

## Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology\*

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Transpersonal psychology is a branch of psychology that recognizes and accepts spirituality as an important dimension of the human psyche and of the universal scheme of things. It also studies and honors the entire spectrum of human experience, including various levels and realms of the psyche that become manifest in non-ordinary states of consciousness. Here belong, for example, experiences and observations from meditation and other forms of systematic spiritual practice, spontaneous mystical raptures, psychospiritual crises ("spiritual emergencies"), psychedelic therapy, hypnosis, experiential psychotherapy, and near-death situations (NDE). More specifically, these are such phenomena as sequences of psychological death and rebirth; experiences of divine light; cosmic consciousness; mystical union with other people, nature, and the entire universe; encounters with archetypal beings; visits to mythological realms; karmic experiences; various forms of extrasensory perception (ESP), and many others.

Transpersonal psychology has been in existence for more than a quarter of a century and has been enjoying steadily increasing influence and popularity. In the last fifteen years, the transpersonal orientation has expanded into other scientific disciplines, including quantum-relativistic physics, biology, medicine, anthropology, art, ecology, politics, and many others. The Association for Transpersonal

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Psychology (ATP) holds annual meetings in Asilomar, California, and the International Transpersonal Association (ITA) convenes regularly in different parts of the world. There exist universities and other educational institutions that offer advanced degrees in transpersonal psychology and many national and regional conferences in psychiatry, psychology, and anthropology have featured special symposia dedicated exclusively to the transpersonal perspective. Many journals, such as the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology and the Re-Vision Journal, specialize in publishing articles on transpersonal

subjects and the number of books in this field has reached many hundreds in the United States alone.

In spite of all this, many professionals refuse to accept that the transpersonal orientation represents a legitimate scientific endeavor. They dismiss it as an irrational and undisciplined product of a group of eccentric, mystically oriented professionals and paraprofessionals who are not familiar with the most basic principles of traditional science. The main reason for this criticism is the fact that the findings and conclusions of the transpersonal disciplines are incompatible with the most basic metaphysical assumptions of the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm and with the materialistic philosophy that has dominated Western science for the last three hundred years.

However, this attitude completely ignores the fact that many of the pioneers and chief representatives of the transpersonal movement are people with solid academic backgrounds and often impressive professional credentials. They have departed from the traditional conceptual frameworks not because of their ignorance of the most basic principles of Western science, but because the mainstream conceptual frameworks failed to account for and explain too many of their important observations and experiences.

The purpose of this paper is to review the existing evidence and show that the transpersonal orientation can be fully scientifically justified, both as a theoretical system of thinking and as an approach to important practical problems. I will first describe in very general terms the essence of the issues involved and then discuss more specifically the findings in various areas of the transpersonal field and the challenges they represent for traditional science. I will also touch upon the new perspectives that open up when we accept the transpersonal orientation and point out the hopes this brings on a personal, as well as collective level.

The critical issue and pivotal focus of the controversy about transpersonal psychology is the nature (or the ontological status) of a wide spectrum of experiences that occur in various forms of non-ordinary states of consciousness, such as death-rebirth experiences, archetypal visions, karmic phenomena, out-of-body experiences, episodes of ESP, and many others. Their existence has been known to psychiatrists and psychologists for many decades. However, they were in the past dismissed as pathological products of the brain, as manifestations of mental disease. The main reason for this was the fact that they could not be explained in the context of traditional conceptual frameworks of

mainstream psychiatry. They thus were not seen as having any heuristic or therapeutic value. The main concern of psychiatrists has been to find effective means of suppressing them when they occur.

Serious study of non-ordinary states of consciousness has proven this position to be untenable. It reveals that these experiences are not random products of brain pathology, but represent phenomena that are natural and genuine manifestations of the deeper dynamics of the psyche. Their existence clearly indicates that we have to radically revise our ideas about the nature and dimensions of human consciousness and that our current cartography of the psyche has to be vastly extended. The traditional model of the psyche used in academic psychiatry is limited to postnatal biography and to the individual unconscious as described by Sigmund Freud. In my own attempt to map the new territories of the unconscious, I found it necessary to add two large transbiographical domains; I refer to them as the perinatal and the transpersonal realms.

