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Introduction

WE ARE astoundingly ingenious creatures. We have gone to the moon, split the atom, unraveled the genetic code, and probed the birth of the universe. Indeed, modern civilization stands as a monument to the boundless creativity of the human intellect.

Yet, while evidence of our intellectual and technological genius is all around us, there is growing concern that in other ways we have seriously underestimated ourselves. In part because of the blinding brilliance of our technological triumphs, we have distracted and dissociated ourselves from our inner world, sought outside for answers that can only be found within, denied the subjective and the sacred, overlooked latent capacities of mind, imperiled our planet, and lived in a collective trance—a contracted, distorted state of mind that goes unrecognized because we share it and take it to be "normality."

There exist within us, however, latent but unexplored creative capacities, depths of psyche, states of consciousness, and stages of development undreamed of by most people. Transpersonal disciplines have emerged to explore these possibilities, and they emerged first in psychology.

THE EVOLUTION OF PSYCHOLOGY

Western psychology was born from two distinct sources: the laboratory and experimental science on one hand, and hospitals and clinical concerns on the other. In its practitioners' efforts to establish it as a legitimate science, they modeled experimental psychology on physics, focused on observable, measurable behavior, and shied away from the unobservable world of inner experience. Experimental psychology became dominated by behaviorism.

Clinical psychology and psychiatry, on the other hand, were born of a concern for treating pathology. Since much suffering stems from unconscious forces, clinical work focused on the subjective and the unconscious. Clinical psychiatry and psychology became dominated by psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis and behaviorism thus laid the foundations of clinical and experimental psychology, which they dominated for most of

the first half of the twentieth century, becoming known as the first and second forces of Western psychology.

But by the sixties there was growing concern that along with the many contributions made by these schools of thought, there were also significant restrictions and distortions. Increasingly it appeared that they could not do justice to the full range of human experience. They focused on psychopathology or generalized from simple laboratory-controlled conditions to the complexities of daily life, and they ignored crucial dimensions of human experience, such as consciousness and exceptional psychological well-being.

In addition, they sometimes pathologized vital transpersonal experiences. For example, Freud interpreted such experiences as reflections of infantile helplessness, while other psychoanalysts dismissed them as "regressions to union with the breast," or "narcissistic neuroses." As the philosopher Jacob Needleman put it, "Freudianism institutionalized the underestimation of human possibility."[1]

Humanistic psychology emerged in response to these concerns. In the words of Abraham Maslow, a founding father of both humanistic and transpersonal psychology, "This point of view in no way denies the usual Freudian picture, but it does add to it and supplement it. To oversimplify the matter somewhat, it is as if Freud supplied to us the sick half of psychology, and we must now fill it out with the healthy half. Perhaps this health psychology will give us more possibility of controlling and improving our lives and for making ourselves better people."[2]

Humanistic psychologists wanted to study human experience and what was most central to life and well-being, rather than what was easily measured in the laboratory. One discovery in particular was to have an enormous impact and eventually give birth to transpersonal psychology. Exceptionally psychologically healthy people tend to have "peak experiences": brief but extremely intense, blissful, meaningful, and beneficial experiences of expanded identity and union with the universe. Similar experiences have been recognized across history and have been called mystical, spiritual, and unitive experiences, or in the East, samadhi and satori.

Eventually researchers recognized that various Eastern traditions describe whole families of peak experiences, and claim to have methods for inducing them at will. It soon became apparent that peak experiences have been highly valued throughout history, are the focus of several Asian disciplines, and yet seem to have been significantly underestimated—even pathologized—in the modern Western world. Transpersonal psychology arose in part to explore these experiences.

Of course, humanistic and transpersonal studies did not arise in a cultural vacuum. Rather, they both reflected and fed the dramatic changes

occurring during the sixties within the culture at large. These included the birth of the human potential movement and the questioning of the materialistic dream, both of which led some people to look within for the enduring satisfaction that external success and acquisitions had seductively promised, but failed to provide.

