

## FORUM

### CONTEMPORARY VIEWPOINTS ON TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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*ABSTRACT:* Over the past 35 years the published scholarly conversation about the nature of transpersonal psychology has continued as an ongoing and open-ended forum that reflects a continued vitality within the field. This article presents 41 contemporary viewpoints on transpersonal psychology, solicited from international scholars and new voices as well as from leading theorists and practitioners. These responses represent a sizeable spectrum of perspectives, and offer a framework around which the reader is invited to contemplate both foundational themes and shifting emphases within transpersonal psychology. The diversity of views is offered as a document to reflect the contemporary conversation about the field, as a stimulus for further dialogue and critical reflection, and as a support for innovative and emerging perspectives within transpersonal psychology.

As interest in the field of transpersonal psychology continues to expand, it is critical to maintain an active exploration of principal viewpoints and nascent themes. The purpose of this forum is to present contemporary viewpoints on transpersonal psychology as an invitation for further discussion. This offers an opportunity for those within the field to continually reflect upon and reexamine their perspectives, and for those new to transpersonal psychology to engage in a living examination of the foundation and development of the field.

Within the ongoing conversation about the nature, scope, and definition of transpersonal psychology from 1968 to the present, there have been articles reviewing collections of published definitions of transpersonal psychology (LaJoie, Shapiro & Roberts, 1991; LaJoie & Shapiro, 1992; Shapiro, Lee & Gross, 2002); those reviewing the content and themes of undergraduate transpersonal psychology courses (Davis & Wright, 1987); others offering perspectives on the field (Vaughan, 1982; Walsh, 1993; Nalimov & Drogalina, 1996); reflections on its definition (Sutich, 1968, 1969; Vich, 1988, 1992; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993); and efforts to analyze the range and scope of the movement (Boucouvalas, 1980, 1981, 1995, 1999). This paper is intended to add a further contribution to the discussion in the form of current perspectives.

The viewpoints represented within come from leading transpersonal theorists and practitioners of transpersonal psychology, including international scholars, as well as a few doctoral students and recent graduates who represent a “new generation” of contributors to the field. The perspectives presented here are original, previously unpublished material, and in many instances represent a fresh synthesis of the contributor’s viewpoint on the field.

Of the 60 individuals contacted, 21 did not respond by the deadline, resulting in the inclusion of 39 perspectives (augmented by the addition of #40 and #41). Whereas this sampling is not a comprehensive account of all major scholars in the field, it represents a sizeable spectrum of viewpoints on the subject from informed individuals.

The purpose of giving voice to these points of view is to provide a solid framework for a dynamic exploration into important distinctions within the field of transpersonal psychology. As you explore these perspectives, we invite you to engage your own rigorous investigation into this topic, ideally allowing previous assumptions and opinions to be temporarily suspended in favor of engaging an original, living enquiry that might assist in furthering innovative and creative discussion in the field.

## CONTEMPORARY VIEWPOINTS

### *1. Rosemarie Anderson*

Transpersonal Psychology is the study of the bodily, psychological, and spiritual dynamics involved in the process of individual human and communal transformation. Inherently inter-disciplinary and multi-cultural, Transpersonal Psychology is the examination of the common boundaries between worldwide psychologies, spirituality, and indigenous spiritual practice relevant to psycho-spiritual development.

### *2. Angeles Arrien*

Transpersonal Psychology is the experience, discipline and study of spirituality which explores the essence, and true nature of the transcendent Self found within the human spirit.

### *3. Wilfried Belschner (Germany)*

Transpersonal Psychology is the discipline of psychology that acknowledges the whole spectrum from everyday consciousness to non-dual states as a normal potential of humanity. Nowadays academic psychology (and mainstream culture) stresses everyday consciousness in a monopolistic manner. Variations in states of consciousness are not recognized in the construction of psychological theory. In psychological research, consciousness is not seen as a relevant variable that has to be controlled by means of psychological instruments that can measure the modulations of consciousness on the side of the subjects and/or the researcher in the process of research. In the models of professional practice (e.g. psychotherapy), induced

variations in the state of consciousness (from a dualistic state towards a more non-dualistic state), especially on the side of the practitioner, are neither recognized nor part of the curriculum in academic training.

Transpersonal Psychology sees the shortcomings of such a limited basis of psychological theory and practice and reformulates psychology in all of its subsequent subjects from the perspective of the wide range of states of consciousness.

#### *4. Seymour Boorstein*

Transpersonal Psychology embraces the traditional psychological systems for the understanding and treatment of emotional problems, and, within a spiritual context (for the therapist, and the patient, when possible), seeks simultaneously to honor humanity's highest potentials. Thirty years ago I had hoped that the actual experiences of the spiritual dimension would "undo" traditional emotional problems. Sadly, this has not turned out to be. The spiritual path usually cannot undo problems in the "basement" of our minds, and, in fact, we need to be cautious that the spiritual path not enhance "basement" narcissism.

