thinking; defining health, consciousness, spirituality, transcendence, self, and ego within various transpersonal contexts; criticisms of transpersonal concepts and definitions; and examining the relationship between transpersonal psychology and contemporary religious studies.*

**Waldman:** In 1992, the Association for Transpersonal Psychology described transpersonal psychology as follows:

Today, a more comprehensive view of human nature is developing. It recognizes our personal uniqueness, as well as a *transpersonal* dimension -- something which is beyond our individual egos, and yet still a part of us. This perspective offers an expanded view of human capabilities, and combines a probing assessment of personality with an affirming vision of the full range of human psychological and spiritual development. Based on observations and practices from many cultures, the transpersonal perspective is informed by modern psychology, the humanities and human sciences, as well as contemporary spiritual disciplines and the wisdom traditions.

However, various authors within the field have proposed alternative definitions and descriptions which reflect the specific nuances and backgrounds of the individual researcher. Other transpersonal institutes and associations have also created definitions which, in part, embrace the specific philosophical orientations of their organizations. In addition, the term "transpersonal" has taken on numerous meanings and contexts within other disciplinary fields,

particularly in philosophy and religious studies. It has also been applied to several new fields of study, including transpersonal medicine (Achterberg, 1992) transpersonal anthropology (Kalweit, 1992; Laughlin, McManus, & Shearer, 1993), and transpersonal ecology (Fox, 1990). Yet, as recent debates in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (Fall, 1989) have demonstrated, confusion and misunderstanding continues to surround transpersonal theories and perspectives.

To date, there is no single definition of transpersonal psychology that is generally agreed upon. In a recent review and analysis of 40 selected definitions, Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) proposed what they called "a precise and contemporary definition of transpersonal psychology" based upon their identification of the most frequently found concepts and themes:

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.

However, several objections can be raised to such a generalized definition. First, their selection from over 200 citations was rather arbitrary, and in my opinion, excluded a number of important definitions and descriptions found within the literature and in related fields of study. Second, by emphasizing only the most frequently used terms and themes (their statistical analysis yielded five: "states of consciousness," "highest or ultimate potential," "beyond ego or personal self," "transcendence," and "spiritual") subtle contextual distinctions are lost. As a result, other significant concepts were excluded that various authors and scholars deem essential to the understanding of transpersonal psychology. Examples include the study of human values, cross-cultural studies of religious and spiritual disciplines, interdisciplinary studies of personality, hierarchical and non-hierarchical models of transpersonal experience, alternative models and theories concerning the nature of human consciousness, transpersonal psychology's emphasis upon empirical research, the relationship of transpersonal psychology to perennial philosophy or new paradigms in science, transpersonal models of health and its applications to healing and therapy, social and societal implications of transpersonal theory, and so on. Finally, such a brief, reductionistic definition offers no contextual framework in which to understand such complex issues as consciousness, spirituality, transcendence, or highest potential.

Serious misrepresentations of transpersonal psychology have often appeared in various publications, and have even occasionally found their way into academic scholarship, as demonstrated by the following description which recently appeared in an analysis of the New Age movement:

Mueller notes that the roots of transpersonal psychology include hypnosis and clairvoyance, spiritualism and mediumship, psychical research and the survival issue, parapsychology and ESP, and such diverse "esoteric" schools as Anthroposophy, Rosicrucians, and an interest in past lives. (Alexander, 1992, p. 46)

The author made use of numerous second-hand, unpublished, and unsubstantiated references concerning transpersonal psychology (the roots of transpersonal psychology are not to be found

in any of Mueller's references) in order to tie its development with the New Thought movement of the nineteenth century and the current perspectives of the New Age movement. This not only distorts one's understanding of transpersonal psychology and its psychological and spiritual roots, but it adds to the seemingly endless misrepresentations found throughout current New Age thinking.

**Tart:** Unfortunately, transpersonal knowledge has sometimes been mixed in with a lot of nonsense and immature fantasy, and even psychopathology, as demonstrated by some of the excesses of the New Age movement. The vague, undisciplined use of the term "transpersonal" can cover any sort of experience in which a person feels different from their normal self. Some of these are not what was clearly intended in the original use of the term. For example, if your ordinary state of consciousness is full of suffering, the fuzziness and dullness induced by a narcotic might be called transpersonal by some and be a "high," relatively speaking, but this is probably a narrowing and restriction of full human possibilities, not the expansion to something much greater than the ordinary self that is properly meant by the term. There is no way to stop people from using terms sloppily, of course, but as transpersonal scholars we can be careful in our usage, perhaps always defining how we are using the term in our writings and works.

Another problem with most definitions proposed so far is that they fail to address the vital issue of whether transpersonal psychology is the study of psychopathology, of illusions and hallucinations (even if relatively benign), or if it is the study of *realities* beyond our ordinary states of reality.

For example, I can program my computer to occasionally print out the statement: "Ah! I have just transcended my normal programmed self and experienced the highest state of electro-ecstasy, being one with the great Data Flow in the Sky and finding my ultimate meaning." We would regard this statement as inherently false, a mere quirk of programming, not something that is actually possible for a computer.

A common and comparable type of report in transpersonal psychology might read: "Ah! I have just transcended my normal, biologically and socially limited false self and had the highest mystical experience of becoming one with the inherent intelligence and love of the Cosmos, an experience of ultimate meaning." Our dominant scientific world view, which is materialistic, would regard this statement as just as nonsensical as the computer's. From the materialist's point of view, transpersonal psychology becomes the study of escapist illusions which distort meaning and feeling and which serve to avoid the recognition of our biological limits and inescapable death.