Psychedelics also had a powerful impact and unleashed an unprecedented range and intensity of experiences on a society ill equipped to assimilate them. For the first time in history, a significant proportion of the culture experienced alternate states of consciousness. Some of these were clearly painful and problematic. Yet others were transcendent states that demonstrated to an unsuspecting world the plasticity of consciousness, the broad range of its potential states, the limitations and distortions of our usual state, and the possibility of more desirable ones.

At the same time, the introduction of Asian meditative disciplines offered ways of reaching similar states and insights through non-drug means. Suddenly, experiences that for centuries had appeared to many Westerners as nonsensical or pathological became valid and valued in the lives of a sizable minority. Western culture has never been the same since.

The many social effects included interest in Asian cultures and traditions and in spiritual practices as diverse as yoga, shamanism, and Christian contemplation. Dissatisfaction with conventional values led to alternate life-styles such as voluntary simplicity and ecological sensitivity, which flourished to express and support the new perspectives. Within universities new research fields explored topics such as meditation, biofeedback, psychedelics, and states of consciousness. Yesterday's cultural curiosity had become today's mainstream research. Transpersonal psychologists sought to integrate these novel findings into a new discipline, and they were soon joined by researchers in psychiatry, anthropology, sociology, and ecology.

DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

What, then, is the transpersonal?

Transpersonal experiences may be defined as experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (*trans*) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, *psyche*, and cosmos.

Transpersonal disciplines study transpersonal experiences and related phenomena. Practitioners seek to expand the scope of their disciplines to include the study of transpersonal phenomena and to bring their particular disciplinary expertise to this study.[3]

Transpersonal psychology is the psychological study of transpersonal experiences and their correlates. These correlates include the nature, varieties, causes, and effects of transpersonal experiences and development, as

well as the psychologies, philosophies, disciplines, arts, cultures, lifestyles, reactions, and religions that are inspired by them, or that seek to induce, express, apply, or understand them.

Transpersonal psychiatry is the area of psychiatry that focuses on the study of transpersonal experiences and phenomena. Its focus is similar to transpersonal psychology, with a particular interest in the clinical and biomedical aspects of transpersonal phenomena.

Transpersonal anthropology is the cross-cultural study of transpersonal phenomena and the relationship between consciousness and culture.

Transpersonal sociology studies the social dimensions, implications, and expressions of transpersonal phenomena.

Transpersonal ecology studies the ecological dimensions, implications, and applications of transpersonal phenomena.

The *transpersonal movement* is the interdisciplinary movement that includes and integrates individual transpersonal disciplines.

These definitions describe the focus and purpose of transpersonal disciplines. It is important to note what these definitions do not do, however. They do not exclude the personal, limit the type of expansion of identity, tie transpersonal disciplines to any particular philosophy or worldview, or limit research to a particular method.

Transpersonal disciplines do not exclude or invalidate the personal realm. Rather, they set personal concerns within a larger context that acknowledges the importance of both personal and transpersonal experiences. Indeed, one interpretation of the term *transpersonal* is that the transcendent is expressed through (*trans*) the personal.

Likewise the definitions do not specify limits on the direction or extent of expansion of the sense of identity. Some ecologists emphasize the importance of horizontal expansion of identity to encompass the earth and life, while simultaneously denying the value or validity of vertical transcendence. On the other hand, for some spiritual practitioners this vertical expansion of identity to encompass transcendent images and realms is central, while others value identification with both the vertical (transcendent) and the horizontal (immanent) realms.

These definitions do not commit the transpersonal disciplines or their practitioners to any specific interpretation of transpersonal experiences. In particular they do not tie the disciplines to any particular ontology, metaphysics, or worldview, nor to any specific doctrine, philosophy, or religion. By focusing on experiences, the definitions allow for multiple interpretations of these experiences and the insights into human nature and the cosmos that they offer. Transpersonal experiences have long been interpreted in many different ways, and this will doubtless continue. A transpersonalist could be religious or nonreligious, theist or atheist. A

definition of transpersonal disciplines that focuses on experience thus makes room for a range of diverse but valuable and complementary views.