#### *5. Sylvia Boorstein*

The following is, more or less, the response I've given to at least a dozen graduate students who have asked me, as part of their research, "What do you do differently as a transpersonal psychologist than you did as an ordinary psychologist?" I tell them:

- a. Everything looks the same in my office as ever it did. My clients and I sit on chairs and talk to each other. Mostly they talk and I listen.
- b. I listen with different ears than the ones with which I was trained to listen when psychodynamic therapy defined the field. My context is less "pathologic."
- c. I'm not as daunted by suffering as I used to be. I think we all suffer. I generally feel people are doing remarkably well, given the challenges of their lives, and I think they experience that in the way that I listen to their stories.
- d. I do not think about people becoming "cured" or about "working things through." I think about us all becoming more familiar with the habits of our minds and more skillful about habits we cultivate.
- e. I am much more compassionate.
- f. I rely on the wisdom of the hearts of the people I work with to provide them clues for skillful life choices they might make, and I am hopeful that the context of loving appreciation in which I genuinely hold them will support their hearts in that endeavor.

#### *6. Brant Cortright*

Transpersonal psychology uses the world's spiritual traditions as an integrating framework for Western psychology. It sees the psychological process of healing and growth within the larger context of spiritual unfolding.

### *7. Marc-Alain Descamps (France)*

Transpersonal psychology is the scientific study of higher states of consciousness, such as cosmic consciousness, mystical experience and the non-dual state.

### *8. Daniel Deslauriers*

Transpersonal Psychology studies the whole person in relation to itself, others, nature and the cosmos. It seeks to understand general and particular patterns of experience as a person's sense of identity unfolds and matures. Central to the focus of Transpersonal Psychology is the phenomenology of growth and individuation that concurs with positive transformation in consciousness, the practice of wisdom and the pursuit of self-knowledge. In this pursuit, individuals often combine a variety of methods including contemplative practices, psychotherapy, dreamwork, creativity, and other means of spiritual inquiry. Transpersonal Psychology emphasizes the fact that psychological and spiritual development should ideally unfold in tandem, in continuous cycles of self-transcendence and personal integration. In this way, Transpersonal Psychology seeks to understand how particular skills and aptitudes can be acquired and displayed in conjunction with psycho-spiritual development.

From an epistemological point of view, Transpersonal Psychology attempts to articulate its knowledge claims using "third person" approach (scientific testing and observation) complemented by "first person" (experiential and phenomenological observation) and "second person" (I-thou relational) inquiry. With this "second person" approach, Transpersonal Psychology attempts to recognize the relational nature of consciousness, including the social or communal extension of psychological and spiritual wellness as well as pathology. For example, Transpersonal Psychology has found applications in the study of the development of ecological consciousness. In this way, Transpersonal Psychology can help illuminate the psychological sources of ethical thinking that informs right action in the world.

### *9. Mark Epstein*

Transpersonal psychology is the study of the impersonal nature of the self.

### *10. Vipassana Esbjorn*

Transpersonal psychology in the 21st century demands embodiment—the marriage of spirit and flesh, the point where consciousness knows itself through corporeal existence. As a field, no longer can we collapse into the temptation of dissociating from our bodies, hanging out in the formless expanse of awareness, the transcendent realm, without also recognizing that we are temporal, sensual bodies, hungry to awaken on a blood-and-bones cellular level. Spirit is not separate from flesh; embodiment is God as form. Through writing, research, teaching, and clinical applications as the vehicle, it is our turn to embody the knowledge and discoveries that we have collectively made thus far in our field, and move through the world as

living, breathing examples of temporal form and eternal formlessness joined as one body, beyond duality.

### *11. James Fadiman*

Transpersonal Psychology is the study, recognition, and use of the full range of human experience. Its central assumption is that humans are physical-psychological-spiritual beings and that one aspect can be fully studied only in the context of the other aspects. Transpersonal psychology integrates the accumulated wisdom and practices from the major spiritual traditions and psychological schools of thought with the insights from current research into genetic predispositions, cultural conditioning, and critical events in childhood and in adult life.

### *12. Jorge N. Ferrer*

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).

While focusing on the interface of psychology and spirituality, transpersonal psychology strives to understand and nurture the wholeness of human nature—body, instincts, heart, mind, and consciousness—and explores ancient and modern practical tools that foster an integrative spiritual life that is fully embodied, socially engaged, and ecologically sensitive (e.g., meditation, integral transformative practices, sacred use of entheogens, mind/body integration techniques, dream work, social service, and so forth).

In the early 1990s, the transpersonal field moved beyond its original focus on psychology toward a more integral approach that crystallized into a variety of transpersonal disciplines (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993) or a multidisciplinary transpersonal orientation (Boucouvalas, 1999) that encompasses social work, ecology, art, literature, acting, law, and business and entrepreneurship. The rich diversity of perspectives that shape contemporary transpersonalism, far from indicating its decline, can be seen as a sign of the incipient maturity of the field (a plurality of approaches is one of the marks of any established discipline of knowledge), as well as the tremendous creative power that is being channeled through the transpersonal project (which catalyzes and materializes Spirit's creative urges through human embodied inquiry and hermeneutic participation).