The perinatal domain derives its name from the fact that most people associate the experiences on this level with reliving of their biological birth (the Greek prefix *peri* - means "around" or "near" and the Latin root *natalis* translates as "pertaining to childbirth"). Birth is a potentially or actually life-threatening event, which accounts for the fact that perinatal experiences represent a strange combination of a profound encounter with death and a determined struggle to be born and to become free. The emotions and physical sensations involved are extremely powerful, often reaching far beyond what the individual could previously even imagine.

The fact that perinatal experiences transcend all the individual limits makes them a natural bridge between the personal realm and the transpersonal domain that we will discuss later. On the one hand, they contain many memories related to various aspects of the process of birth, such as pressures, physical pains, suffocation, strangulation by the umbilical cord, or smell of anesthesia, on the other, they open up into the historical or archetypal domains of the collective unconscious as described by C.G. Jung. This often adds to the perinatal process such elements as racial, collective, karmic, and phylogenetic experiences, as well as rich archetypal imagery of a mythological nature.

To understand the importance of the perinatal dynamics, it is necessary to realize that at the moment of biological birth, the fetus is born anatomically, but not emotionally. While the newborn is liberated from the mechanical confines of the birth canal, he or she

still carries a cellular record of the agonizing experience and an enormous amount of pent-up emotions and physical energies. These were generated during the many hours of delivery and could not be adequately processed because there was no excess to peripheral discharge in any form.

Unless the person has the opportunity to participate in powerful ritual practice, undergoes systematic experiential therapy, or has a spontaneous episode of NOSC, this situation does not get resolved and persists for the rest of his or her life. The perinatal reservoir of difficult emotions and physical sensations is an important potential source of future psychopathology and of a generally unfulfilling and inauthentic strategy of existence. It is conducive to a relentless linear pursuit of goals ("tread-mill" or "rat-race" existence) that can easily be recognized as surrogates for the incomplete gestalt of birth. This unconscious repository of heavily emotionally charged material also seems to separate the individual from his or her inner spiritual core.

Activation of this level of the unconscious in NOSC results in sequences of psychospiritual death and rebirth. It involves not only full conscious experience, assimilation, and integration of the trauma of birth, but also connection with the rich spiritual resources of the transpersonal domain. The specific symbolism of these experiences comes from the Jungian collective unconscious, not from the individual memory banks, and can, therefore, be drawn from any spiritual tradition of the world, quite independently from the subject's racial, cultural, or religious background. For somebody who connected with this experiential domain, spirituality is not a matter of belief or interpretation of the world, but deep knowing.

People who have experiences of this kind open up to spirituality found in the mystical branches of the great religions or in their monastic orders, not necessarily in their mainstream forms. If they take a Christian form, the subject would feel close to St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart, or St. Hildegard von Bingen, rather than develop appreciation for the Vatican hierarchy, the edicts of the popes, the crusades or the acts of the Inquisition. An Islamic experience of this kind would bring the subject close to the teachings of the various Sufi orders, not to Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, or to the concept of jihad, or the Holy War against the Infidels. A Judaic variety of this experience would connect one to the Hassidic or the Cabalistic tradition and not to fundamentalist Judaism or Sionism, etc. It is spirituality that is universal, all-embracing, and based on direct experience rather than dogma or religious scripture.

The observations from the study of non-ordinary states of consciousness confirm the ideas of C.G. Jung concerning spirituality. According to him, the experiences from deeper levels of the psyche (in my own terminology perinatal and transpersonal) have a certain quality that Jung calls (after Rudolph Otto) numinosity. The subjects having such experiences feel that they are encountering a dimension which is sacred, holy, radically different from everyday life, belonging to another order of reality. This term is relatively neutral and thus preferable to others, such as "religious", "mystical", "magical", "holy", "sacred", "occult", and others, which have often been used incorrectly and are easily misleading.

Direct spiritual experiences appear in two different forms. The first of these, the experience of the immanent divine, involves subtly, but profoundly transformed perception of the everyday reality. A person having this form of spiritual experience sees the people, animals, and inanimate objects in the environment as radiant manifestations of the same unified field of cosmic creative energy and the boundaries between them as illusory and unreal. This is the experience of nature as god, deus sive natura, that Baruch Spinoza talked about. Using an analogy with television, it could be likened to a situation where a black and white picture would suddenly acquire colors. Much of the old perception remains in place, but is radically redefined by the addition of a new dimension.