Finally, these definitions do not place limits on the methods for studying or researching transpersonal experiences. Rather, any valid epistemology (way of acquiring knowledge) is welcome. In practice, transpersonal researchers have encouraged an eclectic, interdisciplinary, integrative approach that makes appropriate use of all the so-called "three eyes of knowledge": the sensory, introspective-rational, and contemplative. This is in contrast to many other schools, which effectively advocate or rely on a single epistemology. For example, behaviorism has centered on sensory data and science, introspective schools such as psychoanalysis have emphasized mental observation, while yogic approaches focus on contemplation. To date, the transpersonal disciplines stand alone in adopting an eclectic epistemology that seeks to include science, philosophy, introspection, and contemplation and to integrate them in a comprehensive investigation adequate to the many dimensions of human experience and human nature.

Transpersonal disciplines, therefore, tend to be exceptionally wide-ranging, interdisciplinary, and integrative. Their investigations include higher developmental possibilities and what Maslow called "the farther reaches of human nature." This investigation builds on and integrates knowledge from fields such as neuroscience, cognitive science, anthropology, philosophy, and comparative religion and incorporates Eastern as well as Western perspectives. Topics of particular interest include consciousness and altered states, mythology, meditation, yoga, mysticism, lucid dreaming, psychedelics, values, ethics, relationships, exceptional capacities and psychological well-being, transconventional development, transpersonal emotions such as love and compassion, motives such as altruism and service, and transpersonal pathologies and therapies.

RELATIONSHIP TO RELIGION

Several of these topics overlap with areas of religious studies. This raises the question of the relationship of transpersonal disciplines to religion. Of course much depends on definitions. As Ken Wilber points out, "One of the great difficulties in discussing religion . . . is that it is not an 'it.' In my opinion, 'it' has at least a dozen different, major, largely exclusive meanings, and unfortunately these are not always, not even usually, distinguished in the literature."[4]

One simple definition of religion is that which is concerned with, or related to, the sacred. Since some, but not all, transpersonal experiences

are experiences of the sacred, and since some, but not all, religious experiences are transpersonal, there is clearly some overlap between transpersonal experiences and religious experiences. Transpersonal disciplines, however, are also interested in transpersonal experiences that are not religious, and in research, interpretations, psychologies, and philosophies devoid of religious overtones. Transpersonal disciplines espouse no creed or dogma, demand no particular religious convictions, espouse an open-minded scientific, philosophical, and experiential testing of all claims, and usually assume that transpersonal experiences can be interpreted either religiously or nonreligiously according to individual preference. Transpersonal disciplines and religion should therefore be regarded as distinct fields with partially overlapping areas of interest and also significant differences. Likewise, although they share some areas of interest, transpersonal psychology and transpersonal anthropology are clearly distinct from the psychology and anthropology of religion.

MULTISTATE DISCIPLINES

It is vitally important to note that transpersonal disciplines are multistate disciplines. Like Western culture, mainstream disciplines such as psychology and anthropology are predominantly unistate. That is, they are centered in, and focus on, a single state of consciousness—namely our usual waking state—and accord significantly less attention and importance to alternate states.

By contrast, multistate cultures accord more attention and value to states such as dreams and contemplation and therefore derive significant parts of their worldviews from multiple states. Examples of such multistate enterprises include shamanic tribal cultures, Buddhist psychology, and Taoist philosophy.

Traditional transpersonal disciplines, such as yoga and contemplation and their associated psychologies and philosophies, are designed to induce and illuminate multiple states. They are therefore clearly multistate disciplines. Contemporary transpersonal disciplines are attempts to forge modern multistate disciplines to bring the understanding, expression, and induction of transpersonal experiences and phenomena to the modern world and to combine the best of ancient and cross-cultural wisdom with contemporary disciplines.

Because they are multistate systems, transpersonal disciplines may be inherently broader than conventional disciplines, encompassing and valuing a wider range of human experiences and possibilities. This breadth extends to encompassing the contributions of multiple schools of thought. Having seen the ways in which any school or theory provides a selective

perspective that highlights some aspects of behavior and neglects or obscures others, transpersonalists are especially interested in the contributions and integration of diverse schools.

