

## Notes on the meaning of transpersonal psychology

Compiled from various sources by the *Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP)* (now [www.softa.edu](http://www.softa.edu))

Reformatted October 6, 2013 for the [www.WorldU.edu](http://www.WorldU.edu) Library.

**The simplest definition is that transpersonal psychology is spiritual psychology. It recognizes that humanity has drives toward wholeness, toward connecting with and experiencing the divine.**



from <http://www.chakras.co.za/>

Transpersonal Psychology is the **extension of psychological studies** into consciousness studies, spiritual inquiry, body-mind relationships and transformation. Carl Jung first coined the term transpersonal (uberpersonlich) when he used the phrase 'transpersonal unconscious' as a synonym for 'collective unconscious'. A key stimulus for the establishment of transpersonal psychology as a distinct field of inquiry was research on self-actualizing persons by Abraham **Maslow**. Maslow's work addressed not only psychological wounding and personal development, but the study of peak experiences, inspired creativity, altruistic ideals, and personal actions that transcend 'ordinary' personality as well. The work has been refined by scholars such as **Roger Walsh, Frances Vaughan, Stanislav Grof, Arthur J. Deikman, Ken Wilber** and **Charles Tart**. Transpersonal psychology now encompasses the study of the full range of human experience, from abnormal behavior to healthy normal functioning, to spiritually embodied, and transcendent consciousness. The exact nature and boundaries of Transpersonal Psychology is still being debated among academics, although there has been much written on the

topic. Generally, the field can be said to encompass three major areas: Beyond-Ego Psychology, Integrative/Holistic Psychology, and Transformative Psychology. This model of the field is discussed in depth by Glenn Hartelius, Mariana Caplan, and Mary Anne Rardin in their work, *Transpersonal Psychology: Defining the Past, Divining the Future*, which can be downloaded in PDF format.

The following compilation by **Robert Hutchins**, Ph.D., offers ten simple ways to explain transpersonal psychology

1. Transpersonal Psychology is a **psychology of health and human potential**. While recognizing and addressing human psychopathology, transpersonal psychology does not derive its model of the human psyche from the ill or diseased. Instead of defining ourselves as all essentially neurotic (if not worse), transpersonal psychology makes it possible to perceive the individual as one engaged in the process of development toward full humanity, as exemplified by the words and deeds of great men and women. Transpersonal psychology looks to saints, prophets, great artists, heroes, and heroines for models of full human development and of the growth-oriented nature of the normal human psyche.

2. Transpersonal psychology and transpersonal psychotherapy, in particular, does not see the human personality as an end in itself. Our personal history and the resulting personality traits, tendencies, and attributes are seen as **the crust or skin covering our transpersonal essence**. Another way of putting this is that **the personality the vessel or vehicle which enables the soul and spirit to navigate through the world**. Thus, the proper role of the personality is to be a translucent window, a servant to divinity within.

3. Transpersonal psychology is a **psychology of human development**. As developmental psychologists, we agree with the object relations theorists that there is a continuum of development, in the sense of self and its stability. This continuum begins with individuals who have not achieved object constancy and strong ego identity, people who might be called psychotic. The next step up the development ladder are those with "borderline personality disorder", in whom an unstable sense of self and object constancy have developed. Another step up toward full functionality are those with a strong sense of ego identity and clear object relations, the so-called "normals". Transpersonal psychology, at

this point, extends object relations theory by pointing to the next stages of human development, wherein there is disidentification from one's personality or personal identity and recognition of object impermanence or transiency. This stage is typified by the states of consciousness obtained by advanced meditators. A further step in development is posited wherein the person realizes the Supreme Identity (i.e., enlightenment or connection with God), and the relative nature of normal reality, as seen in saints and mystics.

4. **Transpersonal psychology is an approach to the whole person.** It seeks a balanced development of the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical, social, and creative expression aspects of a person's life. Thus, all six areas are addressed scholastically and therapeutically, and integration or balance is sought.

5. **Transpersonal psychology goes through the personal to the transpersonal.** Far from just transcending our humanity, it is **a process of working through our humanity to reach the recognition of divinity within.** Thus transpersonal psychology emerges out of personal psychology, as a result of the individual's growth and maturation.