### *13. Robert Frager*

Transpersonal psychology is the study of the full range of human experience, from psychosis and dysfunction to creativity, genius, and genuine spirituality. One basic

premise of transpersonal psychology is that the Higher Self is at the core of every human being, and the Self is the source of health, wisdom, and higher functioning. The spiritual quest, to realize the Self, is at the root of all human motivation and striving. Maslow, Carl Rogers, and others wrote that the fundamental human motive is self-actualization, and late in his career Maslow described the fundamental transpersonal process of transcendent self-actualization.

#### *14. Laura Boggio Gilot (Italy)*

Born as a general field of inquiry on the farther reaches of human nature, transpersonal psychology is now developing as an integral psychology addressing psychopathological, existential, and spiritual issues in a developmental framework. The most influential research refers to consciousness transformation through applied spirituality. This requires a deep involvement in a meditative path, which acts as a Platonic *metanoia*, leading to an expanded view of mind, the self and life.

Central among meditative methods is the practice of awareness, which pushes perception into the unconscious structures, revealing the deep mental functioning and processes connected to the perception of reality and to individual choices. The meditative experience, combined with psychotherapy, allows a wider vision of mental suffering, revealing the role of egoism and non-ethical attitudes, not only in ordinary psychopathology but also in spiritual suffering, expressed in the lack of awareness, creativity and love, and in the prevalence of fear, solitude and destructiveness.

Aiming to contribute to healing the pervasive disease affecting the life of the planet, from the more advanced lines of transpersonal psychology are growing people of wisdom and maturity, capable of acting with altruistic purposes, not only to relieve suffering, but also to awaken consciousness to the universal meanings of life, which can only lead to lasting peace and unity.

#### *15. Ray Greenleaf*

The definitions of transpersonal psychology have always been growing, expanding and changing as the field has matured. It has evolved into a more integral and holistic model where all aspects of consciousness, modes of being, and developmental processes are recognized and studied. This evolution honors the many dimensions of the human condition, the inner and outer, the individual and the collective in the ever expanding context of the divine mystery.

#### *16. Stanislav Grof*

Transpersonal psychology is a discipline that expands, complements, and modifies the conceptual framework of mainstream psychology and psychotherapy in several important ways: (a) field of study and source of research data (uses scientific methods to study the full spectrum of human experience, including an important subgroup of non-ordinary states of consciousness which I call “holotropic”)

(b) model of the psyche (c) architecture of “psychopathology” (d) therapeutic mechanisms (e) spirituality.

However, it is essential to emphasize that transpersonal psychologists strictly differentiate spirituality based on personal experience from the activities involving organized religion. While it is possible to study transpersonal experiences with scientific rigor and incorporate the findings into a comprehensive worldview, it is impossible to reconcile the dogmas of organized religions with science, traditional as well as “new paradigm science.”

### *17. Sean Hargens*

Transpersonal Psychology is an approach to the human situation that recognizes the reality and importance of non-ordinary states of Being-with-the-world as well as the capacity for developing more inclusive and complex ways of Being-in-the-world. In its efforts to integrate insights from spiritual traditions with psychological understandings of the human condition, Transpersonal Psychology is committed to honoring the full range of being embodied in flesh, embedded in culture, and enmeshed in eco-social systems. According to Transpersonal Psychology, consciousness is not foundationally an intrasubjective phenomenon; rather, is an *inter-subjective* dynamic that enacts multiple worldspaces, revealing and concealing the multiplicity of Divine Mystery that continues to unfold in the creative advance of Spirit. As such Transpersonal Psychology is committed to the rich diversity of our situatedness in body, culture, and nature and continually embraces the openendedness of the Kosmos.

### *18. Arthur Hastings*

Transpersonal psychology begins with the assumption that there is a transpersonal domain which is a reality, just as the physical world and the psychological world are realities. The presence of this third reality is indicated by experiences that go beyond the first two worlds in their nature and characteristics, such as expanded identity, merging with absolute being, unconditional love, transcendent values and motives, feelings of unity with all that exists, nonlocal consciousness, information via ESP, direct knowledge, transcendence of time and space, effects of intention on material reality, and subtle energies. These are not features of the other realities, and apparently cannot be derived from them.

The first two realities have been mapped by physical and psychological sciences. Maps for this third reality have been presented by religions, mystics, parapsychology, and consciousness studies. All three domains have separate natures, yet they interact with each other.

Materialistic science and behaviorism hold that all reality, including the mind, is physical, while philosophical idealism and some spiritual traditions hold that all reality, including matter, is consciousness. One of these metaphysical positions may be the ultimate truth, but the paradigm I suggest as a working hypothesis corresponds to our experienced realities and can be researched and applied.

For example, some transpersonal theories refer to spiritual states, or the higher self. The first two realities treat these as only brain states or psychological constructions. The definition here postulates that such experiences can be manifesting another reality that takes form in various ways, and interacts with our physical and psychological nature. The focus of transpersonal psychology is thus the study of this third reality and the experiences of interactions with it.

*19. Michael Hutton*

Transpersonal psychology is the study of human development which includes and transcends the individual person. This study emphasizes various spiritual and mystical traditions, and a full contextualization in the more-than-human world. Human development is also understood as initiating at a pre-natal phase, and continuing beyond death.