For example, rather than advocating the exclusive dominance of one perspective, transpersonal psychology suggests that apparently conflicting schools may address different perspectives, dimensions, and stages of human experience and may therefore be partly complementary. Thus, Freudian psychology is concerned with important issues of early development, while existential psychology speaks to universal issues confronting mature adults. Behavior therapy demonstrates the importance of environmental reinforcers in controlling behavior, while cognitive therapies illuminate the power of unrecognized thoughts and beliefs. Jungian psychology reminds us of the archetypal depths and power of the collective unconscious and the therapeutic potency of images and symbols. Asian systems such as Buddhist, yogic, and Vedantic psychologies complement Western approaches by describing stages of transpersonal development and providing techniques for realizing them.

Although transpersonal psychology includes areas beyond the usual scope of mainstream Western schools, it values the many contributions of these schools. It does not seek to replace them but rather to integrate them within a larger vision of human possibility. This is the transpersonal vision.

Of course, the transpersonal vision presented here is not complete or final. It, too, will doubtless yield in its turn to a still more comprehensive viewpoint.

> And yet if we only knew how each loss of one's viewpoint is a progress and how life changes when one passes from the stage of the closed truth to the stage of the open truth—a truth like life itself, too great to be trapped by points of view, because it embraces every point of view . . . a truth great enough to deny itself and pass endlessly into a higher truth.[5]

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TRANSPERSONAL VISION

Across centuries and cultures transpersonal experiences have been regarded as vitally or even supremely important. In our own time the transpersonal vision and transpersonal disciplines are crucially important for many reasons. They draw attention to a neglected, misunderstood family of experiences; provide new understandings of ancient ideas, religious traditions, and contemplative practices; offer more generous views of human nature; and point to unsuspected human possibilities.

Transpersonal disciplines seek to research and rehabilitate transpersonal

experiences that for too long have been dismissed as irrational or pathological. As the chapters of this book amply demonstrate, these experiences are regarded more accurately as healthy progressions than as pathological regressions. As Ken Wilber clearly argues, such experiences are not "regression in the service of the ego, but evolution and transcendence of the ego."[6]

The rehabilitation and appreciation of transpersonal experiences has enormous cross-cultural significance. It allows us to better appreciate many other cultures as well as their philosophies, religions, and art, and to integrate much historical and cross-cultural data.

In the first half of the twentieth century many Western anthropologists adopted the psychoanalytic perspective and therefore devalued transpersonal experiences. Since these experiences have been so widespread and valued in other cultures, the natural tendency was to reinforce Western biases that devalued other cultures. Eminent scholars could then unblinkingly reach conclusions such as: "The obvious similarities between schizophrenic regression and the practices of Yoga and Zen clearly indicate that the general trend in Oriental cultures is to withdraw into the self from an overbearingly difficult cultural, physical and social reality."[7]

Now that transpersonal experiences and processes are better understood, we can evaluate other cultures better and learn from their transpersonal wisdom accumulated over thousands of years. We can, in effect, reclaim what has been called "the Great Tradition": the sum total of humankind's cross-cultural religious-philosophical wisdom.

Just why transpersonal experiences have been valued throughout history is becoming clearer as we research them more closely. They offer significant psychological and social benefits. Transpersonal experiences can often, though certainly not invariably, produce dramatic, enduring, beneficial psychological changes. They can provide a sense of meaning and purpose, resolve existential quandaries, and inspire compassionate concern for humankind and the earth. Indeed, a single transpersonal experience can sometimes change a person's life forever. Moreover, growing evidence, discussed at various places throughout this book, suggests that a lack of such experiences may underlie a significant amount of the individual, social, and global pathology that surrounds and threatens us.

Transpersonal experiences also point to a cornucopia of human possibilities. They suggest that certain emotions, motives, cognitive capacities, and states of consciousness can be cultivated and refined to degrees well beyond the norm.

For example, contemplative traditions suggest that beneficent emotions such as love and compassion can be expanded to encompass not only all people but all life. Likewise they claim—and initial research supports their claim—that attention can be stabilized, perceptions sensi-

tized, and motives such as altruism and self-transcendence strengthened. The possibility of heightening capacities such as these suggests that psychological development may proceed far beyond what we formerly regarded as the ceiling for human possibilities.

