

# **A Primer of Transpersonal Psychology**

Bridging Psychological Science and  
Transpersonal Spirit

**By Paul F. Cunningham, Ph.D.**

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# Chapter 0

## Preliminaries

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### A Primer of Transpersonal Psychology

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# 0.1 Content

A Primer of Transpersonal Psychology

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## 0.2 Foreword



The monograph that you hold in your hands is the product of a need for an introductory textbook in the field of transpersonal psychology. While transpersonal psychology has developed into a full-fledged scientific, professional, and academic discipline since its founding by Abraham Maslow more than 35 years ago, it remains on the margins of conventional mainstream scientific psychology.

Whether or not transpersonal psychology will soon find its niche within the behavioral and social sciences is an open question. But when a discipline has inaugurated a number of peer-reviewed journals devoted to the subject matter of the field, founded several national and international professional societies that facilitate scholarly exchange among individuals involved in transpersonal therapy and research, and instituted numerous academic courses and degree programs in university settings around the world, then that discipline deserves a place within the framework of official psychology and ought to have adequate representation within mainstream college and university curricula. This monograph is a portion of a much larger project that is intended to deal with the first issue by addressing the second.

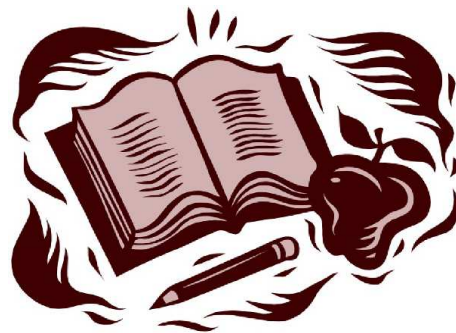
If transpersonal psychology wishes to find itself incorporated within the framework of official psychology, then serious thought needs to be given to what might be taught in a generalized course in transpersonal psychology. This monograph will hopefully be of service in that regard. It represents the first chapter of a projected 12-chapter textbook in transpersonal psychology for 2-year and 4-year colleges that covers topics ordinarily addressed in the typical introductory psychology course, but from a *transpersonal* point of view - introduction, biological foundations, sensation and perception, states of consciousness, learning and memory, language and thought, motivation and emotion,

development, personality theory and measurement, psychological disorders, psychotherapy, and social behavior. Use of such an organizational framework will encourage a more complete coverage of transpersonal topics within traditional content domains, promote greater integration of transpersonal concepts and theories with the methods and findings with contemporary psychology, and more easily present transpersonal psychology within the framework of the contemporary mainstream educational process.

While more and more college courses are being offered on the subject of transpersonal psychology (a partial listing of schools and programs in transpersonal psychology can be found at [www.atpweb.org](http://www.atpweb.org)<sup>1</sup>), there are no standard texts or curricula offering the fundamentals of transpersonal psychology to help structure most courses. In approaching transpersonal psychology from an educational point of view, one would be amazed at the lack of a recognized, agreed upon general curriculum, and how various courses intended to provide an introduction to transpersonal psychology vary considerably in course content and structure. Few transpersonal psychologists use the same general textbooks.

The lack of a standardized curriculum is not surprising in a field where transpersonal psychologists themselves disagree on the importance and validity of certain areas of investigation (e.g., parapsychology), where fundamental tenets of the field have not been resolved (e.g., how foundational is the perennial philosophy?), where wide divergence of opinion exists on basic issues of methodology and goals of research (e.g., is transpersonal psychology a science?), and where most psychologists who espouse a transpersonal orientation are self-taught in the field and may be uncomfortable teaching areas of inquiry with which they are unfamiliar (e.g., the clinician who overlooks the experimental research or the experimentalist who ignores the clinical data). This monograph is offered both as a preliminary attempt to address this growing need for a generalized model of curricula for undergraduate courses in transpersonal psychology and as an encouragement to teachers of psychology to introduce this exciting area of investigation to their students.

### 0.3 Preface - A Sacred Story



My personal introduction to the exciting realm of *transpersonal psychology* began during the spring semester of my junior year at Our Lady of Providence Seminary in Warwick, Rhode Island. I was 20 years old at the time and studying to become a Roman Catholic diocesan priest. I was deep in my study of Darwinian anthropology, Freudian psychology, Biblical religions, existential philosophy, and natural science. Ever since I can remember I have had a burning desire to understand the true nature of human personality and humanity's proper relationship to spiritual reality and to the rest of creation. I thought I had discovered those Truths (capital T) in my academic courses that year of 1970.

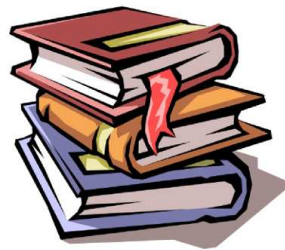
**What I Learned.** I learned in my *anthropology* course about Charles Darwin who spent over half his life proving the validity of his theory of evolution. Generations of scientists since have

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<sup>1</sup>**Internet:** "<http://www.atpweb.org/public>".



viewed the natural world through its light, taking Darwinian theories for granted as being a literal interpretation of the origins of species, and attempting to make human nature conform to the picture of evolution as Darwin conceived it. Certainly Darwin's considerable achievement in classifying the different species and in describing their struggle for survival is an entirely true and objective representation of the natural world. I learned in my *psychology* course about Sigmund Freud who invented such a comprehensive system of psychology that it seemed to explain everything about human experience and behavior. Such an all-inclusive and internally consistent theory must be true, I thought, because it possessed such sweeping explanatory power. I learned in my *religion* course about the Old Testament God Jehovah and about Jesus Christ, the Son of the only God, who declared that His was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The Holy Scriptures and the theological doctrines and dogmas of His Church must certainly be divinely true if His Holy Spirit inspired them. I learned in my *philosophy* course about existential thinkers such as John Paul Sartre and Albert Camus who were committed to engaging the painful realities of aloneness and death exactly as they are and refused to gloss over suffering or arbitrarily pretend that life is inherently meaningful. Such a demand for authenticity, freedom, and autonomy must certainly be true and the correct defense against delusion and selfdeception. I learned in my *natural science* course that science, too, seemed committed to engaging reality exactly as it is. Objective, empirical science must certainly be the final arbiter of what is true and real. When I attempted to integrate these diverse beliefs and ways of thinking into a single coherent framework, however, I became filled with feelings of tension and conflict, stress and strain, for *how could they all be true?* As I examined in more detail the assumptions and implications of the course material that I was learning, I gradually began to lose a sense of my own worth and purpose.



**What I Came to Believe.** My course in *Darwinian theory* revealed our species to be a creature pitted against itself (as ego is pitted against id) and whose nature is amoral (there are no standards of right or wrong as anything goes for survival sake). In the Darwinian world, nature cares little for the individual, only for the species. The attainment of adulthood has little purpose except to insure the further existence of the species through procreation. The species itself appears to have no reason except a mindless determination to exist. Tainted with brutish and destructive impulses, I was the member of a greedy and predatory species, a murderer at heart and nature's despoiler, a blight upon the planet, and the victim of an indifferent Nature that brought meaningless death. I became separate from nature and in competition with all other creatures in an endless struggle for survival. There is no possibility of spiritual survival as far as evolutionary theory is concerned, because evolutionary Darwinian man and woman are not created with a soul. All psychological activity is scaled down in between life and death. Death becomes an affront to life and comes to imply a certain kind of weakness, for is it not said that only the strong survive?

My course in *Freudian psychology* taught me to believe that my unconscious self was certainly devious, capable of the most insidious subconscious fraud, and filled with savage rage and infantile impulses that I could not trust, no matter what I told myself. The unconscious was understood to be a garbage heap of undesirable impulses, long ago discarded by civilization. Slips of the tongue and dreams betrayed the self's hidden nefarious true desires. The spontaneous self, the impulsive portion of my nature, became most suspect, since in my spontaneous acts I could unwittingly reveal not my basic goodness, but the hidden shoddiness of my motives. Programmed and conditioned



from childhood to fail or succeed, the heights and depths of each person's experience were seen to be the result of infantile behavior patterns that rigidly controlled us for a lifetime.