My own research suggests that the general label "transpersonal" may indeed include the study of such illusions, but -- and this is a vital point -- there is also excellent scientific evidence from parapsychology to indicate that mind can sometimes transcend the limits of matter. This evidence, backed by rigorous laboratory experience and spontaneous psi experiences, suggests that transpersonal psychology can be based upon the *reality* that there is something in people capable of genuinely transcending biological and physical limits.

It may be politically useful to occasionally blur the question of what we are studying, but ultimately we must face the issue of defining what our field is about.

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Values**

**Waldman:** Let us begin by examining some of the fundamental concepts and principles that Maslow (1969) articulated when he first presented his ideas concerning the emerging discipline of transpersonal psychology. The following is excerpted from his 1967 San Francisco lecture that appeared in the first issue of *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*:

Perhaps human nature has been sold short in that the higher possibilities of man have not been seen as biological. The need for dignity, for example, can be seen as a fundamental human right in the same sense that it is a human right to have enough calcium or enough vitamins to be healthy. If these needs are not fulfilled, pathology will result.

If, however, these needs are fulfilled, a different picture emerges. There are people who do feel loved and who are able to love, who do feel safe and secure and who do feel respected and who do have self-respect. If you study these people and ask what motivates them, you find yourself in another realm. This realm is what I have to call transhumanistic [i.e., transpersonal], meaning that which motivates, gratifies, and activates the fortunate, developed, self-actualizing person. These people are motivated by something beyond the basic needs. The focal point, or the point of departure, into this transhumanistic realm comes when they answer the following kind of questions: "What are the moments which give you the greatest kick, the greatest satisfaction? What are the great moments? What are the moments of reward which make your work and your life worthwhile?"

The answers to those questions were in terms of ultimate verities. These are what Robert Hartman (1967) calls "the intrinsic values" -- truth, goodness, beauty, perfection, excellence, simplicity, elegance, and so on. What this amounts to is that this third [humanistic] psychology is giving rise to a fourth, "transhumanistic psychology" dealing with transcendent experiences and with transcendent values.

The fully developed (and very fortunate) human being, working under the best conditions tends to be motivated by values which transcend his *self*. They are not selfish anymore in the old sense of that term. Beauty is not within one's skin nor is justice or order. One can hardly class these desires as selfish in the sense that my desire for food might be. My satisfaction with achieving or allowing justice is not within my own skin; it does not lie along my arteries. It is equally outside and inside: therefore, it has transcended the geographical limitation of the self. Thus one begins to talk about transhumanistic [transpersonal] psychology.

The emphasis in Maslow's speech is three-fold. First, is the importance he places upon human values, which he considers to be partly intrinsic (to be discovered within us) and partly

self-created or chosen (Maslow, 1968). Second, is the role that transcendent experiences play in the processes of self-actualization. And third, is the notion that these values and experiences extend *beyond* the individual's self-centered interests. It was in this respect that he chose to use the word "transpersonal." Other researchers, such as Grof (1972, 1973), have often focused less upon transcendent *values* and more upon transcendent *experiences* in and of themselves.

**Lannert:** According to Maslow (1968), "The human being needs a framework of values, a philosophy of life, a religion or religion-surrogate to live by and understand by, in about the same sense he needs sunlight, calcium, or love." Values greatly impact every area of our lives, giving meaning and fullness to life. None of us is value free, nor is any psychology or psychotherapy. Values are priority choices for which mature and ethical adults assume responsibility, and they are inherent to the inner and outer realities of us all.

It used to be assumed that the consummate psychotherapist remained value free when working with a client, but it is now commonly known that psychiatry and psychology are neither value-free nor value neutral. Current research is now assessing the effects that values have upon mental health practitioners, professors, and educators (Derr, 1990; Elkins, 1990; Jenson and Bergin, 1988). As will be discussed later, values are an essential component to the definition of spirituality, a central theme throughout transpersonal research.

**Waldman:** Maslow (1971, p.269) saw values hierarchically, where some transcended others. For example, self acceptance and forgiveness transcends guilt, shame, and self embarrassment. Maslow wrote that transcendence "refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos" (p.269).

The concept of transcendence continues to be a prominent theme throughout transpersonal literature. Maslow (1971) described 35 different meanings of transcendence, including: identification with Being-Values, the experience of timelessness, a sense of loss of self-consciousness, a sense of otherness, perceiving the world as is, unselfish love, detached observance of self and other, becoming an autonomous self, an acceptance of one's own destiny, the sheer enjoyment of gratification, the recognition and appreciation of universal humanness, etc. His description of transcendent experiences included self-actualizing experiences, mystical fusion with another person or the cosmos, interpersonal synergy, the experience of illumination, experiencing unity consciousness, and so on.

In contrast, Wilber (1990a, p.104), a principle figure in the development of transpersonal theory, refers to transcendence as "essentially identical" to development and evolution. Transcendence, he articulates, is also the same as transformation. At each stage of one's psychological development, a higher order structure emerges, which transcends the earlier developmental structure by enveloping its operational frameworks within the newly emergent structure. Ultimately, he writes, the individual's separate self or ego can be transcended, bringing the person in contact with what the spiritual and mystical traditions call the absolute, the

universal, or the Divine.