*20. Sean Kelly*

Transpersonal psychology recognizes that any whole or authentic account of the psyche, the mind, personality, or the ego must honor their embeddedness in the more encompassing, if ultimately mysterious, dimensions of the Cosmos and of Spirit. At the same time, the transpersonal movement—and particularly transpersonal theory—marks the point where psychology transcends its narrower disciplinary boundaries. Once again unashamed in the good company of philosophy, religion, and the full range of the sciences, it calls us to the multi- and transdisciplinary adventure of ideas and practices to which all deep and earnest inquiry is increasingly drawn.

*21. Jack Kornfield*

Transpersonal psychology is the broadest possible psychology. One that encompasses the personal and the universal dimensions of life—body, heart, mind and spirit, human and non-human, interbeing and ecological—a psychology open to our sacred place in the cosmos.

*22. Jeffrey Kripal*

Transpersonal psychology is an important critique and development of Western psychological theory, particularly in the latter's focus on the socialized ego as the limit of human potential and the sole marker of psychospiritual health. I, however, would like to see the field take the following possibilities much more seriously: the possibility that certain types of profound religious experience often typed as "mystical" possess no necessary ethical or therapeutic implications, that is, that mystical events can occur in pathological and immoral environments as well as in therapeutic and ethical ones; the possibility that the common perennialist assumptions of the field find little basis in the historical data and are in fact functions of our own categories and their careful, if largely unconscious, sifting of the historical data; and, finally, the possibility that the body, particularly in its erotic modes of repression and sublimation, plays a much greater role in religious



experience than is often assumed. If there is a true universal in the history of religions, a perennial generator, shaper, or reflector of religious experience (pick your metaphor), it is certainly not morality or monism—it is the human body, nurtured, expressed, repressed, oppressed, and sublimated in a thousand subtle ways by innumerable cultures across space and time. This is not to deny the reality of spirit, simply to recognize that the term itself encodes a deep ontological dualism that we have yet to think beyond and virtually obliterates in its substantive simplicity the vast differences that separate and define human religious experience.

### 23. *Olga Louchakova*

The definition of transpersonal psychology must begin with an analysis of its cultural and historical origins. Transpersonal psychology emerged in a secularized society, where religious sentiments were separated from daily life, inherent spiritual needs were frustrated, and non-ordinary experiences were pathologized. Transpersonal psychology responded to this spiritual “deprivation” by absorbing world traditions—a process possible due to globalization. Transpersonal psychology emerged as if through the cultural cracks, expressing the essential impulse of the self-alienated consciousness of the West to come back to its wholeness.

However, since this newly born consciousness healing device had to fit into some cultural category, it became a psychology. Transpersonal psychologists formulated an identity, legitimized spiritual needs, and built a tradition. The function of transpersonal psychology, therefore, is to balance the contemporary self, and to provide it with the means of regaining wholeness, fullness and vitality. It is a collective remedy against the hazards to the self.

So, I would define the current state of affairs in transpersonal psychology as a way of being in the world with the acknowledgement of complexity, curiosity, and all the levels of consciousness pertaining to being human.

### 24. *Ralph Metzner*

Transpersonal psychology grew out of a need to have a language for a fourth strand (or school) of psychology (besides psychodynamic, behaviorist and humanistic) that would cover areas of human experience not covered by these three. Previously, such matters (higher states of consciousness, mystical experience, spirituality, religious values and aspirations, methods of transformation such as yoga), would be covered under the rubric of “psychology of religion,” as in William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, which was mostly based on the Western Christian literature of mysticism. Transpersonal psychology, due to the efforts of Stanislav Grof, Abraham Maslow, and Tony Sutich followed by many others, started to develop a language to describe these areas, without using the language of any one religion and instead considering the common psychological experiences and processes that were talked about in the Hindu, Buddhist, Judaeo-Christian, Confucian literature. Thus, Transpersonal Psychology has an ecumenical, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary character.

25. *Claudio Naranjo*

When I celebrated the initiation of a Transpersonal Psychology journal, I remember liking the impressionistic and denotative rather than abstract statement concerning the new field—more a description than a definition, pointing to things such as altered states of consciousness, creativity, sacredness, and the “further reaches of human nature.”

Feeling that there was mystification in the use of “transpersonal” in lieu of the more traditional and colloquial “spiritual” to suggest scientific authority, I have avoided the label in reference to my own work, instead using the term Integrative Psychotherapy. By this I refer not only to an eclectic and ecumenical psycho-spiritual synthesis, but a holistic approach to ego transcendence and transformation including intellectual and somatic components as well working with feelings and meditation.

26. *Bert Parlee*

Exalted, as well as altered, states comprise forms of Transpersonal Psychology. When we include well-developed contemplative, and related traits, we begin to fashion a depth and spiritually engaged sensibility. While including, yet moving beyond the merely personal, a transcendental and transformational psychology is not shy about recognizing degrees of advancement and attainment in the service of others. Transpersonal Psychology emphasizes more the complex depth and quality of diversity within, than it does the breadth and range of diversity without.