Darwinian and Freudian concepts were also reflected in my *Bible studies*. Given the earth as living grounds by a capricious and vengeful God, who would one day destroy the world, I came to believe that our species was bound for ultimate tragedy and extinction. Born blighted by original sin, created imperfect by a perfect God who then punished me for my imperfections, and who would send me to hell if I did not adore Him, I came to see myself as an innately flawed and sinful self, a creature bound to do wrong regardless of any strong good intent. Being the member of a species of sinners, contaminated by original sin even before birth, innately driven by evil, and sometimes demonic, forces that must be kept in check by good work, prayer, and penance, I came to distrust my inner self and to fear my own spontaneity. How could I be "good" when my self was "bad"? The conditions of life and illness were seen as punishment sent by God upon his erring creatures, or as a trial sent by God, to be borne stoically. Life was indeed a valley of sorrows.



My course in *existential philosophy* was simply a variation upon the theme. It convinced me that life was an unpleasant and inherently meaningless condition of existence from which release

was welcomingly sought and that the end justifies the means, especially if that end is Man. Life was replete with guilt, pain, suffering, and death, and in the words of Woody Allen, “was over much too quickly.” One is born alone and dies alone. There is no escape from this condition of isolation for the self who perceives the universe and everyone else as “not-self” and “other” (“Hell is other people”). Jean Paul Sartre’s novels, *Nausea* and *No Exit*, persuaded me that I was born without reason (because “existence precedes essence” and no *a priori* meaning or purpose could be assigned to my being since nothing is pre-given but must be created), that I prolong myself out of weakness (because I do not have the courage to commit suicide), and that I will die by chance in an ultimately meaningless universe. Belief in God, in the existence of spiritual realities, and in an afterlife may serve as a consolation to the ego faced with the threat of nonexistence, but I must not deceive myself. The separate self is eventually overcome by death. The skull always grins at the banquet of life. Everyone must die; everything gained must eventually be relinquished. Nothing lasts; everything changes. Eventually I must confront the threat of my own extinction and refuse to pretend that things can get better. Try as I may to create meaning through my individual actions, even the most heroic actions cannot overcome feelings of existential dread and ontological anxiety. Like a character in one of Pirandello’s novels, I was a personality in search of an author. Like an actor in one of Beckett’s plays, I was waiting for a Godot who would never arrive. Even love itself seemed only a romantic illusion.

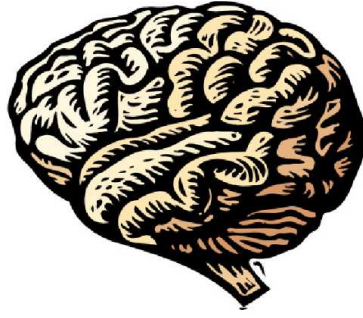


My *natural science* course had the most impact of all. Science led me to suppose that my exquisite selfconsciousness and all of life itself was nothing more than an accidental by-product of inert atoms and molecules and the chance conglomeration of lifeless chemical elements, mindlessly coming together into an existence that was bound to end in a godless, uncaring, and mechanical universe that was itself accidentally created. The emotions of love and joy, the virtues of kindness and generosity, all thoughts and wisdom, religious sentiments and consciousness itself were merely epiphenomena of the erratic activity of neural firings, hormones, and neurotransmitters. Consciousness was the result of a brain that was itself nothing but a highly complicated mechanism that only *happened* to come into existence, and had no reality outside of that structure. The self was simply the accidental personification of the body’s biological mechanisms. Feelings of conscious choice were only reflections of brain state activity at any given time. The great creative, individual thrust of life within each person became assigned to a common source in past conditioning or to the accidental nature of genes or reduced to a generalized mass of electrochemical impulses and neurological processes.<sup>2</sup>

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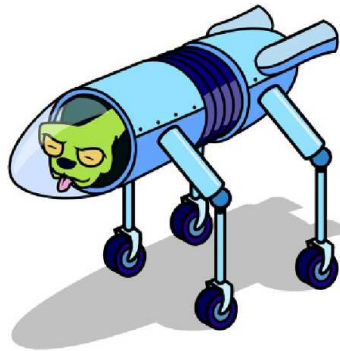
<sup>2</sup>Editor’s Citation of *Urantia Book 102:0.1* - TO THE unbelieving materialist, man is simply an evolutionary accident. His hopes of survival are strung on a figment of mortal imagination; his fears, loves, longings, and beliefs are but the reaction of the incidental juxtaposition of certain lifeless atoms of matter. No display of energy nor expression of trust can carry him beyond the grave. The devotional labors and inspirational genius of the best of men are doomed to be extinguished by death, the long and lonely night of eternal oblivion and soul extinction. Nameless despair is man’s only reward for living and toiling under the temporal sun of mortal existence. Each day of life slowly and surely tightens the grasp of a pitiless doom which a hostile and relentless universe of matter has decreed shall be the crowning insult to everything in human desire which is beautiful, noble, lofty, and good.

But such is not man’s end and eternal destiny; such a vision is but the cry of despair uttered by some wandering soul who has become lost in spiritual darkness, and who bravely struggles on in the face of the mechanistic sophistries of a material philosophy, blinded by the confusion and distortion of a complex learning. And all this doom of darkness and all this destiny of despair are forever dispelled by one brave stretch of faith on the part of the most humble and



Projecting these ideas upon nature at large, the *natural world* appeared equally explainable, dangerous, and threatening, especially the *non-human animal world*. Given to humans to do with as we wished by our specieistic God, animals were in a “natural” subordinate position in the Great Chain of Being. Lifted up above the beasts at the pinnacle end of a great evolutionary scale, only humans possessed consciousness and self-consciousness, intellect and imagination, emotion and free will, and the dignity of a spiritual life. Only humans were to be granted souls or a rich psychological life. Animals were mere electrochemical machines that operated solely by the mechanism of instinct. Being creatures literally without a center of meaning, animals were to be regarded simply as physical objects, like rocks and stars, blind alike to pain or desire and without intrinsic worth or value.

An individual animal’s existence could have no higher meaning or purpose than to be a resource for human use or consumed as mere foodstuff in a daily tooth-and-claw struggle for survival that was everywhere beset by the threat of illness, disaster, and death. The sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of animals in experiments that would be unethical if performed on human beings became justified in the pursuit of knowledge if it was a means toward the goal of protecting the sacredness of human life and the survival of the human species, regardless of the consequences.



**Becoming the Self I Thought I Was.** Unknown to me at the time, my academic course work was indoctrinating me into what transpersonal psychologist Charles Tart (1992a, Chapter 2) calls the “Western Creed” - a set of *implicit* assumptions about the nature of the psyche and the nature of reality that have come to characterize much of the modern secular world, that have practical consequences on the human spirit, and that block progress in understanding the spiritual side of ourselves. Operating for the most part outside of my conscious awareness, these psychologically invisible beliefs programmed my experience to such an extent that they took on the appearance of fact. Interpreting the private events of my life in light of these assumptions about the nature of physical reality and human personality, I unconsciously put together my perceptions so that they seemed to bear out those beliefs. My beliefs selectively structured my experience so that experience came to fit the beliefs I had about it. Perceptions and beliefs became mutually and selectively reinforcing. What I believed to be true became true in my experience. Imagination and emotion, following the contours of my beliefs, not only colored and intangibly structured my

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unlearned of God’s children on earth.

subjective experience, but also conditioned me to act in certain ways in accordance with those beliefs. Believed in fervently enough, they came to act like powerful hypnotic suggestions that triggered specific actions strongly implied by the beliefs. The end result was a set of unexamined structured beliefs that were automatically acted upon. I created events that more or less conformed to those beliefs, and thus became the self that I thought I was.