Washburn (1988, p. 5), however, limited transcendence to the later transformational stages of personality, in particular, to the "transcendence of the major dualisms that plague the mental ego -- e.g., the dualisms of mind and body, thought and feeling, logic and creativity, civilization and instinct, and most basically, ego and Ground -- and the transformation of these dualisms into harmonious dualities, higher syntheses of opposites." In Washburn's view, transcendence is the equivalent of a spiritual awakening that thoroughly reorganizes the personality into a singular, integrated psychic whole. Washburn sees such individuals not as mystics or saints, but more in terms of Maslow's concept self-actualization. Such integrated people, says Washburn (p.233) "are all uniquely and authentically themselves" and represent "a developmental stage open to humanity at large."

### **Transpersonal Experiences and Consciousness Research**

**Waldman:** Within transpersonal research, much attention has been given to reports of extraordinary or exceptional experiences. Maslow (1970), in particular, was interested in *transcendent* experiences, equating them with "core-religious" experiences (defined in either theistic or nontheistic terms), peak experiences, mystical illuminations, ecstasies, and other experiences capable of bringing about positive changes in consciousness and awareness.

**Walsh:** For Maslow, our desire for transpersonal experiences was essential for full human development and was as biologically rooted in our human nature as our needs for shelter and food. Furthermore, he argued that the failure to recognize and fulfill these transpersonal desires - - metamotives, or Being needs, as he called them -- would result in psychological distress or "metapathology." Such metapathology is rarely recognized as such, but may underlie much of the cultural malaise so prevalent in Western society. For Maslow, honoring the transpersonal, religious, philosophical, and aesthetic dimensions of life was essential for the health and development of both individuals and cultures.

Transpersonal experiences --- which may be defined as experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, *psyche*, and cosmos --- can provide a sense of meaning and purpose, resolve existential quandaries, and inspire compassionate concern for humankind and the earth. Even a single transpersonal experience may change a person's life forever, whereas a lack of such experiences may contribute to individual, social and global pathology.

**Waldman:** Shortly before his death, Maslow (Krippner, 1972) made reference to what he called the *plateau experience*, a particular transcendent state that was distinguished from peak experiences in terms of its subtlety, constancy, and cognitive and volitional quality. These were serene experiences which embraced the preciousness and beauty of things, made life more poignant and vivid, and brought about a shift in personal values:

The important point that emerges from these plateau experiences is that they're essentially cognitive. As a matter of fact, almost by definition, they represent a witnessing of the world. The plateau experience is a witnessing of reality. It involves seeing the symbolic, or the mythic, the poetic, the transcendent, the miraculous, the unbelievable, all of which I think are part of the real world instead of existing only in the eyes of the beholder.

The plateau experience bears close resemblance to the subtle forms of transpersonal experience described by Fabry (1980), whose work is based upon the principles of Frankl's logotherapy:

For the logo therapists, *transpersonal* is used to describe any experience that has an effect on the person not explainable on the human level, especially not on a rational level [where] meaning and order become immediately apparent. In most cases the message is hidden in commonplace experiences; it may come up when we are watching a sunset, ocean waves, or a fire, when we are listening to music, watching a play, or reading a poem, or when we are in the process of an intense human relationship with a lover, a child, a guru. Suddenly and inexplicably, life, if only for a moment, makes sense. (p.86)

**Walsh:** A common characteristic of profound transpersonal experiences is that they may bring a penetrating insight into one's nature or identity. That nature is said to be not only transpersonal but transverbal or ineffable, beyond time, space, and limits, and largely beyond the power of words or thoughts to encompass.

Yet experiences come and go. Initial flashes of illumination, no matter how meaningful or profound, eventually fade. There is, then, yet another developmental task, which is to transform these transitory altered states into an enduring altered *trait*, to extend, for example, a peak experience into a plateau experience, or as Huston Smith so eloquently put it, to transform flashes of illumination into abiding light.

### **Transpersonal Models of Consciousness**

**Waldman:** Grof, one of the founders of the transpersonal movement, developed a very specific model describing the realms of transpersonal experience, drawn from his clinical work with LSD and Holotropic Breathwork, a specific breathing/bodywork/sound technique developed to evoke altered states without the use of drugs. Grof's (1992) cartography identifies three realms of psychic experience: the biographical (relating to childhood events, memories, and traumas,) the perinatal (relating to childbirth), and the transpersonal:

In the transpersonal realm, we experience an expansion or extension of our consciousness far beyond the usual boundaries of both our bodies and our egos, as well as beyond the physical limits of our everyday lives....transpersonal consciousness can include the entire spectrum of existence itself. (p.87)

Examples of transpersonal consciousness, according to Grof (1992), include embryonic or

fetal experiences, identification or merging with other people or species, experiencing the totality of life, experiencing planetary consciousness, dissolving the boundaries of time, accessing ancestral or past-life memories, accessing racial and collective experiences, experiencing archetypal identifications, encountering parapsychological phenomena, experiencing other-worldly or mythical realities, and encountering a wide variety of experiences that have been described in spiritual, mystical, or shamanic practices.