Mapping the psycho-spiritual domains within, a richly textured “Transpersonal Diversity” might serve as a useful adjunct and corrective to the limitations of merely surface related criterion (race, sex, ethnicity, etc.), that mark much of our current “cultural” confusion. Indeed, an integrally informed Transpersonal Psychology would reflect a healthy and dynamic dialectic between the structural polarities of both universality and diversity. The Many is in the One. The One is in the Many.

27. *Kaisa Puhakka*

In my understanding, Transpersonal Psychology is concerned with life that is connected and whole. The “whole” is limitless, includes everything (physical, mental as well as other subtle worlds) and privileges nothing. “Connected life” means that all beings according to their species-bound capacity, including humans, have direct access to the whole or any part of it that is more immediate and less restricted than the skin-encapsulated or even psyche- or personality-encapsulated exchanges between human beings.

As a field of human inquiry, Transpersonal Psychology employs the methods, concepts and theories of psychology and other culturally contextualized meaning systems to explore, classify, map and explain its subject matter. Transpersonal Psychology takes on the challenge of how to bring clarity to our understanding of, and ways of living in, connectedness to the whole without reducing this

understanding to the concepts or empirical generalizations of conventional meaning systems and without mistaking egoic functioning for something beyond it. The best way to guard against such a mistake and to ensure the continued vitality of inquiry in Transpersonal Psychology is to consider its theories, methods, and definitions—including the one offered here—as provisional and open-ended.

#### 28. *Vitor Rodrigues (Portugal)*

Transpersonal Psychology is the study of consciousness from a psychological viewpoint. This implies studying consciousness functions, structure and development; consciousness states and ways of inducing them; behavioral, existential, cognitive, emotional, physiological, phenomenological and spiritual correlates of those states.

“Classic” definitions talk about “cosmic consciousness,” “samadhi,” “satori” and the like without acknowledging that such extreme positive states are relatively rare, and that most probably the majority of transpersonal therapists and theorists have not really experienced them. So, for the purposes of science, the classic definitions are idealistic but lacking in empirical ground. We do not have any sound scientific basis to consider as an object of study something that is very rare and therefore hard to define and to find. As a scientist within a very skeptical scientific community, I hold the position that these states exist and are worth studying—as soon as we are able to do so.

#### 29. *Donald Rothberg*

Transpersonal psychology has historically been a vehicle for developing a *secular*, *academic*, and *scientific* account of experiences, practices, and perspectives that traditionally have been considered to lie in the “religious” or “spiritual” realm. In thus challenging the split between rationality and religion that is a starting point for modernity, yet in making this challenge from *within* rationality and modernity, transpersonal psychology has implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) pointed to transformed understandings of the very meaning of the secular, academic, and scientific. With such a shift, the initial understanding of transpersonal psychology as a discipline will itself evolve.

The original concept of transpersonal psychology was in many ways the product of the 1960s: the “discovery” of “altered states of consciousness” and the leading role played by psychologists in bringing these experiences into the worlds of academia and popular culture. “Transpersonal” psychology pointed to and studied these experiences “beyond” and/or “through” the personal, and suggested the vital importance of these experiences for understanding and realizing the deepest potential of humans.

The work of transpersonal psychology has moved beyond its traditional focus primarily on the study of transpersonal experiences. A further major “cutting edge”

is in helping to develop a way of life appropriate to 21<sup>st</sup> century Western (and increasingly global) cultures guided and informed by what is “transpersonal.” This will lead the field of transpersonal *psychology* to be more fully complemented by and connected to (a) broader, interdisciplinary studies which link the individual psychological and spiritual domains with the social, ecological, and political; and (b) the practices of spiritual transformation, both traditional and integrative in this contemporary sense.

I believe that our times call out for such an integrative and practically-grounded approach. In my view, transpersonal psychology will be most alive and meaningful in our culture insofar as it not only identifies the “transpersonal” for the larger culture in “modern” terms, but also manifests such tendencies toward integration, practical grounding, and spiritual development. In so doing, transpersonal psychology will have the courage to evolve from its present forms, and help transform secular modernity, the nature of education and the academy, and our core views about science and knowledge.

### *30. Vernice Solimar*

Transpersonal Psychology asks the ultimate question, “Who am I?” Moving through the spectrum of human development, it explores the wisdom of all the great psychological traditions and moves on toward the deeper, larger stages of consciousness found in mystical spiritual traditions. Each stage of human development is an identity and a paradigm through which we perceive, experience, and interpret the world. With body, emotion, mind, heart and soul integration, we know ourselves to be the whole world, embodying wisdom, compassion and joy in service of all.

### *31. Fausto Sergej Sommer (Switzerland)*

Transpersonal Psychology is an active process, a creative act, in which the chaos of the human universe is made consciously accessible and manageable. This is done through all the sensory channels available, involving body, mind and soul and their poly-expression within the manifested world.