**“Science Loves Skepticism Except When Skepticism is Applied to Science.”** There always remained lingering doubts, however, about what I had come to believe. I found it ironic that the basis of the scientific empirical method and the framework behind all of our organized structures of science, rested upon a subjective reality that was not considered valid by the very scientific institutions that were formed through its auspices. How could such a vital consciousness as my own even suppose itself to be the end product of the chance meeting of inert elements that were themselves lifeless, but somehow managed to combine in such a way that our species attained culture, technology, philosophy, science, medicine, literature, and space travel?<sup>3</sup> Science almost made me believe in magic! What a cosmic joke that the atomic and chemical composition of my own brain was somehow intelligent enough to understand the irony of its own meaninglessness. Certainly a brain that could conceive of purpose, meaning, and creativity somehow had to emerge from a greater purpose, meaning, and creativity. Certainly it was not *purposelessness* that gave us the design of nature, the well-ordered genetic activity, or the elegant sequences of molecular structures that support the creation of amino acids and proteins that sustain physical life. Certainly it was not *meaninglessness* that gave rise to the creative drama of our dreams. Certainly it was not *genetic chance* that is responsible for the precision with which we grow spontaneously, without knowing how, from a fetus to an adult. Certainly it was not *environmental necessity* that caused the existence of heroic themes and ideals that pervade human life. Surely all of these give evidence of a greater meaning, purpose, and context in which we have our being.

How could atheistic science, I wondered further, stress the species’ accidental presence in the universe and the belief that we owe our physical existence to the chance conglomeration of atoms and molecules and still expect our species to be the most moral of creatures or to feel that one’s life has meaning or purpose? How can we trust ourselves and look at ourselves with self-respect and dignity and live lives of honor, or expect goodness and merit from others, if we believe we are members of a species in which only the fittest survive through a struggle of tooth-and-claw, as implied by the theories of evolution? One question led to another. Yet while referring to the *Big Bang theory* or to the *theory of evolution*, my teachers seemed to accept them as facts about existence. It appeared almost heretical to express any skepticism that threatened the given wisdom of those theories that served to provide our culture’s “official” version of events.

When the full weight of these unanswered questions and unquestioned beliefs finally fell upon me, a sick and sinking feeling began to well up in the pit of my stomach. Amid such a conglomeration of

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<sup>3</sup>Editor’s Citation of *Urantia Book 58:2.3* - And yet some of the less imaginative of your mortal mechanists insist on viewing material creation and human evolution as an accident. The Urantia midwayers have assembled over fifty thousand facts of physics and chemistry which they deem to be incompatible with the laws of accidental chance, and which they contend unmistakably demonstrate the presence of intelligent purpose in the material creation. And all of this takes no account of their catalogue of more than one hundred thousand findings outside the domain of physics and chemistry which they maintain prove the presence of mind in the planning, creation, and maintenance of the material cosmos.

negative beliefs, the idea of a good and innocent inner self seemed almost scandalous. To encourage expression of that self appeared foolhardy, for it seemed only too clear that if the lid of awareness were opened, so to speak, all kinds of inner demons and enraged impulses would rush forth. This webwork of beliefs had deprived my mind and body of the zest and purpose needed to enjoy pursuits or activities and made any endeavor appear futile. I began to feel adrift, without a higher goal or vision. I felt suspicious, frightened, angry, aloof, and alone. In this confusion of thoughts and fears, I felt my life to be meaningless and hungered for something more sustaining. I was experiencing what William James (1936) called “soul sickness.”



**The Kite as My Symbol of Transformation** As I lay exhausted upon my bed one spring afternoon in 1970, I slipped into a trance-like state and had a waking dream. My confused and disordered mind suddenly symbolized itself as a kite connected to a long string held by mental hands. The kite was fluttering in fits and starts, buffeted about by turbulent gusts of inner wind that threatened to tear it to pieces. “How can I stop this violent commotion of my mind?” I thought aloud. “Cut the string,” an inner voice replied. “But if I do that, then I’ll lose my mind,” I answered back, fearing that if I cut that string I would release my mind to fly off into some dark, unfathomable and limitless recess of the psyche, forever swallowed up by my own subjectivity. “What else can I do?” I implored. “Pull the kite in,” an answer came. Slowly I began to tug on that mental string, but the more I pulled, the more wildly did that kite toss and turn. Thrown about by the tumultuous energy of some wild psychic wind, my mental kite threatened to tumble and shatter onto that inner landscape. I was at a loss at what to do to end this turmoil of body, mind, and spirit. I feared that I was losing my mind.

At this point, my mind suddenly opened up and leaped beyond itself. Some indescribable element, some spiritual intangible, touched me and said: “If you want to save yourself, you must first lose yourself. If you want to hold onto yourself, then you must let yourself go.” All at once I knew what I had to do. In a moment of faith, instilled by an unaccustomed sense of trust and safety, I slowly let the string out so that the kite ascended higher and higher until it found its way up through the turbulence and turmoil into the calm and peaceful sky above. My mental kite now floated easily and gently with a newfound sense of ease and freedom. I was suddenly filled with an additional energy, a new buoyancy and joy. Sitting up in bed and opening my eyes, I sat transfixed. Another world seemed to shimmer within and around whatever I looked at. Everything seemed to be what it was, yet somehow more. A change had occurred in me. I felt my personality click into a new focus and become lined up with an invisible part of my own reality that I had barely sensed before. The entire feeling-tone of my personality was changed. In that brief moment of intense, expanded consciousness, I felt and experienced directly a Presence so creative, understanding, and lovingly permissive that its good nature and loving intent could indeed create and maintain worlds. In a way quite difficult to describe, I felt myself to be a part of nature’s framework and one with nature’s source.

My earlier psychological reality became meaningless to me. It was superseded by a biologically and spiritually rooted faith that my existence was meaningful precisely because of my connection with nature and with that greater indefinable framework of existence from which all life springs, even though that meaning was not intellectually understood at the time. I felt deeply within myself that

the quality of identity and the nature of existence were far more mysterious than I could presently understand.



**Epiphany.** Looking inward and remaining open to my intuitions, I felt deeply within myself indivisible connections not only with the earth itself, but with deeper realities. While in the throes of what seemed to me to be inspiration of almost unbearable intensity, I got the idea that the universe was formed out of what God is, that it was the natural extension of divine creativity, lovingly formed *from the inside out*, so to speak. I felt that in certain basic and vital ways, my own consciousness and being was a portion of that divine gestalt. As philosopher-theologian John Hick (1999) in his book, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Dimension*, put it:

There is an aspect of us that is ‘in tune’ with the Transcendent. This aspect is referred to as the image of God within us; or as the divine spark spoken of by Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart, Ruusbroec, Suso, Tauler and many other Christian mystics; or as ‘that of God in every man’; or as the *atman* which in our deepest nature we all are; or as our ‘true self’, the ‘selfless self’, or as the universal Buddha nature within us. It is this aspect of our being that is affected by the ultimately Real to the extent that we are open to that reality. (p. 41)

I became aware that God (or whatever term you wish to use for Nature’s source) is so much a part of His (or Her or Its) creations that it is almost impossible to separate the Creator from the creations, that each hypothetical point in the universe is in direct contact with God in the most basic terms, and that this indissoluble connection can never be severed. I got the picture that there is a portion of God that is directed and focused and residing within each of us that is more intimate than our breath. It is the force that forms our flesh and our identities in that it is responsible for the energy that gives vitality and validity to our unique personalities. I perceived all Being to be continually upheld, supported, and maintained by this ever-expanding, ever-creative energy that forms everything and of which each human being is a part. As physicist-theologian John Polkinghorne (1998) in his book *Belief in God in an Age of Science* put it:

Our moral intuitions are intimations of the perfect will, our aesthetic pleasures a sharing in the Creator’s joy, our religious intuitions whispers of God’s presence. The understanding of the value-laden character of our world is that there is a supreme Source of Value whose nature is reflected in all that is held in being. (pp. 19-20)

I also felt the inconceivable vitality of a God that is truly multidimensional – a God that is a part of creation and yet is also more than what creation is, in the same way that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. His nature transcends all dimensions of activity, consciousness, or reality, while still being a part of each. Yet this is no impersonal God. Since its energy gives rise to you and me and all human personalities, how could this be? This portion of God that is both aware of

itself as you, that is focused within your existence, and that is also aware of itself as something more than you, is a loving and creative, redemptive God that is both transcendent and personal. This portion of God cherishes and protects you and looks out for your interests and may be called upon for help when necessary in a personal manner through prayer that always contains its own answer if you believe and desire to receive it (Mark 11:24).