6. Transpersonal psychology is the future norm in psychology, as yet unrecognized by the mainstream. Transpersonal psychology is largely inclusive of and builds on the psychoanalytic, behavioral/experimental, and humanistic psychologies that preceded it. It provides both an extension of and a different perspective from these previous psychologies. It is in no way a denial of the validity of their theories and techniques. It simply places them in a new context. Transpersonal psychology asserts that religious and mystical experiences and the perspectives that derive from them are valid approaches to reality and can be studied scientifically. It is the beginning attempt of science to understand these most meaningful of human experiences.

7. Transpersonal psychology recognizes and studies the different states and stations of consciousness. It recognizes that such different states as dreaming, hypnotic trance, and "waking" consciousness all have sub-levels within themselves and possess their own state-specific systems, their own realities. Further, transpersonal psychology recognizes that not only are there different states of consciousness that one may move into and out of during the course of a day but that there are also stages or stations of consciousness that,

through development, one can come to live in relatively permanently.

8. Transpersonal psychology is **largely a return to the perennial philosophy identified by Aldous Huxley.** Mystical experience and shamanistic healing practices, which have been central concerns of humankind for millenia, are also a focus of transpersonal psychology.

9. Transpersonal psychology is **depth psychology.** It is part of the therapeutic stream started by Freud and his successors, Jung, Rank, and Reich. Roberto Assagioli, who posited a superconscious, as well as a subconscious, integrated transpersonal and depth psychology, as did Carl Jung

10. **Transpersonal psychology is spiritual psychology.** It recognizes that humanity has both and drives toward wholeness, toward connecting with and experiencing the divine as well as drives toward sex and aggression.

**Mainstream psychology views the psyche in purely local terms i.e. each person's psyche is located and confined within the locus of their physical body. The standard psychological approach lacks the ability to discern the interconnectedness of collective psychology that gives rise to mass events. All minds are linked together and co-operate as integrated parts in a collective, non-local field of consciousness...** the scope of modern psychology is extended into new domains with the understanding of the non-local and non-temporal dimensions of the psyche... the role that they play in shaping both individual and group psychology. human psyche as consciousness... is not bound by space and time. The non-local field of consciousness **unites all minds in a singular and inherently inseparable unified quantum field. The ollective human psyche operates as a non-local field of energy, information and sentience (the quality of having awareness). Certain functions of the human psyche operate as a non-local quantum field... an interconnected and interdependent mind-field...** new non-local or field psychology focuses not on the psyche of the individual in isolation but on the entire field...

In connecting to the transpersonal the individual connects to **their higher expanded self... their expanded states of awareness.** There is the recognition of a connection to the whole and something larger. This

something is **The All That Is, God consciousness**. The transpersonal is not religious, but through religion one can have transpersonal experiences. The transpersonal can be felt in a myriad of religions, belief systems, rituals, esoteric philosophies, disciplines and activities. However, to consistently be able to tap into this state at will or live in this state is quite another situation, and is possible.

**The transpersonal is ego inclusive.** This is very important. The inclusion of the ego means there is nothing to fix or get rid of in the psyche. **The key is to align the ego functioning to the blueprint and reign of the higher self (soul self)** The ego's needs and wants are taken into account and harnessed for the benefit of the whole psyche. The desires of the human ego mind are allowed to be defined and refined for the growth, health and total wellness of the person. There are processes that facilitate this process. In this way **the ego is seen as a functioning part of a being; however not the total part of a being.** an individual is looked upon as a spirit with a soul contained within the very fabric of being a soul purpose and an essential reason for being and living. one is being just by being here. . The living is up to you, and how you live your life. Your unfoldment is in your hands and awareness. Your life and how you live it has a purpose whether you are conscious of this or not.

The conscious awareness and unfolding of this blueprint leads to your reason for being and is seen as being integral to the universe, world, society and universal/divine plan. In this way there are no mistakes, just the possibility of the realization of one's wholeness and perfection. With this self realization then comes the self actualizing of this awareness of being into the world creating a sense of purpose and deeper sense of peace and fulfillment in one' life.