In substantiating his model of consciousness, Grof (1983, 1992) refers to various theoretical perspectives and arguments proposed by Einstein, Bohm, Bateson, Capra, Pribram, and Sheldrake. These, he suggests, may have far-reaching implications for our understanding of human consciousness and its application to contemporary psychology and psychotherapy. Wilber (1990a), however, has cautioned against premature assumptions and correlations:

The "new physics" is far from a grand consensus as to the nature of even subatomic reality. To hook transpersonal psychology/mysticism to the consensus of the new quantum physics is not possible, because there is no consensus. Those connections that have been drawn between physics and mysticism are of the pick and choose variety. The actual details of the various [quantum mechanics] interpretations are, as we have seen, largely mutually exclusive. Simply to take a detail from one interpretation, then another, a little bootstrap here, a little implicate order there, is, in the words of physicist Bernstein, "a travesty and a disservice" to the theories involved. (p.146)

**Walsh:** The study of consciousness and altered states is central to transpersonal psychology, yet there has been little discussion of what consciousness actually is. Although it has recently been given more serious attention, confusion continues regarding the nature, importance, and even existence of consciousness, let alone the best means to study it (Baruss, 1990). At one extreme, consciousness has been dismissed as fictitious, and at the other extreme, it has been lauded as the fundamental substrate of reality (idealism). It has also been regarded as one aspect of a more basic reality that is neither mental nor physical but exhibits qualities of both, and has been seen as a mere epiphenomenon of matter (materialism). It has been looked down on as a disease of life (Nietzsche), and looked up to as infinite being-bliss (Vedanta).

Until recently, nonordinary states of consciousness were regarded as pathological, in part because most Western researchers had little direct experience of the altered states they were investigating. By comparison, many Eastern psychologies mapped out multiple states of consciousness and provided sophisticated techniques for inducing them. Goleman (1974), for example, concluded that the integration of different psychologies may enrich both East and West. As we come to understand and appreciate transpersonal experiences and process, we can evaluate other cultures better and learn from their accumulated centuries of transpersonal wisdom. We can, in effect, reclaim what has been called "the Great Tradition," the sum total of humankind's cross-cultural religious-philosophical wisdom.

The existence of a wide range of states of consciousness raises several important questions. For example, which states are beneficial and transformative, and which states are regressive or



dangerous? How can we strengthen healthy states and transform destructive ones? How can we identify, compare, and map individual states, and can we develop an overarching framework or theory that lays out the whole spectrum of consciousness? These are but some of the questions transpersonal psychology must continue to address.

### **Optimal Health and Well-being**

**Waldman:** In Walsh and Vaughan's (1980) often quoted definition, we also see the emphasis that transpersonal research has placed on health:

*Transpersonal psychology* is concerned with expanding the field of psychological inquiry to include the study of optimal psychological health and well-being. It recognizes the potential for experiencing a broad range of states of consciousness, in some of which identity may extend beyond the usual limits of ego and personality. *Transpersonal psychotherapy* includes traditional areas and concerns, adding to these an interest in facilitating growth and awareness beyond traditionally recognized levels of health. The importance of modifying consciousness and the validity of transcendental experience and identity is affirmed.

**Walsh:** Unfortunately, one of the problems with this definition is that it sidesteps issues of pathology and implies that transpersonal experiences are related only to health. Although there is a widespread fantasy that transpersonal development brings unalloyed joy, bliss, and well-being, in reality transpersonal experience and development have their challenges and difficulties. Spiritual and contemplative practices, for example, can provoke an eruption of unresolved early psychological issues or create interpersonal difficulties. Now that we have access to practices and philosophies of the world's contemplative traditions, we can begin to make cross-cultural maps of their developmental stages, difficulties, and appropriate therapies. This is what Ken Wilber (1984) has begun to do with his "spectrum" of psychopathologies.

Transpersonal crises can emerge at any stage of one's spiritual and psychological path, and may even require clinical treatment. However, what may initially appear as pathology can turn out to be a potentially beneficial developmental crisis. It is rarely appreciated that psychological crises, even psychoses, can sometimes function as growth experiences that result in greater psychological and spiritual well-being. If these crises are successfully negotiated, then the disorganization and turmoil may turn out to be the means by which constricting life habits, beliefs, goals, identities and life-styles may be reassessed or cast off and new life-affirming modes adopted. However, this is *not* to say that all psychological distress is a developmental crisis or that all developmental crises, even transpersonal ones, will be successfully navigated and result in greater growth and well-being. Clearly, some people can be left impaired.

Transpersonal experiences can also emerge unexpectedly in the midst of severe pathology such as psychoses. For example, when normal cognitive functions disintegrate, the psyche can be flooded with elements from all parts of the unconscious, high and low, pathological and transcendent. Appropriate treatment depends upon the nature and severity of the pathology,

appropriate diagnosis, and an understanding of transpersonal processes.

### **The Self and the Transpersonal Concept of "Beyond Ego"**

**Waldman:** Walsh and Vaughan's 1980 definition raises one of the more difficult concepts to grasp: that one's identity can extend beyond the normal boundaries of ego and personality. This implies something quite different from Maslow's concept of *values* that transcend the self.