It is very difficult to try to assign anything like human motivation to God. I can only say that that initial experience revealed the existence of an entity who was possessed by “the need” to lovingly create from His own being - to lovingly transform His own reality - in such a way that even the most slightest thought that emerged within His infinitely massive, omnipotent, superlative, and creative imagination attained dimensions of actuality impossible to describe. This was no static, impassible God that I perceived. It was a vision and version of a God who, seeking to know Himself, constantly and lovingly creates new versions of Himself out of Himself (or Herself). This “seeking Himself” is a creative activity, the core of all action; God acting through *creatio continua* (Peacocke, 1979). Each creation carries indelibly within itself this characteristic of its Source. Just as one’s awareness and experience of God constantly changes and grows, all portions of God are constantly changing, enfolding and unfolding as the universe does (see, for example, Bohm, 1980).



The loving support, the loving encouragement, the need to see that any and all possible realities become probable and have the chance to emerge, perceive, and love - that is the intent of the divine subjectivity and creativity that I perceived in that state of expanded consciousness. I felt deeply that our closest approximation of the purpose of the universe could be found in those loving emotions that we might have toward the development of our own children, in our intent to have them develop their fullest capabilities. And God loves all that He has created down to the least. He is aware of every sparrow that falls because He is every sparrow. Everything that was or is or will be is kept in immediate attention, poised in a divine context that is characterized by such a brilliant concentration that the grandest and the lowest, the largest and the smallest, are equally held in a loving constant focus. His awareness and attention is indeed directed with a prime creator’s love to each consciousness. God IS Love (1 John, 4:8, 16).

**Aftermath.** The highly charged energy generated by this experience was enough to change my life in a matter of moments. The insights that I received strongly clashed with previously held ideas and beliefs, giving the experience its initial explosive, volatile, and intrusive quality. I had been led by my experience beyond the framework of beliefs that had given it birth. My task was now to correlate the new intuitive knowledge with the beliefs of the Western Creed that I had so willingly accepted before, and to reform my knowledge frameworks to make them strong enough to support the new insights. Accepted frameworks and answers now made little sense to me. I could no longer accept answers given by others, but now insisted upon finding my own. I could no longer continue to think about God in the old ways, for the experience had brought me far beyond such a point. I had now to free myself and be true to my own vision. Shortly thereafter I left the Seminary to see the world firsthand, driven by a fine impatience, a divine discontent that drives me on even today. I felt immeasurably strengthened and supported by an inner certainty that instilled in me a sense of safety, optimism, and trust in my own nature and in that unknown source in which we all have our being and from which our vitality springs daily. I knew somehow that my existence has a meaning



and purpose even if that meaning and purpose is not intellectually understood.



**Expanding the circle of compassion.** The insights that I received during that state of expanded consciousness required me to become more responsive and responsible in my behavior. It also brought with it a sympathy with life that had earlier been lacking, especially for animals - a sensitivity that remains strong, challenging, and intense to this day. I understood for the first time that my humanness did not emerge by refusing my animal heritage, but upon an extension of what that heritage is. It was not a matter of rising above my animal nature to truly appreciate my spirituality, but of evolving from a fuller understanding of that nature. I am not separated from animals and the rest of existence by virtue of possessing an eternal inner consciousness; rather, such a consciousness is within all life, whatever its form. The consciousness that exists within animals is as valid and eternal as my own, for each individual being is . . .

A vital, conscious portion of the universe [that] simply by *being*, fits into the universe and into universal purposes in a way that no one else can . . . an *individualized segment* of the universe; a beloved individual, formed with infinite care and love, uniquely gifted with a life like no other. (Butts, 1997a, pp. 147-148)



I also came to understand the symbolism of my kite experience: *There is a portion of universal creative energy that becomes individualized to form my being and that sustains and nourishes my existence, and when I become too intent in maintaining my own reality I lose it, because I am denying the creativity upon which it rests.*

**The farther reaches of transpersonal psychology.** When my formal training as a psychologist began, I was constantly on the outlook for some kind of framework that would help me translate that spectacular inner vision into terms that made psychological sense. Transpersonal psychology and the writings of gifted writer and mystic Seth-Jane Roberts (Butts, 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Roberts, 1966, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977a, 1977b, 1978, 1979a, 1979b, 1981a, 1981b, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c) has helped me to make that translation in a way that was psychologically sound and faithful to the underlying complexity of the original experience. The works of Jane Roberts, collectively referred to as *The Seth Material*, strongly informs the content of the present monograph. Arguably transpersonal in origin, “the

basic firm groundwork of the [Seth] material and its primary contribution lies in the concept that consciousness itself indeed creates matter, that consciousness is not imprisoned by matter but forms it, and that consciousness is not limited or bound by time or space” (Butts, 1997c, p. 312). The writings of Jane Roberts hint at the multidimensional nature of the human psyche and identify potentials of exceptional human experiences and transformative capacities that are a part of our species’ heritage. In my view, systematic study of *The Seth Material* has the potential of offering the field of transpersonal psychology an opportunity of initiating its own further development, truly making it the “higher’ Fourth Psychology, transpersonal, transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interest, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like” (Maslow, 1968, pp. iii-iv) that Abraham Maslow envisioned it to be.



## 0.4 Introduction



**Seeking spirituality in contemporary life.** There has been a striking increase of interest in things “spiritual” over the past 30 years. One need only visit a local bookstore to find shelves of books and audiotapes on topics such as altered states of consciousness and contacting one’s inner guide, extrasensory perception and lucid dreaming, meditation and mysticism, near-death experiences and out-of-body experiences, reincarnation and shamanism, spiritualism and trance channeling. Culturally and socially, there is a growing desire for books, seminars, audiotapes, magazines, and academic courses that deal with exceptional human experiences and human transformative capacities. People are “desperately seeking spirituality” (Taylor, 1994).

**Not a passing fad.** The cultural and social interest in spirituality is not a passing fad, nor has its absorption into mainstream contemporary life diminished its vitality or strength over time. The modern trend away from traditional collectivist forms of exoteric religion, on the one hand, and the postmodern movement toward innovative personal forms of esoteric spirituality, on the other, coupled with the rediscovery of ancient and cross-cultural forms of spiritual practices, have given today’s social and cultural interest in spiritual experiences and human transformative capacities a strong grounding in contemporary life.

**Interest in religion extends to modern psychology.** Interest in spirituality is not confined to the general public, but extends to modern psychology. Psychology’s interest in spirituality and religion goes back at least to the work of Sir Francis Galton whose paper titled “Statistical Inquiries in the Efficacy of Prayer” (Galton, 1872) examined the correlations between certain religious practices and physical health (and found none). William James’s 1902 classic account of “*The Varieties of Religious Experience*” is a landmark in the history of modern American psychology (James, 1936).

**Clinical value of religious beliefs recognized.** In the area of counseling psychology, research connecting religion, spirituality, and health has been a vibrant research area (Engels, 2001; Fretz,

1989). The American Psychological Association (APA) has acknowledged the clinical value of using client's religious beliefs in therapy, publishing such books as *“Religion and the Clinical Practice of Psychology”* (Shafranske, 1996) and *“A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy”* (Richards & Bergin, 1997). An individual's religious orientation is now viewed as a useful adjunct to traditional forms of therapy in bringing about desired therapeutic outcomes.

**Orthodox psychology's view of religion and spirituality has not always been a positive one.** Humanity is by nature a spiritual creature. It is one of our strongest attributes as a species and yet it is the part of our psychology most often overlooked by conventional psychology. As principle investigators of the NIH Working Group on Research on Spirituality, Religion, and Health observed: “For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, [research on spirituality and religion] were isolated from mainstream scientific discourse and journals of the field” (Miller & Thoresen, 2004, p. 55). Lack of attention to humanity's spiritual nature is reflected in the fact that the term “religion” or “spirituality” is not mentioned in most introductory psychology textbook. Orthodox psychology has traditionally had little regard for what Gordon Allport (1969) called the “religious sentiment” and its function of “relating the individual meaningfully to being” (p. 98) because it had long been believed that . . .