There is a variety of 'psychologies' in different cultures each representing a shared construct or paradigm concerning the question which is fundamental to them all: 'what is the nature of the human personality' or 'human nature'? The question is answered within the constraints of cultural perspectives... they differ in the degree of emphasis on the various facets dimensions of the human personality... states of awareness or 'consciousness states'... depending on the existent cultural norms different consciousness states are considered appropriate in a given social situation. The different viewpoints are based on the means of codification of people's experience and reality as it is perceived and expressed in the linguistic systems of their cultures. To a large extent, it is the cultural norms which

determine people's state of awareness and their perception of reality and human nature. People's awareness and perception of reality and human nature is determined largely by cultural norms with respect to values of the culture. certain states of awareness are appropriate and acceptable for an individual in a given social situation. The different paradigms produce different 'psychologies' The different perspectives of the various 'psychologies' ... their methods and techniques... are not to be regarded as contradictory but complementary they represent different viewpoints emphasizing different dimensions of a complex multidimensional human personality as a whole... and can provide knowledge about the human personality or 'human nature'.

The various 'psychologies' differ according to the 'level' of consciousness which is addressed or emphasized. It is through the various methods and techniques of the different 'psychologies' that scientists can have access to knowledge about the human mental processes. Consequently, transpersonal psychologists consider that the different 'psychologies' are complementary and not contradictory. Research in this area indicates that all individuals have the potential for expressing the different levels of consciousness. As a result of the paradigm shift, the aim of research efforts would be to formulate a universal theory of the nature of human consciousness. With the acknowledgement of the limitations of the behavioural sciences, along with the recognition of possible limitations of the consciousness disciplines, it is hoped that new paradigms will be created which will incorporate the world views of both Eastern and Western 'psychologies.' The resulting implications for mental health and psychological growth would be profound and far-reaching. Western 'psychology' has traditionally emphasized the 'ego level' of the spectrum of human consciousness states. The assumption that man's happiness depends on the material world, 'high standard of living' and 'wealth,' has proved to be ill-founded. Evidence abounds to indicate that material wealth in excess of the amount sufficient for one's needs is not a source of 'happiness.' Beyond the 'ego-level' on the spectrum of consciousness states, the 'mind level' of transpersonal dimensions of human psychology constitutes the source of self-fulfillment beyond self-interest, the source of a meaningful appreciation for one's own humanity and the humanity of others. ("Beyond Ego: Transpersonal Dimensions in Psychology" Edited by Roger Walsh, M.D. Ph.D. and Frances Vaughan Ph.D., J.P. Tarcher, Inc. Los Angeles 1980)

Eastern cultures of Asia and India, consciousness is considered to be indivisible from matter and the primary constituent of 'reality'. The reality of the material world is a reflection of thought and the mind-thought relation is a 'psycho-spiritual system' ...a multiple-states-of-consciousness model of the human personality which is broader than the Western model of the behavioural sciences or '[behaviourism](#)'. The Eastern model involves a wide range of mental or 'consciousness' states and modes of perception... extending from pathological states through normal healthy waking states and including the more profound 'higher' states which lead to profound insights and creative or 'adaptive' behaviour ('[adaptability](#)')

The 'psychologies' which are based on the Eastern model emphasize the need for discipline to train the mind in its capacity to alter its state of consciousness and thus its mode of perception.... '[holistic perception](#)'. These are the so-called '[consciousness disciplines](#)'.

In the past, the Eastern consciousness disciplines have been examined by Western scientists from their own point of view i.e applying the assumptions of the behavioural sciences. Not understanding the assumptions of the Eastern paradigms, Western scientists have denied the credibility of other states of consciousness and other perceptions of 'reality'. They have discredited the 'higher' states of consciousness and described practitioners of the consciousness disciplines as pathological, delirious, psychotic and even regressing to infantilism.