### *32. Stuart Sovatsky*

Transpersonal Psychology sees all psychological maturation and pathology as forward-moving struggles with faith (confidence combined with humility), hope (optimism), love (deepening powers of gratitude, appropriate contrition, forgiveness, and ecstasy), the palpability of eternal time (awe, endlessness) and the mystery of time-passage (anicca in Buddhism, Kali-Shaivism in Hinduism, grace in Judaism and Christianity), and the attainment of “extraordinary” mental, moral, and emotional intelligence/maturity. It holds special regard for nonlinguistic gnosis (meditation, ecstatic states and bodily sensations such as “Kundalini,” “chi,” “shekina,” “Holy Ghost,” etc.) and for the limitations of linguistic “knowledge” in general.

Therefore, the entire range of DSM pathologies is to be re-written as the range of difficulties people have with such maturation, whether mania (redefined as the infinite become over-intoxicating), depression (problems with humility and with the finality of past-time), borderline (problems with the relentless fluctuations of events in anicca), paranoia (problems with existential uncertainty and inconclusive authority and interpretation), and so on.

Transpersonalism should also focus upon social or group well-being via the powers of group ritual and ecstatic practice, that is, “profound fun”—as manifested periodically throughout the history of religion, the ecstatic sects of Baal Shem Tov, the Lakulisha-Pashupata, early Quakerism and Shakerism, Jnaneshvar and Thiramular Siddha Traditions, Caitanya tradition, Woodstock Festival, and other early Christian, Pagan, African, South and Native American ecstatic communities.

### 33. *Steve Sulmeyer*

Transpersonal psychology is the study of the human psyche in the context of, and viewed through the lens of, a spiritual sensibility. This includes the reconsideration of traditional Western psychology from a spiritual perspective to find new meanings and applications, as well as the integration of Western psychological concepts with spiritual and psychological insights from other traditions. In the clinical realm, it includes seeing the psychotherapy client not only as an individual struggling to resolve unconscious intrapsychic conflicts and to increase self-understanding, but also as a person struggling to shed layers of delusion that keep him or her from bringing to conscious awareness his or her true nature as a spiritual being, inseparable from that to which all the spiritual traditions point.

### 34. *Richard Tarnas*

I would like to focus my thoughts about the present and future of transpersonal psychology by looking at the evolving definition of the word “transpersonal” as a window into the evolution of the transpersonal field itself. Compared with transpersonal theorists’ initial understandably more objectivistic formulations of mystical and transpersonal experience, recent transpersonal scholars have brought a greater recognition of the complexly participatory nature of spirituality, as well as a deeper appreciation of the immanent dynamism of the sacred in human life.

Reflecting many influences during the past decade and more, transpersonal scholars have come to recognize more deeply how the spiritual power and mystery of the sacred is not only something human beings experience as transcendentally and timelessly beyond themselves and beyond everyday mundane reality, but is also a dynamically creative immanent reality moving in and through the human person in all her and his living, embodied, temporally situated specificity. The full person—psychological and physical, individual and relational, cultural and historical, ecological and cosmic—is a vessel of and co-creative participant in the divine unfolding.

In this emerging view, “trans” recovers its original larger range of meanings from the Latin, and comes to signify not only *beyond* and *across* (as in “transatlantic,”

“transalpine”); but also *through* and *pervading* (as in “translucent,” “transcutaneous”); *occurring by way of* (as in “transplacental”); and *so as to change* (as in “transform,” “transliterate,” “transfigure”). Thus in this larger definition, the word “transpersonal” multivalently acknowledges the sacred dimension of life as something that moves dynamically *beyond* the confines of the human person as ordinarily conceived and experienced (the Cartesian self and skin-encapsulated ego) but also *within, through, and by way of* the full human person in a manner that is mutually transformative, complexly creative, opening to a fuller participation in the divine creativity that *is* the human person and the ever unfolding cosmos. We can now recognize that it is this spiritual dynamism within the human person, in turn embedded in a spiritually alive cosmos, that empowers, and challenges, the human community’s participatory co-creation of spiritual realities, including new realities still to unfold. In this redefinition, transpersonal psychology enters into a deeper acknowledgment of the mystery of being and the complexity of human participation in that mystery.

One could also say that this redefinition reflects transpersonal psychology’s better integration of its full ancestry and contemporary matrix: It has been nourished from the deep well of the great Eastern mystical traditions while seeking to meet the demands of Western empirical science, but has also now come to a fuller insight into the generative role and participatory autonomy of the human person that was forged in the Western humanist tradition, while also assimilating the critical insights of postmodern thought into the enactive, participatory nature of human knowledge and experience.

### 35. Charles Tart

Transpersonal psychology is a fundamental area of research, scholarship, and application based on experiences of temporarily transcending our usual identification with our limited biological, historical, cultural and personal self and, at the deepest and most profound levels of experience possible, recognizing/being “something” of vast intelligence and compassion that encompasses/is the entire universe. From this perspective our ordinary, “normal” biological, historical, cultural, and personal self is seen as an important, but quite partial (and often pathologically distorted) manifestation or expression of this much greater “something” that is our deeper origin and destination.