The second form, the experience of the trans-cendental divine, involves appearance of archetypal beings and realms of reality that are ordinarily transphenomenal, that means unavailable to perception in the everyday state of consciousness. They seem to unfold or explicate- borrowing a term from David Bohm- from another level or order of reality. These two types of transpersonal experiences represent the source of inspiration for the founders of religions, saints, prophets, and spiritual practitioners. This form of spirituality is often first encountered in the context of the death-rebirth process, but then finds full expression in connection with the transpersonal level of the psyche, where such experiences appear independently of the perinatal elements.

The term transpersonal means literally lying beyond or going beyond the personal. The experiences that originate on this level involve transcendence of the usual boundaries of the individual (his or her body and ego) and of the limitations of three-dimensional space and linear time that restrict our perception of the world in the ordinary state of

consciousness. The transpersonal experiences are best defined by describing first the everyday experience of ourselves and the world- how we have to experience ourselves and the environment to pass for "normal" according to the standards of our culture and of Newtonian-Cartesian psychiatry.

In the ordinary or "normal" state of consciousness, we experience ourselves as Newtonian objects existing within the boundaries of our skin. The American writer and philosopher Alan Watts referred to this experience of oneself as identifying with the "skin-encapsulated ego". Our perception of the environment is restricted by the physiological limitations of our sensory organs and by physical characteristics of the environment. We cannot see objects we are separated from by a solid wall, ships that are beyond the horizon, or the other side of the moon. If we are in Prague, we cannot hear what our friends are talking about in San Francisco. We cannot feel the softness of the lambskin unless the surface of our body is in direct contact with it. In addition, we can experience vividly and with all our senses only the events that are happening in the present moment. We can recall the past and anticipate future events or fantasize about them; however, these are very different experiences from an immediate and direct experience of the present moment. In transpersonal states of consciousness, however, none of these limitations are absolute; any of them can be transcended.

Transpersonal experiences can be divided into three large categories. The first of these involves primarily transcendence of the usual spatial barriers, or the limitations of the "skin-encapsulated ego. Here belong experiences of merging with another person into a state that can be called "dual unity", assuming the identity of another person, identifying with the consciousness of an entire group of people (e.g. all mothers of the world, the entire population of India, or all the inmates of concentration camps), or even experiencing an extension of consciousness that seems to encompass all of humanity. Experiences of this kind have been repeatedly described in the spiritual literature of the world.

In a similar way, one can transcend the limits of the specifically human experience and identify with the consciousness of various animals, plants, or even a form of consciousness that seems to be associated with inorganic objects and processes. In the extremes, it is possible to experience consciousness of the entire biosphere, of our planet, or the entire material universe. Incredible and absurd as it might seem to a Westerner committed to Cartesian-Newtonian science, these experiences suggest that everything we

can experience in the everyday state of consciousness as an object, has in the non-ordinary states of consciousness a corresponding subjective representation. It is as if everything in the universe has its objective and subjective aspect, the way it is described in the great spiritual philosophies of the East (e.g. in Hinduism all that exists is seen as a manifestation of Brahma, or in Taoism as a transformation of the Tao).

The second category of transpersonal experiences is characterized primarily by overcoming of temporal rather than spatial boundaries, by transcendence of linear time. We have already talked about the possibility of vivid reliving of important memories from infancy and of the trauma of birth. This historical regression can continue farther and involve authentic fetal and embryonal memories from different periods of intrauterine life. It is not even unusual to experience, on the level of cellular consciousness, full identification with the sperm and the ovum at the time of conception. But the historical regression does not stop here and it is possible to have experiences from the lives of one's human or animal ancestors, or even those that seem to be coming from the racial and collective unconscious as described by C. G. Jung. Quite frequently, the experiences that seem to be happening in other cultures and historical periods are associated with a sense of personal remembering; people then talk about reliving of memories from past lives, from previous incarnations.

In the transpersonal experiences described so far, the content reflects various phenomena existing in space-time. They involve elements of the everyday familiar reality—other people, animals, plants, materials, and events from the past. What is surprising here is not the content of these experiences, but the fact that we can witness or fully identify with something that is not ordinarily accessible to our experience. We know that there are pregnant whales in the world, but we should not be able to have an authentic experience of being one. The fact that there once was the French revolution is readily acceptable, but we should not be able to have a vivid experience of being there and lying wounded on the barricades of Paris. We know that there are many things happening in the world in places where we are not present, but it is usually considered impossible to experience something that is happening in remote locations (without the mediation of the television and a satellite). We may also be surprised to find consciousness associated with lower animals, plants, and with inorganic nature.