Without the mental training prescribed by the doctrines of the consciousness disciplines, an individual can be completely unaware of any fixation to the Western 'psychology' paradigm, in itself psychotic behaviour, defined by the behavioural sciences as the lack of recognition of a distorted perception of 'reality.' The result is a '[paradigm clash](#).' The behavioural science model is only useful in the study of phenomena which are related to the paradigm of the behavioural sciences. It is not useful for the study of the consciousness disciplines which when viewed from the limited perspective of behavioural science are incomprehensible and nonsensical. Objective investigation of the consciousness disciplines by Western psychology or behavioural science is obscured by the psychological viewpoint of the scientists themselves. In order for Western behavioural scientists to fully understand human behaviour, they need to acknowledge the validity of perceiving the Eastern 'psychologies' as alternative 'lenses' for gaining further insights into the human mental processes. They must acknowledge the so-called

'higher' states which transcend - go beyond - the usual limits of awareness and identity or 'ego'... '[ego-transcendence](#)'.

Objectivity depends on rejection of the assumption that 'higher' states of consciousness represent evidence of psychopathology, delirium, regression to infantilism and limited intelligence. It depends on the willingness to adapt to new research paradigms. Awareness of inaccuracies depends on their training not only in the behavioural sciences, but in the consciousness disciplines as well... depends on their ability to shift their viewpoint from one paradigm to another. Only then can they apply the empirical methods of behavioural science to an objective investigation of the consciousness disciplines.

Levels of human consciousness According to the doctrines of transpersonal psychology, the spectrum of the different states of consciousness represents a hierarchy of different levels of expression of human consciousness... the 'mind level', the 'existential level', the 'ego level' and the 'shadow level'. The 'mind level' represents the innermost consciousness or 'supreme identity' of humanness and is also known as the 'higher' state of consciousness. The 'existential level' represents the individual's sense of identity as a psychophysical organism existing in space and time. The existential level is influenced by the individual's experience in a familial and cultural context and is considered to be the source of rational thought processes and personal will. The 'ego level' represents the state of mind and body separation and the individual's identification with a self-image. The 'shadow level' represents those facets of the personality which are not accepted or acknowledged at the ego level i.e. the individual's tendencies for wickedness or '[evil](#)'. Every individual has the potential for expressing each one of the different states of consciousness.

**The spectrum of the different states of consciousness represents the different levels of expression of the human consciousness.**

Western scientists known as '**transpersonal psychologists**' are interested in formulating a synthesis of the knowledge of Eastern consciousness psychologies with that of Western behavioural science. The aim of their research efforts is to formulate a **universal theory of the nature of human consciousness**. They investigate the altered consciousness states brought about by psychedelic drugs, meditation, yoga, and

biofeedback techniques....'[spiritual emergence](#)'....  
['transpersonal psychotherapy'](#). The acknowledgement of the limitations of the behavioural sciences, along with the recognition of possible limitations of the consciousness disciplines they hope to create new paradigms which would incorporate the world views of both Eastern and Western psychologies. Western 'psychology' has traditionally emphasized the '**ego level**' from which derives the assumption that the source of '[happiness](#)' is material 'wealth' and a 'high standard of living'. There is abundant evidence to indicate that material wealth in excess of the amount sufficient for one's needs is not a source of happiness.

***The source of true happiness lies beyond egoistic self-interest*** ...the trans ego or transpersonal dimensions of the human psyche ...in the '**mind level**' of meaningful appreciation for one's own humanity and the humanity of others. The implications are profound and far-reaching not only for mental health and psychological growth but for education as well.

Implications for education Our current educational systems are almost entirely addressed to the mode of reason. Training of the observational and contemplative modes and affective dimension is almost completely lacking. Even within the mode of reason, most emphasis is placed on the **acquisition of data** and less on actual training and developing skill in reasoning itself. One of the goals discussed by Tom Roberts in "Education and transpersonal relations" is therefore the expansion of the educative process into these other dimensions. Roberts suggests that though the field is very young, a number of useful and enjoyable techniques exist for facilitating the attainment of traditional and nontraditional goals. One of the most important tasks awaiting transpersonal educators is the exploration of the optimal goals and potentials of such an expanded curriculum.(Walsh p 198)

**Thomas Roberts** "Education and transpersonal relations"(228-233) "there is emerging awareness that our current educational psychology is not so much wrong as so very limited." "... psychologists are extending their domain to include the study of consciousness" "What do ..states of consciousness have to do with education? Quite a bit, both at the immediately applicable level and in long-range possibilities. Surprising as it seems, teachers and counselors find no problem in figuring out how to use transpersonal techniques in their day-to-day work. Enough books of games and techniques for classroom use have appeared to justify the label "**transpersonal**

**education."** The immediate uses of transpersonal education stem from applying insights from transpersonal psychology to our ordinary awake state of consciousness (and consequently our ordinary schooling) rather than anything requiring an altered state of consciousness.