Devoteness reflects irrationality and superstition. A religious orientation serves as a crutch for people who can't handle life. Religious beliefs indicate emotional instability. Comments like these illustrate psychology's traditional view of religion. Although William James and other early psychologists were interested in the topic, psychologists since Freud have generally seen religious belief and practice as signs of weakness or even pathology. (Clay, 1996, p. 1)

**Psychology again exploring topics relevant to science and religion.** Yet psychology's potential contribution to the task of understanding humanity's “religious sentiment” and clarifying the relationship between science and religion in the modern world cannot be denied. “Next to the deep mystery of the divine nature, the mystery of the human person is of central significance for the whole discussion, since scientific and religious concerns intersect most clearly in our embodied nature” (Polkinghorne, 1998, p. 80). Psychology is now exploring the following areas that are relevant to this topic:

- States of consciousness (Hunt, 1995)
- Meditation (Murphy & Donovan, 1997)
- Lucid dreaming (Gackenback & Bosveld, 1989)
- Psychedelics (Grof, 1988)
- Near-death experiences (Ring, 1982)
- Trance channeling (Hastings, 1991)
- Cross-cultural contemplative development (Walsh & Shapiro, 1983)
- The relation of psychosis to mysticism (J. Nelson, 1994)
- The relation of brain states to mind states (Austin, 1998)

**Scientific study of consciousness leads to “birth” of transpersonal psychology.** These studies have thrown light on how spiritual practices work, confirmed some of their benefits, and led to the birth of “transpersonal psychology,” a field of psychology that emerged in the late 1960's out of humanistic psychology, and that is dedicated to integrating the wisdom of the world's premodern



religions, modern psychological sciences, and constructive postmodern philosophies (Wulff, 1991, Chapter 12).

**What are transpersonal experiences?** Transpersonal psychology has as one of its tasks the scientific investigation of transpersonal experiences. What are “transpersonal experiences”?

*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 . . . [Their] 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 inspired by them, or that seek to induce, express, apply, or understand them. (Walsh & Vaughn, 1993a, pp. 3, 269)

**An introduction to transpersonal psychology.** This monograph presents an introduction to transpersonal psychology - its scope, historical origins, contemporary perspectives, and research methods. Various definitions of transpersonal psychology are distinguished, phenomena studied by transpersonal psychologists are identified, transpersonal psychology’s relationship to religion is described, and the importance of the transpersonal vision is explained. The premodern roots, modern emergence, and postmodern developments of transpersonal psychology are outlined. How transpersonal research is conducted and described.

**The transpersonal vision.** What transpersonal psychology has discovered, and what ancient mystical traditions have disclosed is that there are “unexplored creative capacities, depths of psyche, states of consciousness, and stages of development undreamed of by most people” (Walsh & Vaughn, 1993a, p. 1). Transpersonal psychology has opened up new areas of comprehension and creativity for contemporary psychology by calling attention to the existence of aspects of personality action that transcend standardized, orthodox ideas about the nature of the human psyche and, by implication, the nature of the known and “unknown” realities in which we dwell.

# Chapter 1

## What is Transpersonal Psychology?



### WHAT IS TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY?

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

## 1.1 Definition of Transpersonal Psychology

**Definitions of transpersonal psychology over the past 35 years.** One way to gain an understanding of transpersonal psychology is to examine definitions of transpersonal psychology. **Figure 1-1** presents a representative sample of definitions of transpersonal psychology published between 1967-2003.

### Figure 1-1. Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology<sup>20</sup>

**Thematic analysis of definitions from 1968-1991.** Based on an analysis of over 200 previously-published definitions of transpersonal psychology cited in the literature over a 23 year period, Lajoie & Shapiro (1992) identified the following most frequently cited themes:

- States of consciousness
- Highest or ultimate potential
- Beyond ego or self
- Transcendence
- Spiritual

Based on these five most frequently found major themes, Lajoie & Shapiro (1992) synthesized the following definition: “*Transpersonal psychology is concerned with the study of humanity’s highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness*” (p. 91).

### **Thematic analysis of definitions from 1991-2001.**

S.I. Shapiro and Phillippe L. Gross, co-editors of “*The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*”, and transpersonal psychologist Grace W. Lee in 2002 conducted a thematic analysis of 80 English-language passages in the transpersonal literature published in a variety of sources including books, journal articles, websites, brochures, newsletters, dictionaries, encyclopedias, school catalogues, and convention papers between 1991 through 2001 that addressed the “essence” transpersonal psychology.

A thematic analysis of these passages revealed that the two most frequent categories, occurring 53 (66.2%) and 49 (61.2%) times, respectively were: (a) Going beyond or transcending the individual, ego, self, the personal, personality, or personal identity; existence of a deeper, true, or authentic Self; and (b) Spirituality, psychospiritual, psychospiritual development, the spiritual, spirit. Other, less frequent, themes included: special states of consciousness; interconnectivity/unity; going beyond other schools of psychology; emphasis on a scientific approach; mysticism; full range of consciousness; greater potential; inclusion of non-Western psychologies; meditation; and existence of a wider reality. (Shapiro, Lee, and Gross, 2002, p. 19)

*Transpersonal psychology defined. Transpersonal psychology, as defined in this monograph, is concerned with the recognition, acknowledgement, and study of creative human experiences and behaviors and human transformative capacities associated with a broad range of normal and nonordinary states, structures, functions, and developments of consciousness in which personality action extends beyond the usual boundaries of ego-directed awareness and personal identity and even transcends conventional limitations of space and time; hence the term, “transpersonal.”*

### **Figure 1-1. Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology (1967-1975)**

- 1967. In the first public announcement of transpersonal psychology given in a lecture at the First Unitarian Church in San Francisco in 1967, Abraham H. Maslow provides a preliminary and informal description of “transhumanistic” psychology (later called transpersonal psychology).

“‘Transhumanistic psychology’ [deals] with transcendent experiences and with transcendent values. The fully developed (and very fortunate) human being, working under the best conditions tends to be motivated by values, which transcend . . . the geographical limitations of the self. Thus one begins to talk about transhumanistic psychology.” (Maslow, 1969a, pp. 3-4)

- 1969. Transpersonal psychotherapist Anthony Sutich (founder and first editor of the “*Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*”) provides one of the first formal definitions of transpersonal psychology in 1969 in the inaugural issue of “*The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*” (Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1969).

“The emerging Transpersonal Psychology (‘fourth force’) is concerned specifically with the empirical, scientific study of, and responsible implementation of the findings relevant to, becoming, individual and species-wide meta-needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, B-values, ecstasy, mystical experience, awe, being, self-actualization, essence, bliss, wonder, ultimate meaning, transcendence of self, spirit, oneness, cosmic awareness, individual and species-wide synergy, maximal interpersonal encounter, sacralization of everyday life, transcendental phenomena, cosmic self-humor and playfulness; maximal sensory awareness, responsiveness and expression; and related concepts, experiences and activities.” (Sutich, 1969, pp. 15-16)

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- 1971. Elmer Green and Alyce Green (pioneer researchers of biofeedback and the voluntary control of internal states) define transpersonal psychology within the context of ultimate values and meaning.

“Transpersonal psychology might be defined as the psychology of ultimate or highest meanings and values, and psychologists who explore in this area must be prepared to examine all institutions and activities from the point of view of such meanings and values.” (Green & Green, 1971, pp. 42)

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- 1974. Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 astronaut and founder of the *Institute of Noetic Sciences* - an organization that chronicles news, data, and opinions from the interdisciplinary field of consciousness research - publishes “*Psychic Exploration: A Challenge for Science*” that offers a definition of transpersonal psychology within the context of parapsychology.

“Transpersonal psychology [is] a new major psychological approach to the study of the person that emphasizes humanity’s ultimate development or transcendent potential as individuals and a species . . . A blend of the best in science and religion, it provides a perspective in which the findings of psychic research are given significance *sub specie aeternitatis*. And in turn, transpersonal psychology takes its place within noetics, the general study of consciousness.” (Mitchell & White, 1974, pp. 696, 569)

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- 1975. Charles T. Tart’s 1975 book “*Transpersonal Psychologies*”, the first major work to systematically examine the world’s major religions and spiritual traditions from a transpersonal perspective, identifies humanity’s spiritual traditions (i.e., Zen Buddhism, Yoga, Christianity, Sufism) as “traditional transpersonal psychologies.”