However, the third category of transpersonal experiences is even stranger; here consciousness seems to extend into realms and dimensions that the Western industrial

culture does not consider to be "real". Here belong numerous visions of archetypal beings and mythological landscapes, encounters or even identification with deities and demons of various cultures, and communication with discarnate beings, spirit guides, suprahuman entities, extraterrestrials, and inhabitants of parallel universes. Additional examples in this category are visions and intuitive understanding of universal symbols, such as the cross, the Nile cross or ankh, the swastika, the pentacle, the six-pointed star, or the yin-yang sign.

In its farther reaches, individual consciousness can identify with cosmic consciousness or the Universal Mind known under many different names - Brahman, Buddha, the Cosmic Christ, Keter, Allah, the Tao, the Great Spirit, and many others. The ultimate of all experiences appears to be identification with the Supracosmic and Metacosmic Void, the mysterious and primordial emptiness and nothingness that is conscious of itself and is the ultimate cradle of all existence. It has no concrete content, yet it contains all there is in a germinal and potential form.

Transpersonal experiences have many strange characteristics that shatter the most fundamental metaphysical assumptions of the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm and of the materialistic world view. Researchers who have studied and/or personally experienced these fascinating phenomena realize that the attempts of mainstream science to dismiss them as irrelevant products of human fantasy and imagination or as hallucinations- erratic products of pathological processes in the brain- are naive and inadequate. Any unbiased study of the transpersonal domain of the psyche has to come to the conclusion that the observations represent a critical challenge not only for psychiatry and psychology, but for the entire philosophy of Western science.

Although transpersonal experiences occur in the process of deep individual self-exploration, it is not possible to interpret them simply as intrapsychic phenomena in the conventional sense. On the one hand, they appear on the same experiential continuum as the biographical and perinatal experiences and are thus coming from within the individual psyche. On the other hand, they seem to be tapping directly, without the mediation of the senses, into sources of information that are clearly far beyond the conventional reach of the individual. Somewhere on the perinatal level of the psyche, a strange flip seems to occur and what was up to that point deep intrapsychic probing becomes experiencing of the universe at large through extrasensory means. Some people have compared this to an



"experiential Moebius strip", since it is impossible any more to say what is inside and what is outside.

These observations indicate that we can obtain information about the universe in two radically different ways: beside the conventional possibility of learning through sensory perception and analysis and synthesis of the data, we can also find out about various aspects of the world by direct identification with them in a non-ordinary state of consciousness. Each of us thus appears to be a microcosm containing in a holographic way the information about the macrocosm. In the mystical traditions, this was expressed by such phrases as: "as above so below" or "as without, so within."

The reports of subjects who have experienced episodes of embryonal existence, the moment of conception, and elements of cellular, tissue, and organ consciousness abound in medically accurate insights into the anatomical, physiological, and biochemical aspects of the processes involved. Similarly, ancestral, racial and collective memories and past incarnation experiences provide quite frequently very specific details about architecture, costumes, weapons, art forms, social structure, and religious and ritual practices of the culture and historical period involved, or even concrete historical events.

People who experienced phylogenetic experiences or identification with existing life forms not only found them unusually authentic and convincing, but often acquired in the process extraordinary insights concerning animal psychology, ethology, specific habits, or unusual reproductive cycles. In some instances, this was accompanied by archaic muscular innervations not characteristic for humans, or even such complex behaviors as enactment of a courtship dance.

The philosophical challenge associated with the already described observations, as formidable as it is all by itself, is further augmented by the fact that the transpersonal experiences correctly reflecting the material world often appear on the same continuum as and intimately interwoven with others that contain elements which the Western industrial world does not consider to be real. Here belong, for example, experiences involving deities and demons from various cultures, mythological realms such as heavens and paradises, and legendary or fairy-tale sequences.

For example, one can have an experience of Shiva's heaven, of the paradise of the Aztec raingod Tlaloc, of the Sumerian underworld, or of one of the Buddhist hot hells. It

is also possible to communicate with Jesus, have a shattering encounter with the Hindu goddess Kali, or identify with the dancing Shiva. Even these episodes can impart accurate new information about religious symbolism and mythical motifs that were previously unknown to the person involved. Observations of this kind confirm C. G. Jung's idea that beside the Freudian individual unconscious we can also gain access to the collective unconscious that contains the cultural heritage of all humanity.