---

## **How does transpersonal psychology represent a paradigm shift in Western psychology?**

Roger Walsh, M.D. Ph.D. and Frances Vaughan  
"Beyond Ego: Transpersonal Dimensions in Psychology" Edited by Ph.D.,J.P. Tarcher, Inc. Los Angeles 1980

**Our formal Western 'psychology' as a science of mind and behaviour known as 'behavioural science' is less than a hundred years old and a product of European and American cultures.** According to the tenets of this 'psychology' only a limited number of normal consciousness states are recognized: dreaming and nondreaming sleep, and waking. The most desirable dimension of the personality and the most satisfactory for an individual's perception of 'reality' is considered to be the ordinary waking state of consciousness. The behavioural scientists consider that essentially all psychological functioning and phenomena can be codified and communicated through language. Consequently it is through intellectual analysis that they can be understood. They ignore those 'psychologies' which present too many difficulties for objective study. The individual who lives within the context of the paradigm of Western psychology is unaware of its limitations and of the mental distortions which affect his perception of 'reality.' Matter is considered to be the primary constituent of 'reality' and consciousness the product of material brain processes. By defining 'psychology' as the 'mental or behavioural characteristics of an individual or group,' behavioural science becomes only one of the many 'psychologies' described by different peoples and cultures of the world.

**In the Eastern cultures, in Asia and India, the consciousness is considered to be the primary constituent of 'reality' and the material world is a reflection of thought.** Emphasizing the need for disciplining and training the individual's capacities for altering his consciousness states, these 'psychologies' or 'psycho-spiritual systems' are known as 'consciousness

disciplines.' Their doctrines claim that there is a broad range of mental states which include the more profound and more adaptive 'higher' states of consciousness. These lead to the most profound insights of the mental processes which constitute 'reality,' indivisible from matter and the material world. Western scientists have been examining the Eastern consciousness disciplines from the Western point of view. They have denied the credibility of other states of consciousness and other perceptions of 'reality.' Not understanding the assumptions of the Eastern paradigms, they have been applying those of the behavioural sciences. Discrediting the 'higher' states of consciousness, they have described practitioners of the consciousness disciplines as pathological, delirious, psychotic and even regressing to infantilism. Without the mental training prescribed by the doctrines of the consciousness disciplines, an individual can be completely unaware of any fixation to the Western 'psychology' paradigm, in itself **psychotic behaviour, defined by the behavioural sciences as the lack of recognition of a distorted perception of 'reality.'** Involving a wider range of states of consciousness and modes of perception, the multiple-states-of-consciousness model of the consciousness disciplines is broader than that of the Western behavioural sciences. The result is a 'paradigm clash.' The Western model is useful in the study of phenomena related to the paradigm of the behavioural sciences but is too limited for the study of the **consciousness disciplines which appear incomprehensible and nonsensical when viewed from the limited Western perspective.**

**The behavioral sciences ignore those 'psychologies' which present too many difficulties for objective study.** The individual who lives within the context of the paradigm of Western psychology is unaware of its limitations and of the mental distortions which affect his perception of 'reality.' Matter is considered to be the primary constituent of 'reality' and consciousness the product of material brain processes. By defining 'psychology' as the 'mental or behavioural characteristics of an individual or group,' behavioural science becomes only one of the many 'psychologies' described by different peoples and cultures of the world. The variety of 'psychologies' in different cultures represents the variety of shared constructs or 'paradigms' which are concerned with the question which is fundamental to them all: "What is a person"? With differing perspectives and viewpoints regarding human nature, they differ in the degree of emphasis on the various facets of the human personality. The different viewpoints are based on the means of codification of

people's experience and reality as it is perceived and expressed in the linguistic systems of their cultures. To a large extent, it is the cultural norms which determine people's state of awareness and their perception of reality and human nature. Certain states of awareness are appropriate and acceptable for an individual in a given social situation depending on the existent cultural norms with respect to the accepted constructs or paradigms of the culture. Thus the different perspectives of the various 'psychologies' are not to be regarded as contradictory. More likely, they represent different viewpoints emphasizing different dimensions of a complex multidimensional human personality as a whole.