“Traditional transpersonal psychologies, which I shall call spiritual psychologies . . . deal . . . with human experience in the realm we call spiritual, that vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purposes, with higher entities, with God, with love, with compassion, with purpose.” (Tart, 1992a, p. 4)

## Figure 1-1. Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology (1980-1984)

- 1980. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughn publish one of the first collections of writings from contemporary contributors to the transpersonal literature in their book *“Beyond Ego: Transpersonal Dimensions in Psychology”* that offered the following definition of transpersonal psychology.

“*Transpersonal psychology* is concerned with expanding the field of psychological inquiry to include the study of optimal psychological health and well-being. It recognizes the potential for experiencing a broad range of states of consciousness, in some of which identity may extend beyond the usual limits of the ego and personality.” (Walsh and Vaughn, 1980, p. 16)

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- 1982. Physicist Fritjof Capra, author of international best sellers *“The Tao of Physics”* and *“The Turning Point”* (a book that was subsequently turned into a nationally-acclaimed film called *“Mind Walk”*) provides a definition of the “new” transpersonal psychology that conceives it to be a vital part of the ongoing scientific, social, and cultural shift from a reductionistic and materialistic worldview toward a more holistic paradigm of science and spirit.

“Transpersonal psychology is concerned, directly or indirectly, with the recognition, understanding, and realization of nonordinary, mystical, or ‘transpersonal’ states of consciousness, and with the psychological conditions that represent barriers to such transpersonal realizations . . . [This] new psychology . . . is consistent with the systems view of life and in harmony with the views of spiritual traditions, . . . [that] sees the human organism as an integrated whole involving interdependent physical and psychological patterns, . . . [and recognizes] that the psychological situation of an individual cannot be separated from the emotional, social, and cultural environment.” (Capra, 1982, pp. 367-369)

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- 1982. Psychologists Leonard Zusne and Warren Jones publish the book *“Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Extraordinary Phenomena of Behavior and Experience”* that clarifies the relationship between transpersonal psychology and traditional concepts of the occult.

“Transpersonal psychology is concerned with meaningful and spiritual aspects of life, such as peak experiences, transcendence of self, self-actualization, and cosmic consciousness. As such, it only partially subsumes traditional occult concepts.” (Zusne & Jones, 1982, pp. 462-463).

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- 1984. Richard Mann, editor of the State University of New York (SUNY) Series in Transpersonal and Humanistic Psychology, defines the transpersonal approach and delineates the potential of this “new form of psychology” called *transpersonal psychology*.

“Transpersonal psychology . . . is a psychology that honors all the world’s great spiritual traditions and their mythic portrayal and appreciation of the divinity of each human being - the inner Self. Thus, transpersonal psychology extends our sense of the full course of



human development to include intuitions of our essential nature and of ways in which that nature might be more fully revealed, realized, and enjoyed ... In addition, the term 'transpersonal' calls our attention to a state of consciousness that enables some human beings to experience reality in ways that transcend our ordinary 'personal' perspectives. Therefore, a transpersonal psychology would also be one that acknowledges the possibility of going beyond the limited outlook of everyday awareness." (Mann, 1984, pp. viii-ix)

### Figure 1-1. Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology (1988-1989)

- 1988. Philosopher Michael Washburn - one of the first scholars to ground the transpersonal notion of ego transcendence in the psychoanalytic theory of ego development - defines transpersonal psychology in his book, *"The Ego and the Dynamic Ground: A Transpersonal Theory of Human Development"*.

"Transpersonal psychology is the study of human nature and development that proceeds on the assumption that humans possess potentialities that surpass the limits of the normally developed ego. It is an inquiry that presupposes that the ego, as ordinarily constituted, can be transcended and that a higher, transegoic<sup>1</sup> plane or stage of life is possible. Transpersonal psychology is less a subdiscipline of psychology than it is a multidisciplinary inquiry aimed at a holistic understanding of human nature. It is a synthesis of several disciplines, including most importantly not only the larger discipline of psychology, but also the disciplines of religion and philosophy. Transpersonal psychology is concerned not only with psychological notions such as ego, unconscious, and integration but also with religious notions such as fallenness, transcendence, and spiritual realization and with philosophical notions such as selfhood, existential project, and life-world ... A chief objective of transpersonal theory is to integrate spiritual experience within a larger understanding of the human psyche. Transpersonal theory thus is committed to the possibility of unifying spiritual and psychological perspectives." (Washburn, 1988, pp. v, 1)

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- 1989. Robert Frager (founder and first president of the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology) identifies three domains of study that transpersonal psychology focuses upon.

"Transpersonal psychology focuses on three domains - the psychology of personal development, the psychology of consciousness, and spiritual psychology. These three main areas overlap to form the field of transpersonal psychology. The *psychology of personal development* includes those models of human nature found in: (a) psychoanalysis and neo-Freudian personality systems, (b) the body-oriented models of therapy and growth developed by Wilhelm Reich and others, and (c) the positive, growth-oriented models of Maslow and humanistic psychology. The *psychology of consciousness* is devoted to mapping and exploring different states of human functioning, such as dreaming, meditation, drug states, and parapsychology. *Spiritual psychology* consists of the study of the models of human nature found in the world's religious traditions and the development

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<sup>1</sup>Editor's Citation of *Urantia Book 12:9.6* Mortal man has a spirit nucleus. The mind is a personal-energy system existing around a divine spirit nucleus and functioning in a material environment. Such a living relationship of personal mind and spirit constitutes the universe potential of eternal personality. ...

The personality is not the same as the individual and the ego. So maybe a more adequate name for "transpersonal psychology" would be "spiritual psychology".

of psychological theory that is consistent with religious and spiritual experiences ... The transpersonal approach to each of these areas is based on an inherent interest in studying human capacities and potentials and a fundamental premise that these capacities are far greater than our current understanding.” (Frager, 1989, p. 289)

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- 1989. Transpersonal psychologist Ronald Valle was one of the first scholars in the emerging new field of consciousness studies to identify Aldous Huxley’s (1970) “perennial philosophy” as central to the perspective of transpersonal psychology.

“The following premises can be thought of as comprising an identifiable structure or essence that characterizes any particular psychology or philosophy as transpersonal: (1) That a transcendent, transconceptual reality or Unity binds together (i.e., is immanent in) all apparently separate phenomena, whether these phenomena be physical, cognitive, emotional, intuitive, or spiritual<sup>2</sup>. (2) That the ego- or individualized self is not the ground of human awareness but, rather, only one relative reflection-manifestation of a greater trans-personal (as “beyond the personal”) Self or One (i.e., pure consciousness without subject or object). (3) That each individual can directly experience this transpersonal reality that is related to the spiritual dimensions of human life. (4) That this experience represents a qualitative shift in one’s mode of experiencing and involves the expansion of one’s self-identity beyond ordinary conceptual thinking and ego-self awareness (i.e., mind is not consciousness). (5) This experience is self-validating.” (Valle, 1989, p. 261)

### Figure 1-1. Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology (1992-1997)

- 1992. Edward Bruce Bynum, Director of the Behavioral Medicine Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Health Services, defines transpersonal psychology in a special 1992 edition of “*The Humanistic Psychologist*” that celebrates the contributions of humanistic and transpersonal psychology to American psychology during the 100th anniversary of the American Psychological Association.

“Transpersonal psychology can be understood to be the study of non-ordinary states of consciousness not traditionally covered by the discipline of **ego psychology**. This includes states of consciousness such as meditation, religious ecstasy, trance and ‘unitive conscious experiences’ often described in the esoteric and spiritual literature of humankind. This would also incorporate the study of the psychophysiological techniques and introspective disciplines associated with these states of consciousness. Finally the field includes both metaphysical and philosophical paradigms often encountered in the contemporary fields of theoretical physics, neuroscience, and cognitive psychology.” (Bynum, 1992, pp. 301-302)

- 1993. Transpersonal psychiatrist Roger Walsh and psychotherapist France Walsh publish “*Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*” - an updated version of their 1980 landmark book, “*Beyond Ego*” - that presents a thoroughly revised review of major transpersonal areas that reflects the dramatic growth of transpersonal psychology into a multidisciplinary transpersonal movement.