The concept of a transcendent *self* can be found throughout the history of philosophy and religion, and in the influential psychologies of Assagioli (1971) and Jung. Early transpersonal researchers also turned their attention to non-Western religions and philosophies (particularly those of the East) because they offered alternative and, in some cases, more sophisticated models of personality development and the nature of human consciousness (Hall and Lindzey, 1978). Research into psychedelics and other nonordinary states of consciousness, along with research in biofeedback, guided imagery, relaxation therapy, etc., offered further evidence to the multi-dimensionality of personality and awareness. These studies also suggested that one's sense of self could be altered, reformulated, or experienced in ways quite different than ordinary states of consciousness provide. As Watts (1974) stated, "we have identified ourselves with a process of mentation or consciousness which is not really ourselves at all."

Was the self an illusion, an arbitrary construction of one's mind, as the Buddhists suggested, or was there another self, more fully integrated, that could be achieved through some kind of spiritual or therapeutic practice? Was consciousness simply a product of the mind, or could it exist beyond the confines of the biological body, as contemporary parapsychological research has shown? These questions currently fuel debate within the academic and transpersonal communities.

**Tart:** In my study of various altered states of consciousness, such as dreaming, hypnosis, strong emotional states, meditative experiences, and drug-induced states, it makes the most sense to consider the feeling or sense of "self" to be a semi-arbitrary, perhaps completely arbitrary, *construction*, not a simple perception of something concrete.

The strongest influence to concretize the self is from the relative stability of our physical bodies in normal health. As my systems theory approach to altered states indicates (Tart, 1975), the rest of the construction is driven by culturally relative psychological and emotional habits. Change to an altered state and self or ego can be experienced in a radically different leading to different behavior. Take ordinary dreams, for example. If you were asked to list the personality traits of both your usual dreaming and usual ordinary waking selves, many important differences would appear. In hypnosis, as a second example, the sense of self can be arbitrarily manipulated by suggestion.

It is easy to get caught up in trying to define "self" or "ego," but I think it would be more useful to catalog the actual experiential variations that occur, thus realizing that "self" is much

more of a process than a thing.

**Waldman:** I quite agree. However, many transpersonal theories and definitions have used the term "ego" in ways that are quite different from standard psychological definitions. This creates a problem, particularly for other psychologists and therapists who may be attempting to understand transpersonal theories and perspectives. Fadiman (1980), for example, used "ego" to define one's personality, while others used it to refer to one's self image. In *Beyond Ego* (Walsh and Vaughan, 1980, p. 262), it is defined as a "conceptual self-sense identified with individual separateness; part of the mind with which the individual identifies."

Most psychologists, however, refer to the ego as the central governing part of one's personality, the integrative and synthesizing aspect of the mind. It represented, according to Strachey (Freud, 1960), reason and sanity. Bettelheim (1982), however, argued that the English use of the term "ego" distorted Freud's basic concept, which should have been translated as "I" or "me" (from the German "*das Ich*"). Bettelheim (1982, p.55) was quite critical of the use of the term ego, for he felt that it depersonalized Freud's model of the psyche: "What he called the 'I' refers primarily to the conscious, rational aspects of one's self." Maslow also refrained from using the term "ego" in his descriptions of transpersonal processes and experiences.

In transpersonal psychology, "ego" refers more to the sense of self that we most often identify with, and which we often presume represents our individual totality. But the real difficulty arises when we try to define that which is "beyond" our personal self identification, for there are many models describing transcendence of the self. Jung, for example, suggested that the ego was not the center of one's personality, that there was a more central, directing core which he called the "Self." Yet it is unfair to equate Jung's notion of the Self with transpersonal experiences and perspectives, which may draw their source from distinctly different frameworks, for there are transpersonal orientations that have been influenced by various mystical or esoteric sources, or can be traced to various nineteenth century perspectives of the self. An example of this can be gleaned from William James' (1961, p.342) reference to Kant's doctrine of the Transcendental Ego, which was a depersonalized and universal concept of abstract consciousness, and which, in James' terms, constituted "the soul of the world, and in which our sundry personal self-consciousnesses have their being."

Eastern philosophies in particular have distinguished between the individual conscious self (the term ego has its own specific meanings in Asian cultures) and a greater, or Absolute, Self that exists within or beyond the boundaries of everyday awareness. Transpersonal literature often borrows from, or refers to, these concepts when using the term "ego." Wilber (1975), for example, refers to certain aspects of consciousness which he considers transpersonal, or "supra-individual," which is similar to the Eastern notion of the Witness: "that which is capable of observing the flow of what is -- without interfering with it, commenting on it, or in any way manipulating it." Because transpersonal literature makes reference to so many different and distinct dimensions of a transcendent self, the use of the antiquated, impersonal, abstract term "ego" seems inappropriate, and may even account for criticism from those who were concerned that transpersonal concepts could de-humanize the person and his or her internal psychological

processes (Chaudhuri, 1975; May, 1986; Schneider, 1987).

**Vaughan:** Although the discussions of ego can be confusing, I do not think we can do away with the term. I think it can be clarified to include and accommodate different perspectives. Different perceptions reflect different beliefs and ways of seeing. The ego, as I understand it, reflects the integrating, governing part of one's personality, the conscious rational aspects of self, and the conceptual self-sense with which we identify. Jung's idea of the Self as the center of the psyche, and the ego as the center of the conscious personality, dovetails with these definitions if we look for the commonalities.

Further confusion arises, though, if we use the term "ego" to refer to the transcendental self. Kant and James were writing long before the term became popularized by psychology. Today, in common parlance, most people seem to differentiate quite easily between what they call the ego and what they might call the soul, and arguments can be made for dropping both of these terms. However, in attempting to communicate ideas in the language of contemporary psychology, I do not think we can avoid a discussion of relative perceptions of "ego." Clarifying the distinctions as well as the commonalities between different uses of the term could be helpful.