**In order for Western scientists to investigate the consciousness disciplines, they must do several things.** They must first recognize that such investigations involve a clash of paradigms, their own with that of the consciousness disciplines. Consequently they must examine the beliefs and models of the paradigm within which they would carry out the investigations. They must be open-minded enough to reject the assumption that the consciousness disciplines are evidence of psychopathology or limited intelligence. They must be prepared to accept the possibility that the paradigms of these other 'psychologies' may be as sophisticated as their own. They must be willing to adapt new research paradigms which serve to concentrate their attention on the appropriate problem areas. As well as being trained in the behavioural sciences, they must be trained in the consciousness disciplines so that they can be aware of the distinction between their central phenomena and any inaccurate popular notions. They must in effect shift their viewpoint from the behavioural sciences paradigm to the consciousness disciplines paradigm. They can then apply the methods of behavioural science in an attempt to clarify the paradigm of the consciousness disciplines. The 'objective' study of human mental processes by Western psychology or behavioural science is obscured by the psychological viewpoint of the scientists themselves. In order for Western behavioural scientists to fully understand human behaviour, they need to acknowledge the validity of perceiving the Eastern 'psychologies' as alternative 'lenses' for gaining further insights into the human mental processes.

**Western scientists known as 'transpersonal psychologists' are interested in formulating a synthesis of the knowledge of Eastern consciousness 'psychologies' with that of Western 'behavioural science' and its empirical methods.** They have become interested in research of the altered consciousness states

brought about by psychedelic drugs, meditation, yoga, and biofeedback techniques. They acknowledge the broad range of consciousness states which extends from pathological states through normal healthy waking states and includes the so-called 'higher' states which transcend - go beyond - the usual limits of awareness and identity or 'ego.' The spectrum of the different states of consciousness appears to represent the different levels of expression of the human consciousness. The 'mind level' or 'higher' state represents the innermost consciousness or 'supreme identity' of humanness. The 'existential level' represents the level of identity as a psychophysical organism existing in space and time. Influenced by the familial and cultural context of the individual's experience, it is the source of rational thought processes and personal will. The 'ego level' represents the state of mind and body separation and the individual's identification with a self-image. The 'shadow level' represents the individual's 'evil' tendencies, those facets of the personality which are not accepted or acknowledged at the 'ego level.' The various 'psychologies' differ according to the 'level' of consciousness which is addressed or emphasized. It is through the various methods and techniques of the different 'psychologies' that scientists can have access to knowledge about the human mental processes. Consequently, transpersonal psychologists consider that the different 'psychologies' are complementary and not contradictory. Research in this area indicates that all individuals have the potential for expressing the different levels of consciousness.

**As a result of the paradigm shift, the aim of research efforts would be to formulate a universal theory of the nature of human consciousness.** With the acknowledgement of the limitations of the behavioural sciences, along with the recognition of possible limitations of the consciousness disciplines, it is hoped that new paradigms will be created which will incorporate the world views of both Eastern and Western 'psychologies.' The resulting implications for mental health and psychological growth would be profound and far-reaching. Western 'psychology' has traditionally emphasized the 'ego level' of the spectrum of human consciousness states. The assumption that man's happiness depends on the material world, 'high standard of living' and 'wealth,' has proved to be ill-founded. Evidence abounds to indicate that material wealth in excess of the amount sufficient for one's needs is not a source of 'happiness.' Beyond the 'ego-level' on the spectrum of consciousness states, the 'mind level' of transpersonal dimensions of human psychology constitutes the source of self-fulfillment beyond self-

interest, the source of a meaningful appreciation for one's own humanity and the humanity of others.