Transpersonal experiences generally have a profoundly transforming effect on the lives of those who experience them, both inspiring an understanding of great love, compassion and non-ordinary kinds of intelligence, and also making them more aware of the distorting and pathological limitations of their ordinary selves that must be transformed for full psychological and spiritual maturity. Because people ordinarily identify with the personal, which tends to separate us, rather than with the transpersonal, which impresses us with our fundamental unity and oneness with each other and all life, intelligent knowledge of and/or contact with the transpersonal can be of great potential value in solving the problems of a world divided against itself.

Transpersonal psychology draws knowledge and practices from mainstream psychology, anthropology, history, sociology and other disciplines when needed,

and tries to understand them from the more inclusive transpersonal perspective.

### 36. *Frances Vaughan*

Transpersonal psychology studies the nature and implications of transpersonal experiences that extend the sense of identity beyond the ego to encompass wider aspects of reality. Transpersonal psychology addresses the whole person, body, emotions, mind and spirit, in the context of community and culture. Multiple epistemologies, including empirical, rational and intuitive, are employed in an inquiry into subtle dimensions of consciousness and their potential for healing and personal growth. Transpersonal psychology does not espouse any particular faith, philosophy or religious belief, being open to multiple perspectives on human development and spiritual realization. Transpersonal psychotherapy seeks to integrate the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of relationships and action in the world.

### 37. *Miles A. Vich*

During the first 15 years of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* I found myself in general agreement with the definitions appearing in the *JTP* statement of purpose (see Vich, Vol. 15 #2). Today my view is rather pragmatic. In ordinary conversation: “The area where psychology and spiritual life and experience interact or overlap.” Examples, elaborations and explanations can follow. For more in-depth purposes:

Transpersonal Psychology is the study of the full range of human awareness, examined from informed psychological and spiritual/religious perspectives, in various cultures and eras. As a broadly inclusive field it focuses on theory and practice, is multidisciplinary, uses multiple methodologies, and applies its findings to individual, social, and planetary concerns and needs.

### 38. *Jenny Wade*

As a developmentalist specializing in noetics, I consider transpersonal psychology to be the study of the widest possible range of different types of bodymind awareness for the contribution they can make to the health or wholeness of an individual, to humanity as a whole, and to the greater collective of all sentient beings. This includes considering the validity, usefulness, and application of nonordinary states of consciousness as they occur naturally and through adventitious or deliberate induction, regardless of how they are valued by cultural conventions (including whether they are considered “spiritual” or not, a judgment that is often entirely retrospective and contextual in addition to being culturally-bound). My definition also deliberately acknowledges bodymind integration, especially the need for exploring and acknowledging the inseparability of psyche and soma, an area insufficiently explored in traditional psychology outside a tendency to medicate away nonordinary or difficult states. I define nonordinary as any cognition that differs

significantly from the Cartesian-Newtonian causality of Piagetian Formal Operations structuring of time, space, and agency which, in most industrialized countries is considered the consensus reality of normal, awake adults, and therefore constitutes the criteria for “mental health.” As a result, this definition has metaphysical and theoretical implications that go far beyond therapeutic diagnoses and interventions, challenging the rather archaic materialist models of traditional psychology, psychiatry and the Western behavioral sciences generally. It is extremely important that transpersonal psychology be considered within the post-Newtonian paradigms emerging in physics and biology, and that the field develop a theoretical underpinning congruent with grand paradigms and teleological issues in addition to the smaller theory necessary at the level of therapeutic application and intervention.

### 39. *John Welwood*

Transpersonal psychology should be an integrative psychology that studies the whole of human existence in the context of the ground of human existence: the essential nature of consciousness. It would explore both the essential, suprapersonal nature of consciousness and its relationship to the other levels of consciousness. This would involve developing an understanding of the relationships between three main levels of human existence: the pre-personal (egoic conditioned mind), the personal (the development of the person, the individuation process, human relationship issues), and the trans-personal (nondual awareness, egolessness, objective consciousness).

Finally, in the interest of wholeness, and considering the forum nature of the article, we encouraged our senior author and the *JTP* editor to step outside their respective roles and offer reflections on their own perspectives.

### 40. *Mariana Caplan*

The field of Transpersonal Psychology, as it continues to grow in relationship to the emerging and changing needs of the respective movements of psychology and spirituality in Western culture, is called upon to address the following questions: “How does enduring transformation occur in the human being at all levels?” “What constitutes authentic psycho-physical-spiritual integration?” “Through what contexts and practices, and in what circumstances, can this integration effectively be cultivated to full fruition?” The “trans” aspect of the transpersonal must work *through* the personal at all levels of experience, and not *above* it, thus *transmuting* existing structures of consciousness in order to express increasing levels of refinement, rather than bypassing or repressing them.

The data collected in the first four decades of the field regarding altered states of consciousness, dreams, psychedelic experiences, and the like, have been invaluable in terms of bringing greater awareness to the existence and accessibility of non-ordinary states of consciousness. While honoring this research for its necessary contribution to the field, it has become evident that mystical experiences and



transpersonal phenomena alone do not transform the human being in an integrated and enduring manner.