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<sup>2</sup>Editor’s Citation of *Urantia Book 0:5.11* Personality. The personality of mortal man is **neither body, mind, nor spirit; neither is it the soul**. Personality is the one changeless reality in an otherwise ever-changing creature experience; and **it unifies all other associated factors of individuality**. The personality is the unique bestowal which the Universal Father makes upon the living and associated energies of matter, mind, and spirit, and which survives with the survival of the morontial soul.

“*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, life-styles, reactions, and religions that are inspired by them, or that seek to induce, express, apply, or understand them.” (Walsh and Vaughn, 1993a, pp. 3-4)

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- 1994. Ken Wilber, a leading contributor to transpersonal theory, defines transpersonal psychology within the context of the “perennial philosophy” and what the ancient spiritual traditions of Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, Christianity, and Confucianism call the “Great Chain of Being” (i.e., the two-fold belief that reality is composed of stratified and ordered stages or levels of being reaching from lowly insentient and nonconscious matter through body, mind, and soul, up to the highest level of all-pervading Spirit, and that human beings can evolve all the way up the hierarchy to Spirit itself).

“The aim of transpersonal psychology . . . is to give a psychological presentation of the perennial philosophy and the Great Chain of Being, fully updated and grounded in modern research and scientific developments. It fully acknowledges and *incorporates* the findings of modern psychiatry, behaviorism, and developmental psychology, and then adds, when necessary, the further insights and experiences of the existential and spiritual dimensions of the human being.” (Wilber, 1994, p. x)

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- 1997. Charles T. Tart, one of the founders of transpersonal psychology, has been a leading proponent of including the study of psi functioning as a legitimate topic for study within the domain of transpersonal psychology. Professor Tart’s publications can be viewed at his website – *www.paradigm-sys.com*<sup>3</sup>.

“Transpersonal psychology is a fundamental area of research, scholarship, and application based on people’s experiences of temporarily transcending our usual identification with our limited biological, historical, cultural and personal self . . . and as a result, experiencing a much greater ‘something’ that is our deeper origin and destination<sup>4</sup> (Tart, 1997, available *www.paradigmsys.com*<sup>5</sup>)

### Figure 1-1. Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology (1997-2000)

- 1997. Brant Cortright, Director of the Integral Counseling Psychology Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies, publishes “*Psychotherapy and Spirit: Theory and Practice in Transpersonal Psychotherapy*” that defines transpersonal psychology as the integration of spiritual and psychological aspects of the human psyche.

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<sup>3</sup>**Internet:** “<http://www.paradigm-sys.com/ctart/>”.

<sup>4</sup>Editor’s Citation of *Urantia Book 141:5.1* . . . **Jesus** . . . replied: . . . **Spiritual unity** is derived from the consciousness that each of you is indwelt, and increasingly dominated, by the spirit gift of the heavenly Father. Your apostolic harmony must grow out of **the fact that the spirit hope of each of you is identical in origin, nature, and destiny.**”

<sup>5</sup>**Internet:** “[http://www.paradigmsys.com/display/ctt\\_articles2.cfm?ID=25](http://www.paradigmsys.com/display/ctt_articles2.cfm?ID=25)”.

“Transpersonal psychology can be understood as the melding of the wisdom of the world’s spiritual traditions with the learning of modern psychology . . . a synthesis of these two profound approaches to human consciousness, the spiritual and the psychological . . . Transpersonal psychology is concerned with developing a self while also honoring the urge to go beyond the self . . . The definition of transpersonal as “beyond the personal” [includes] such things as mystical experience, altered states of consciousness, kundalini experiences, various psi phenomena (such as ESP, clairvoyance, channeling, telepathy, etc.), shamanic journeying, unitive states, near-death experiences, and so on . . . [Moving] toward a more complete view that seeks to find the sacred in the daily, ordinary life and consciousness in which most people live. The definition of *trans* as “across” also applies, since transpersonal psychology moves across the personal realm, acknowledging and continuing to explore all aspects of the self and the unconscious that traditional psychology has discovered while also placing this personal psychology in a larger framework . . . Transpersonal psychology studies how the spiritual is expressed in and through the personal, as well as the transcendence of the self<sup>6</sup>. Transpersonal psychology in this sense affords a wider perspective for all the learning of conventional psychology. It includes and exceeds traditional psychology.” (Cortright, 1997, pp. 8-10)

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- 1998. William Braud, Research Director of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (Palo Alto, California) and Rosemarie Anderson, Associate Professor at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, publish “*Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences*” to assist transpersonal psychologists explore the “transformative or spiritual dimension of human experience” within the context of scientific research.

“As a field of research, scholarship, and application, transpersonal psychology seeks to honor human experience in its fullest and most transformative expressions . . . Transpersonal psychology seeks to delve into the most profound aspects of human experience, such as mystical and unitive experiences, personal transformation, meditative awareness, experiences of wonder and ecstasy, and alternative and expansive states of consciousness. In these experiences, we appear to go beyond our usual identification with our limited biological and psychological selves . . . Transpersonal psychology . . . concerns itself with issues of consciousness, alternative states of consciousness, exceptional experiences, trans-egoic development, and humanity’s highest potential and possible transformation . . . It seeks to learn how people can become more whole through integrating the somatic, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, creative-expressive, and relationship and community aspects of their lives.” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, pp. xxi, 4, 37)

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- 2000. Stanislav Grof, co-founder of transpersonal psychology with Abraham Maslow, defines transpersonal psychology in his book “*Psychology of the Future: Lessons from Modern Consciousness Research*” within the context of modern consciousness research.

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<sup>6</sup>Editor’s Citation of *Urantia Book 6:6.2* Spirit is ever conscious, minded, and possessed of varied phases of identity. Without mind in some phase there would be no spiritual consciousness in the fraternity of spirit beings. The equivalent of mind, the ability to know and be known, is indigenous to Deity. Deity may be personal, prepersonal, superpersonal, or impersonal, but Deity is never mindless, that is, never without the ability at least to communicate with similar entities, beings, or personalities.

“Transpersonal psychology seriously studies and respects the entire spectrum of human experience, including holotropic [i.e., moving toward the whole] states, and all the domains of the psyche - biographical, perinatal and transpersonal. As a result, it is more culturally sensitive and offers a way of understanding the psyche that is universal and applicable to any human group and any historical period. It also honors the spiritual dimensions of existence and acknowledges the deep human need for transcendental experiences.” (Grof, 2000, p. 217)

### Figure 1-1. Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology (2001-2002)

- 2001. The National Association for Transpersonal Psychology [<http://natponline.com/>], in affiliation with Life’s Foundation of Health & Education, defines transpersonal psychology within a comprehensive systems perspective of human nature, which includes mind and body, nature and spirit, intellect and emotions to promote a “whole person” concept of wellness.

“[Transpersonal psychology] embraces the combined fields of clinical psychology, spiritual and pastoral counseling as well as any philosophies which recognize the close connection between the body and the spirit. Transpersonal Psychology works on the basic assumption that physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual growths are interrelated<sup>7</sup>. Transpersonal Psychology focuses attention on the human capacity for self-transcendence as well as self-realization and is concerned with the optimum development of consciousness.” [Retrieved December 15, 2001, from <http://www.starlighter.com/natp/>]

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- 2002. Transpersonal psychologists James Fadiman and Robert Frager, who published one of the first college-level personality theory textbook that included chapters on Far and Middle Eastern personality theories another was Hall & Lindsey’s (1978) classic text, “*Theories of Personality*” (3<sup>rd</sup>. ed.). that included an overview of the Buddhist personality theory, **Anhidhamma** - incorporate a chapter titled “Abraham Maslow and Transpersonal Psychology” into the 5th edition in their text, “*Personality and Personal Growth*”, that provides a contemporary description of transpersonal psychology.