### **Jung's Use of the Term Transpersonal**

**Lannert:** From my perspective, transpersonal psychology has been deeply influenced by the work of Carl Jung, who argued for the validity of religious experience which was a driving force within every individual. Jung (1964, p. 84), who was attracted to both Eastern and Western religions, noted the breakdown of a spiritual perspective in Western culture: "We have stripped all things of their mystery and numinosity; nothing is holy any longer." In response, he proposed a system of spiritual and religious development. Jung noted that during the early and young adult years, individuals are deeply involved in ego concerns, in rational order, and in logical systems of religion. He recognized that when individuals reach middle age, they often seek wholeness and balance in life which often manifests in spiritual and religious experience.

Jung's psychology extends beyond both the ego and humanistic levels. He stated that the approach to the numinous is the real therapy, and inasmuch as an individual achieves the numinous experiences he or she is released from the course of pathology (Jung, 1973). Jung was one of the earliest psychiatrists to relate the ills of humanity to observations of the deeper levels of the individual psyche, which he called the collective unconscious. Following Jung's viewpoint, human development, though seemingly directional, represents an attempt to integrate the polarized opposites, including the shadow self, in a balanced synthesis, a joining of the perspectives between the sensate and the ideational, the rational-linear-analytic and the intuitive, the East and West, the masculine and feminine, the old and new, and so forth (Shalan, 1985), all common themes addressed in religious tradition and within contemporary transpersonal therapy.

**Waldman:** According to Grof (1992, p.12), modern consciousness researchers owe a great debt to Jung for he "amassed convincing evidence showing that we must look much farther than personal biography and the individual unconscious if we are to even begin to grasp the true

nature of the psyche." Jung himself had used the term "transpersonal" to refer to his notion of the collective unconscious, but in a way quite different from its contemporary use. I include Erich Neumann's definition (1954, p. xix) in order to help clarify some of the confusions and inconsistencies that have emerged, particularly since there are many individuals who have integrated Jungian and transpersonal models into their own theories and practices:

Any attempt to outline the archetypal stages from the standpoint of analytical psychology must begin by drawing a fundamental distinction between personal and transpersonal psychic factors. Personal factors are those which belong to one individual personality and are not shared by any other individual, regardless of whether they are conscious or unconscious. Transpersonal factors, on the other hand, are collective, supra- or extra-personal, and are to be regarded not as *external* conditions of society, but as *internal* structural elements. The transpersonal represents a factor that is largely independent of the personal, for the personal, both collectively and individually, is a late product of evolution.

Every historical inquiry -- and every evolutionary approach is in this sense historical -- must therefore begin with the transpersonal. In the history of mankind as in the development of the individual there is an initial preponderance of transpersonal factors, and only in the course of development does the personal realm come into view and achieve independence.

Neumann (1954, p. 270) concludes that "the cardinal discovery of transpersonal psychology is that the collective psyche, the deepest layer of the unconscious, is the ground current from which is derived everything to do with a particularized ego processing consciousness: upon this is based, by this it is nourished, and without this it cannot exist." Thus, the Jungian conceptualization of transpersonal experience stands in contrast to the developmental models of Maslow, Wilber, and others who place transpersonal experiences within post-egoic, self-transcending frameworks.

### **Spirituality and Transcendence within a Transpersonal Context**

**Waldman:** A central theme running throughout transpersonal research concerns the notion of spirituality. Yet, like other terms commonly referred to in transpersonal literature, is often left undefined. A closer examination will reveal that nearly every author has defined spirituality in various contrasting ways. Since spirituality has recently emerged as a popular topic in our society, a brief review of how this term has been used in psychology may help to clarify its meaning within the context of transpersonal theories and perspectives.

**Lannert:** In its broadest definition, spirituality may be considered a part of the human being that may involve aspects of the psyche, soul, mind, emotion, or meaning, and can be viewed in theistic or nontheistic ways. Benner (1989) suggested that the main elements of spirituality are the quest to find our place through self-transcendence, the quest for integration of our being, and the discovery and fulfillment of our true selves. This includes a life of interiority as well as a life in relationship with and service to others. Barring semantic difficulties, spirituality appears to be

the underlying commonality for both religion and psychology.

Although there are atheistic and theistic humanist philosophies, the humanistic psychology school is open to ethical/spiritual pluralism, which suggests that individuals should be allowed to choose or create a spiritual orientation (Goud, 1990). Maslow (1962, p. 206) said that the "human being needs a framework of values, a philosophy of life, a religion or religion-surrogate to live by and understand by, in about the same sense he needs sunlight, calcium, or love."