Therefore, Transpersonal Psychology, in its optimal expression, is a body of education and practice addressing how the human being transforms in an integrated, embodied manner; how that transformation is sustained and further developed into the domain of limitless possibility; and how such transformation can be effectively used to educate and serve humanity-at-large.

#### *41. Marcie Boucouvalas*

Finding one's path to an in-depth understanding of the transpersonal terrain is a lifelong process. All is not understood by the intellect only—or from the space of “ordinary” consciousness alone—as may be possible with some fields and movements. Moreover, deeper layers of understanding continually emerge along with one's own development on both autonomous and homonomous trajectories. Yet we must continue to invite one another, and others, into our understanding. While the 4-tiered scope from my earlier inquiries still resonates (encompassing individual, group, societal, and planetary/cosmic development), emphases have shifted, and new challenges arisen. A global reach has emerged as more countries are hosting transpersonal professional associations, publications, and web sites, and the macro context is further illuminated as more disciplines build a transpersonal literature base. Also, as is typical with growth, some of the terrain has moved more centrally into mainstream (e.g. relevance of spirituality to psychotherapy, dialogues and systematic inquiry between long time meditators/Eastern disciplines and scientists).

The transpersonal perspective offers a vision to all disciplines concerned with the human species in its integrated approach to understanding the whole human phenomenon as it unfolds in the cosmos in all its complexity, subtleness, and sacredness—respecting the importance and uniqueness of various autonomies (individual, group, nation, etc.) while heralding connections (sometimes intangible and unseen) in identity and Being that transcend these differences. Experiences called “transpersonal,” although transitory, catalyze a shift in consciousness that enables broader, deeper perspectives and often an appreciation for the reverence of life and all living creatures. Such experiences have the potential to contribute to transpersonal development where a sense of ethics, for example, might move from an externally motivated space to an internally integrated sense of right action. The dynamics of how this way of Being emerges and is sustained is of central importance for the planet.

Transpersonal experiences we have learned, however, do not always herald transpersonal development. Focus on levels, states, and structures of consciousness while important are not always portals to spiritual development or the divine center. Getting outside and beyond one's separate self sense as a primary source of motivation is significant, but what about the challenge of explaining or better understanding suicide bombers? Other challenges abound: maintaining a balance between staying open and in process, while at the same time having a core to the field; embracing multiple meanings of transpersonal while simultaneously

recognizing partial understandings that are mistaken for the whole; recognizing that external practices and behaviors alone do not necessarily lead to transpersonal development without accompanying inner work; and continually encouraging, supporting, improving, and further developing transpersonal approaches to inquiry and action conducted from many spaces of consciousness, and various ways and sources of knowing, with a simultaneous commitment to Self-knowledge. These are my few thoughts about the meaning of “transpersonal.”

#### AN INVITATION FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

The responses received for this survey of contemporary viewpoints on transpersonal psychology were multi-faceted and wide-ranging. It is our hope that the perspectives presented in this article will not be used to judge and criticize other points of view, nor to separate, condemn, or divide the field, but rather to further critical reflection, to inspire and stimulate dialogue, and to support emerging perspectives and innovative theorists and practitioners in the field.

The development of any field is dependent upon a willingness to honor and acknowledge the foundational theories that have served as a springboard for the development of later perspectives. At the same time we must humble ourselves to relinquish less useful approaches in favor of more useful ones. It is our sincere wish that this article will serve the growth and evolution of the field of transpersonal psychology in the manner that is of greatest service to those dedicated to carrying it forth to its next evolutionary level. In the spirit of collective inquiry and interest in further developing a lively, informed discussion forum, we invite those interested in the field to contribute to this discussion by sharing their viewpoints, definitions, and reflections on the field of transpersonal psychology.

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Transpersonal psychology is a field of psychology for all of the soul searchers out there. Trans translates to "beyond", and personal refers to personality. Therefore, transpersonal psychology is a field of psychology is the study of the human aspect that goes beyond the realm in which the so-called normal personality operates. Studying transpersonal psychology often involves studying spirituality and the parts of the ego that are typically unexplored. Because this field of psychology deals with spirituality, there is often a religious aspect to it as well. This often involves getting acquainted with previously unknown levels of consciousness and life beyond the physical plane. Transpersonal psychology has one of the more interesting histories of all fields of psychology. Contemporary transpersonal disciplines include Transpersonal psychology, Transpersonal psychiatry, Transpersonal anthropology, Transpersonal sociology and Transpersonal ecology. ^ a b c Caplan, Hartelius & Rardin. Contemporary viewpoints on Transpersonal Psychology. The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 2003, Vol. 35, No. 2. ^ a b c Atlas, N. (2016). "Transpersonal psychologists attempt to integrate timeless wisdom with modern Western psychology and translate spiritual principles into scientifically grounded, contemporary language. Transpersonal psychology addresses the full spectrum of human psychospiritual developmentâ€"from our deepest wounds and needs to the existential crisis of the human being, to the most transcendent capacities of our consciousness." Instead of focusing on one school of psychological thought, or even just one discipline, transpersonal psychology seeks to incorporate a broad array of ideas, disciplines, and theories like philosophy, literature, health theories, art, social theory...