“Transpersonal psychology contributes to the more traditional concerns of the discipline an acknowledgement of the spiritual aspect of human experience. This level of experience has been described primarily in religious literature, in unscientific and often theologically biased language. A major task of transpersonal psychology is to provide a scientific language and a scientific framework for this material . . . One basic tenet of transpersonal psychology is that there is in each individual a deeper or true self that is experienced in transcendent states of consciousness. Distinct from the personality and the personal ego, it is the source of inner wisdom, health, and harmony. “*Webster’s Tenth New Collegiate Dictionary*” defines *transpersonal* as ‘extending or going beyond the personal or individual.’ The term refers to an extension of identity beyond both individuality and personality. One of the premises of transpersonal psychology is that we do not know

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<sup>7</sup>Editor’s Citation of *Urantia Book 110:6.3* The psychic circles are not exclusively intellectual, neither are they wholly morontial; they have to do with personality status, mind attainment, soul growth, and Adjuster attunement. The successful traversal of these levels demands the harmonious functioning of the **entire personality**, not merely of some one phase thereof. The growth of the parts does not equal the true maturation of **the whole; the parts really grow in proportion to the expansion of the entire self - the whole self - material, intellectual, and spiritual.**

the full range of human potential. The sense of a vast potential for growth within the individual provides a context for transpersonal psychology.” (Fadiman and Frager, 2002, p. 452)

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- 2002. Jorge Ferrer, Assistant Professor of East-West Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies, publishes “*Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*” that is one of the first constructive postmodern critiques of conventional transpersonal theory which discloses a more multidimensional, participatory vision of transpersonal realities and human spirituality than had previously been acknowledged, recognized, or accepted by most transpersonal theorists.

“Transpersonal theory is concerned with the study of the transpersonal and spiritual dimensions of human nature and existence. Etymologically, the term *transpersonal* means beyond or through (trans-) the personal<sup>8</sup>, and is generally used in the transpersonal literature to reflect concerns, motivations, experiences, developmental stages (cognitive, moral, emotional, interpersonal, etc.), modes of being, and other phenomena that include but transcend the sphere of the individual personality, self, or ego.” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 5)

### Figure 1-1. Definitions of Transpersonal Psychology (2002-2003)

- 2002. Richard Tarnas, former director of programs and education at Esalen Institute and currently professor of philosophy and psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies, emphasizes in his definition of transpersonal psychology the paradigm shift that was initiated by the emergence of the field in the late 1960’s.

“Transpersonal psychology’s inclusion and validation of the spiritual dimension of human experience opened the modern psychological vision to a radically expanded universe of realities - Eastern and Western, ancient and contemporary, esoteric and mystical, shamanic and therapeutic, ordinary and nonordinary, human and cosmic. Spirituality was now recognized as not only an important focus of psychological theory and research but also an essential foundation of psychological health and healing. Developing ideas and directions pioneered by William James and C.G. Jung, transpersonal psychology and theory began to address the great schism between religion and science that so deeply divided the modern sensibility.” (Tarnas, 2002, p. viii)

- 2003. The Department of Transpersonal Psychology, one of four academic departments within the Graduate School for Holistic Studies at John F. Kennedy University in Orinda, California, offers a Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology with a Transpersonal Specialization that promotes a vision of transpersonal psychology within a holistic context.

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<sup>8</sup>Editor’s Citation: Transpersonal could also mean **superpersonal** Deity as in the *Urantia Book 0:1.2* DEITY is personalizable as God, is prepersonal and **superpersonal** in ways not altogether comprehensible by man. Deity is characterized by the quality of unity - actual or potential - on all supermaterial levels of reality; and this unifying quality is best comprehended by creatures as divinity.

“The transpersonal perspective includes the wisdom and methods of [traditional] orientations and expands on them to include the spiritual aspects of human experience. Transpersonal psychologists are concerned with the development of a healthy individuality and its extension to include aspects of the Higher Self. This viewpoint acknowledges that behind the masks, roles and melodramas of one’s conditioned personality lies a deeper state of being that transcends individual identity. Transpersonal psychologists believe that any model of the human psyche must include this full range of human experience, for it is the upper range that sets the context for understanding the whole human being. As the transpersonal perspective unites the spiritual with the psychological aspects of human experience, it addresses the integration of the whole person - body, mind, emotion, and spirit<sup>9</sup>. In doing so, the field is grounded in Western psychological theory and draws on the world’s spiritual traditions, mythology, anthropology and the arts as well as research on consciousness.” (John F. Kennedy University, 2003)

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- 2003. John Davis, a transpersonal psychologist who teaches a course in transpersonal psychology at Metropolitan State College of Denver, provides the following definition of transpersonal psychology and a sample course syllabus on his web site.

“Transpersonal psychology stands at the interface of psychology and spiritual experience. It is the field of psychology that integrates psychological concepts, theories, and methods with the subject matter and practices of the spiritual disciplines. Its interests include spiritual experiences, mystical states of consciousness, mindfulness and meditative practices, shamanic states, ritual, the overlap of spiritual experiences and disturbed states such as psychosis and depression, and the transpersonal dimensions of relationships, service, and encounters with the natural world. The central concept in Transpersonal Psychology is self-transcendence, or a sense of identity<sup>10</sup>, which is deeper, broader, and more unified with the whole. The root of the term, *transpersonal* or literally “beyond the mask,” refers to this self-transcendence. Its orientation is inclusive, valuing and integrating the following: psychology and the spiritual, the personal and the transpersonal, exceptional mental health and suffering, ordinary and non-ordinary states of consciousness, modern Western perspectives, Eastern perspectives, postmodern insights, and worldviews of indigenous traditions, and analytical intellect and contemplative ways of knowing.” [Retrieved June 2, 2003 from *clem.mscd.edu/ davisj/tp*<sup>11</sup>]

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<sup>9</sup>Editor’s Citation: Unification of the whole person means develop an **unified personality** that integrates the body and human mind with the soul and divine spirit. Jesus realized this as revealed in the *Urantia Book 100:7.1* Although the average mortal of Urantia cannot hope to attain the high perfection of character which Jesus of Nazareth acquired while sojourning in the flesh, it is altogether possible for every mortal believer to develop a strong and **unified personality** along the perfected lines of the Jesus personality . . .

<sup>10</sup>Editor’s Citation of *Urantia Book 5:6.7* The material self has personality and identity, **temporal identity**; the prepersonal spirit Adjuster also has identity, **eternal identity**. This material personality and this spirit prepersonality are capable of so uniting their creative attributes as to bring into existence the surviving identity of the immortal soul.

<sup>11</sup>**Internet:** “<http://clem.mscd.edu/ davisj/tp>”.





# Chapter 2

## Conclusion

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## 2.2 Biographical Note

Paul F. Cunningham received his B.A. degree in philosophy from Our Lady of Providence Seminary (Warwick, RI) in 1971, M.S. degree in educational psychology from Purdue University (W. Lafayette, IN) in 1975, and Ph.D. in general/experimental psychology from the University of Tennessee (Knoxville, TN) in 1986. Currently a tenured faculty member, professor of psychology, and chair of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Department at Rivier College (Nashua, NH), he has taught undergraduate courses in behavior modification, cognitive psychology, educational psychology, experimental psychology, health psychology, history and systems, introductory psychology, personality theory, psychological assessment, sensation and perception, statistics, transpersonal psychology, and graduate courses in design and analysis of research.

As director of the Rivier College Assessment Program from 1997-2004, he delivered numerous paper/poster presentations on assessing student outcomes and institutional effectiveness in higher education at regional and national conferences. Member of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) since 1997, he has served as consultant and workshop facilitator on assessment-related issues throughout the New England area.

He has published mainly on animal use, student choice policies, and non-animal alternatives in psychology education, serving as treasurer of Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PSYETA) from 1994-1996.

Member of the American Psychological Association (APA) since 1986, he has served on the Steering Committee of the New England Psychological Association (NEPA) for the past eight years, and was instrumental in bringing NEPA's annual meeting to the Rivier College campus in 2002. As 44th President of NEPA, he has been committed to continue NEPA's fine tradition of providing a forum for open discussion of scholarly and timely topics, facilitating student and professional development, and planning quality programming at its annual conferences.

He is currently writing an introductory textbook in transpersonal psychology for 2-year and 4-year colleges that covers topics ordinarily addressed in a typical introductory psychology course, but from a transpersonal point of view, in order to address the growing need for a generalized model of curricula for undergraduate courses in transpersonal psychology and as an encouragement to teachers of psychology to introduce this exciting area of investigation to their students.