As the interest in spirituality has grown within the psychological community, numerous theories concerning the development of a psychospiritual perspective have emerged. Bakken (1983) stated that what is termed spiritual awakening is actually the development of a psychological identity, while Frankl (1963, 1978) emphasized that spiritual conflicts are at the root of many psychological problems, and that the recovery of a spiritual perspective is a necessary adjunct to therapy:

Phenomenological-existential analysis, [Frankl] maintains, points a person beyond the merely psychological dimension to an unconscious *logos*, a "noölogical dimension" of spiritual depth. Here we find an "unconscious religiousness," a "latent relation to transcendence" inherent in all persons. Thus the spiritual unconscious is also the "transcendent unconscious," the intentional referent of which may be called "God." (Wulff, 1991, p.621)

For Frankl, the individual's search for meaning was seen as a transcendent dimension stemming from that person's spiritual core (Wulff, 1991, p. 621). Shafranske (1984) stated that a spiritual dimension is discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological context. He added that this spiritual aspect of human existence may be discerned within the theoretical formulations of Allport (1950), Erikson (1950), Frankl (1969), Jung (1958), and May (1983). Other early arguments for the incorporation spiritual values have been put forth by James (1961), Assagioli (1965), and Rogers (1961). Fromm (1950, 1955), for example, advocated a humanist religion which consisted of a set of moral values formed by the core of all the major religions and philosophies. He believed that the psychoanalytic cure of the soul would bring about a humanistically religious orientation.

In a recent attempt to define contemporary spirituality, Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988) offered a definition that included nine subscales viewed in terms of the human and universal nature of spirituality: 1) a transcendent dimension; 2) meaning and purpose; 3) mission in life; 4) sacredness of life; 5) spiritual rewards supersede material rewards; 6) altruism; 7) idealism; 8) awareness of the tragic; and 9) fruits of spirituality.

**Waldman:** According to Roof's (1993) survey of 2620 people born between 1946 and 1963, contemporary spirituality is represented by a wide variety of concepts and beliefs that fall between two polar extremes: expansive mysticism and conservative theistic faith. The spiritual values of this generation include self fulfillment, self-growth, inner spiritual exploration, a

greater sense of self, appreciation of the body, gender awareness, and a search for meaning and value of life. Spirituality is often seen as synonymous to psychology, but distinct from religious expression or involvement.

**Lannert:** Other psychospiritual perspectives have been proposed by Benner (1989), Kahoe and Meadow (1981), Genia (1990), Shaalan (1985), Worthington (1988), and others. Bergin (1988) described three contributions of a spiritual perspective to psychotherapy. The first recognizes that being spiritual is part of being human and that spiritual experiences make a difference in our behavior. Secondly, a spiritual perspective anchors values in universal terms; that is, it operates under the assumption that there are basic underlying human standards that are cross-cultural. The third contribution of a spiritual perspective involves a set of therapeutic techniques. According to Bergin, these techniques may include intrapsychic methods, such as the use of prayer and meditation, scripture or other spiritual readings, rituals, and inspirational counseling. Additionally, family and social system methods that use group support, communication, mutual participation, communal spiritual experience, and group identification (i.e., twelve step programs) may support an individual as well as a collective sense of values and spiritual goals.

**Waldman:** Transpersonal psychology has taken a very different approach to contemporary spirituality by focusing on the historical perspectives of the wisdom traditions, what Huxley and Wilber refer to as the perennial philosophy. From a somewhat different perspective, the humanistic and existential psychologies, which contributed greatly to the transpersonal perspective, can be seen to have their roots in the philosophy of Hegel (Stace, 1955), who defined spirituality as a complex set of attributes that included personal and social ethics, morality, values, reason, consciousness, self-awareness, intuition, imagination, mind, soul, art, beauty, and religious experience. These same attributes are reflected throughout Maslow's (1968) psychology. For Maslow (1970), spirituality was synonymous with the intrinsic values of Being, which included such attributes as: truth, goodness, beauty, wholeness, dichotomy-transcendence, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, necessity, completion, justice, order, simplicity, richness, effortlessness, playfulness, and self-sufficiency. Assagioli (1976, p. 38) defined spirituality in terms of "all the states of awareness, all the functions and activities which have as common denominator the possessing of *values* higher than the average, values such as the ethical, the aesthetic, the heroic, the humanitarian, and the altruistic." Jung, however, understood spirituality as a *symbolic* representation of internal psychic drives (Wulff, 1991). Within transpersonal literature, both Wilber (1990a) and Washburn (1988) have argued, as did Jung, that the spiritual drive is a fundamental dimension of the human psyche.

**Tart:** Back in the 1960s, humanistic psychology was the social manifestation of our attempts to grow wise hearts and bodies, as well as wise minds. But it tended to neglect a fourth dimension of human development, the *spirit*. We used this term not only in the sense of vitality and authenticity, but as something *real* behind the material manifestations of life, similar to the vital energy underlying religious experience before it was converted into a mechanism of social control. For many of us, transpersonal psychology is the social manifestation of our attempts to understand and develop this fourth aspect that we feel can guide the individual towards greater psychological maturity and away from the destructive tendencies of religious fanaticism. The

importance of these "spiritual" matters, I feel, will play a major role in determining whether humanity survives on this planet, for if there is a real spiritual dimension linking us, then we will have a vital basis for creating peace in the world and genuinely caring for each other's welfare.

**Waldman:** Washburn (1988, p. 1), in his attempt to build a transpersonal theory of human development, makes spirituality the central theme of his definition:

A chief objective of transpersonal theory is to integrate spiritual experience within a larger understanding of the human psyche....Transpersonal theory is not just psychology of religion or spiritual psychology. Rather, it is a project that attempts a true synthesis of spiritual and psychological approaches to the psyche.... for transpersonal theory assumes that spiritual experience is expressive of humanity's highest potentialities.