Transpersonal experiences occur in altered states of consciousness, and the study of both has made clear just how dramatically we have underestimated the plasticity of human consciousness and its range of potential states. Until the second half of the twentieth century, Western psychology recognized only a handful of states of consciousness; other than normal waking and sleeping states, most of these—such as intoxication, delirium, and psychosis—were pathological. Now, however, research has demonstrated numerous alternate states, and the number and variety of recognized states continue to grow.

The range of techniques for inducing these states is vast and includes both ancient and modern methods. Some time-honored methods are physiological strategies such as fasting, sleep deprivation, and exposure to heat and cold; others are psychological methods such as solitude, chanting, drumming, dance, meditation, and yoga. Modern additions range from isolation tanks to biofeedback.

While many alternate states may confer no particular advantage or may even be disadvantageous, others are associated with heightened capacities such as those discussed earlier. Two key implications follow: higher states of consciousness—states in which people have capacities above and beyond the usual—may be available to us all. And our usual state of consciousness, which we usually assume to be the best, is actually suboptimal.

One finding has far-reaching implications: states of consciousness may exhibit what is called state specificity or state-specific limitations. This means that what is learned or understood in one state of consciousness may be less easily comprehended in another. Thus even profound understandings gained in an alternate state may be incomprehensible to someone who has never accessed the state.

This implies that the ability to appreciate and understand transpersonal experiences, as well as their associated disciplines and life-styles, may depend on the extent of one's experience of these alternate states. State specificity suggests one important reason why transpersonal experiences and traditions have been underestimated and why undertaking practices to cultivate these experiences may be necessary for understanding them.

Transpersonal disciplines offer radical reinterpretations and illuminations of certain aspects of religions and contemplative practices. From this perspective the contemplative and mystical core of the world's great religions can be seen as multistate traditions for inducing specific transpersonal states of consciousness, especially those states that offer what has

been called enlightenment, liberation, or salvation. The philosophies and psychologies that accompany these traditions can be seen as expressing the knowledge gained from these states. The contemplative practices by which these liberating states are induced can be regarded in part as transpersonal technologies or technologies of transcendence. This perspective offers a new and illuminating understanding of disciplines that have often seemed mysterious.

Almost invariably, people who have deep transpersonal experiences begin to entertain a larger view of human nature and the cosmos. They discover an inner universe as vast and mysterious as the outer, and realms of experience inaccessible to physical instruments. These are realms of mind and consciousness. People who discover them may conclude that we exist in these realms as much as or more than in the realm of the senses and physical world.

As with human nature, so too with the cosmos. Transpersonal experiences often suggest that there are nonphysical realms of existence of enormous scope. From this viewpoint existence is seen as multilayered, and the physical universe, so often assumed to be the totality of existence, now appears as only one of multiple realms.

Whatever understanding of humankind and the cosmos they may eventually unveil, to date transpersonal disciplines stand alone in the scope of their search. They advocate an eclectic, integrative quest that includes personal and transpersonal, ancient and modern, East and West, knowledge and wisdom, art and philosophy, science and religion; introspection and contemplation. Only by such a comprehensive approach can we hope for a vision that reflects the extraordinary possibilities of humankind and the cosmos: a transpersonal vision.

1. Needleman, J. *Lost Christianity*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980, p. 60.
2. Maslow, A. *Toward a psychology of being*. 2nd ed. Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1968, p. 5.
3. A fuller definition of transpersonal disciplines, which also applies in large part to individual disciplines and is therefore very similar to the definition of transpersonal psychology, is as follows: Transpersonal disciplines study transpersonal experiences and their correlates. These correlates include the nature, varieties, causes, and effects of transpersonal experiences and development, as well as the psychologies, philosophies, disciplines, arts, cultures, life-styles, reactions, and religions inspired by them, or that seek to induce, express, apply, or understand them.
4. Wilber, K. *A sociable god*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983, p. 55.
5. Satprem. *Sri Aurobindo or the adventure of consciousness*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968, p. 84.
6. Wilber, K. *The Atman project*. Wheaton, Ill.: Quest, 1980, p. 159.
7. Alexander, F., and Selesnich, S. *The history of psychiatry*. New York: New American Library, 1966, p. 372.