Spirituality, as Washburn uses it (1988, p. 4)), is based upon the "relationship of the ego to possible religious (e.g., numinous, infused, charismatic, illumined) experiences." However, he adds, "spirit may have its ultimate origin in a metaphysical source lying completely beyond the soul" (p. 120) Here, Washburn reflects the transcendental notions of spirit or the Absolute that have permeated philosophic and religious debate since Aristotle's conceptualization of the Cosmological Argument.

**Tart:** As I outline in my book, *Transpersonal Psychologies* (Tart, 1975), spiritual disciplines and psychologies generally emphasize the importance of consciousness and experience, that there are different levels and perceptions of reality, and that one's personality or degree of personal development will effect how he or she perceives reality. Many spiritual disciplines also postulate a psychological or psychical reality just as real or even more real than physical reality, and that the goal of spiritual practice is to become conscious of this totality and to recognize that there is a purposeful interrelationship and connection with all forms of life and the various dimensions or realities of the universe. A basic spiritual need is the need to know one's true nature and one's place in the universe.

**Waldman:** There are many within the transpersonal movement who look at spirituality in terms of personal and societal ethics, and some suggest that a transpersonal perspective can be used as a model for living. According to Singer (personal communication, August 4, 1991), the transpersonal perspective suggests that we look at ourselves in the larger context of a global community, for it "implies a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the entire system of which we are an integral functioning part."

**Vaughan:** From a transpersonal perspective the search for wholeness cannot ignore the fact that each of us is only part of a larger whole. We do not live in isolation, but in relationship, and wholeness implies awareness of both a vertical and horizontal dimension of relationship. The vertical refers to being in touch with both immanent and transcendent dimensions of consciousness, while the horizontal dimension recognizes our interconnectedness with all life on earth. The human quest for meaning and purpose is carried out in this context. A transpersonal view that recognizes our interdependence and the interrelatedness of differing worldviews



supports both personal and social responsibility. A transpersonal orientation, therefore, is naturally expressed as service in the world. To me, a healthy integration of psychology and spirituality implies service based on freedom, authenticity, wisdom and compassion.

### **Transpersonal Psychology and Religion**

**Waldman:** A question that is often raised concerns the relationship between transpersonal psychology and religion, since such themes as values, spirituality, and transcendence are prevalent in both. For example, Stone's (1992) model of transcendence, which is anchored within the philosophy of religious naturalism, bears a close resemblance to Maslow's description of transcendent values and experiences. And Cousins (1992), in defining the current state of spirituality from a theological perspective, organizes religion developmentally in terms of various models of consciousness, acknowledging the influence that James, Jung, Masters and Houston, Grof, and other transpersonal researchers have had upon his thinking.

Wulff (1991) cites transpersonal psychology as the most recent development of the psychology of religion, placing it within the context of the psycho-religious perspectives of James, Freud, Jung, Spranger, Erikson, Allport, Fromm, Frankl, Maslow, and others. But Wulff sees transpersonal psychology "less a psychology *of* religion than a modern-day effort at integration -- of Western psychology and Eastern religion." The difficulty with this definition is obvious, for transpersonal psychology has studied a great many religious and spiritual traditions in addition to Eastern perspectives. In addition, there are many dimensions to transpersonal psychology that are totally unrelated to religious or spiritual issues (consciousness studies, parapsychology, psychedelic research, psychopathology, myth and fairy tales, ego and personality structure, etc.). Yet it is clear that these two fields of inquiry are beginning to share common perspectives and orientations.

These examples suggest a growing convergence of interest between psychology and religion, and that an interdisciplinary exchange may help to enhance both transpersonal psychology and religious studies and to distinguish the inherent difference between these two fields of study.

**Lannert:** As Gorsuch (1988) points out, we are entering an age of openness to spiritual and religious issues in the scientific community. According to Benner (1989), both natural and religious spiritualities are mediated by the same psychological processes and mechanisms as those involved in relationships with other people. Human personality is such that we are psychospiritual beings and any segregation of spirituality and psychology is, therefore, both artificial and destructive to the true understanding of either.

Spero (1976) acknowledges that while psychotherapy and religion are not the same, they do share commitments to individual and interpersonal mental adjustment, to the promotion of freedom and authenticity, and to concern for the dynamics of human potential. And Sacks (1985, p. 28) believes that both religion and psychotherapy include "a commitment to growth toward

one's potential; being productive; respect for the dignity and well-being of others as for one's own; responsibility for one's behavior; being in touch with one's self; a sense for relationship to or with the universe; and participation with others in sharing one's deepest emotional experiences."

## Conclusion

**Waldman:** It is my hope that this discussion has helped to address some of the primary concepts and frameworks that distinguish transpersonal psychology from other fields of investigation, and that it may serve others in helping to formulate a more comprehensive definition of this ever-broadening inter-disciplinary field. Where might transpersonal psychology go from here? Wilber (1990b, p. ix) suggests that it should continue to offer a comprehensive psychological presentation of the perennial philosophy and teachings from the world's wisdom traditions, and that transpersonal psychologists attempt to build a unified theory of psychology, acknowledging and incorporating modern psychological research and science, and then adding, where necessary, "the further insights and experiences of the existential and spiritual dimensions of the human being."

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## Recommended Reading:

The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 2003, Vol. 35, No. 2

*Contemporary Viewpoints on Transpersonal Psychology*  
<http://jasmeet.net/james/CDP/docs/Caplan03.pdf>

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