It is not an easy task to convey in a few sentences conclusions from daily observations in the course of over thirty-five years of research of non-ordinary states of consciousness and make this statement believable. It is not realistic to expect that a few sentences would be able to override the deeply culturally ingrained world-view in those of the readers who are not familiar with the transpersonal dimension and who cannot relate what I say to their personal experience. Although I myself had many experiences of non-ordinary states of consciousness and the opportunity to observe closely a number of other people, it took me years to fully absorb the impact of this cognitive shock.

Because of space considerations, I cannot present detailed case histories that could help to illustrate the nature of transpersonal experiences and the insights which they make available. I have to refer those readers who would like to explore this area further to my book **The Adventure of Self-Discovery** (Grof 1978) where I discuss in detail the various types of transpersonal experiences and give many illustrative examples of situations where they provided unusual new information about different aspects of the universe. The same book also describes the method of Holotropic Breathwork which opens the access to the perinatal and transpersonal realms for anybody who is interested in personal verification of the above observations. Comparable information about psychedelic sessions can be found in my book **LSD Psychotherapy** that has recently been published in a new edition (Grof 1994).

The existence and nature of transpersonal experiences violates some of the most basic assumptions of mechanistic science. They imply such seemingly absurd notions as relativity and arbitrary nature of all physical boundaries, non-local connections in the universe, communication through unknown means and channels, memory without a material substrate, non-linearity of time, or consciousness associated with all living organisms, and even inorganic matter. Many transpersonal experiences involve events from the microcosm and the macrocosm, realms that cannot normally be reached by unaided human senses, or from historical periods that precede the origin of the solar

system, formation of planet earth, appearance of living organisms, development of the nervous system, and emergence of homo sapiens.

The research of non-ordinary states thus reveals an amazing paradox concerning the nature of human beings. It clearly shows that, in a mysterious and yet unexplained way, each of us contains the information about the entire universe and all of existence, has potential experiential access to all of its parts, and in a sense is the whole cosmic network, as much as he or she is just an infinitesimal part of it, a separate and insignificant biological entity. The new cartography reflects this fact and portrays the individual human psyche as being essentially commensurate with the entire cosmos and the totality of existence. As absurd and implausible as this idea might seem to a traditionally trained scientist and to our commonsense, it can be relatively easily reconciled with new revolutionary developments in various scientific disciplines usually referred to as the new or emerging paradigm.

After this general introduction, I would like to briefly review more specifically some of the most important areas studied by transpersonal psychology. The common denominator in all of these is that the phenomena involved have been dismissed by mainstream psychology and psychiatry as irrelevant manifestations of brain pathology. They have been interpreted in a very superficial and highly unsatisfactory way, or even completely ignored, because their very existence is in a radical conflict with the leading paradigm.

### **1. Ritual Life, Spiritual Practice, and the Mystical Traditions.**

Transpersonal psychologists and anthropologists study very systematically and seriously various spiritual systems and religious practices in ancient and pre-industrial cultures. Among these, great attention has been given to shamanism, the most ancient religion and healing art of humanity. Shamanism spans historically an extremely long period since the Paleolithic era to the present time. It also shows a universal geographical distribution; it can be found in North and South America, Asia, Polynesia, Australia, Africa, and Europe. Shamanism is a true goldmine of fascinating information on consciousness and on the human psyche. Since it transcends history and race or culture, it seems to be addressing what the anthropologists call the primal mind. An essential characteristic of shamanism is the work with non-ordinary states of consciousness and perinatal, as well as transpersonal experiences.

The anthropologists have also described rites of passage, elaborate rituals conducted by various aboriginal cultures at the time of important biological and social transitions, such as birth, circumcision, puberty, marriage, dying, migration, and others. They typically employ powerful mind-altering technologies and the experiences induced by them revolve around the trias birth-sex-death; like shamanic experiences, they also represent different combinations of perinatal and transpersonal phenomena. Clinical work with psychedelics and various non-drug experiential approaches (such as the Holotropic Breathwork) has helped us to understand these events and appreciate their importance for individuals and human groups.

Closely related to the rites of passage were the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth, complex sacred and secret procedures that were also using powerful mind-altering techniques. They were particularly prevalent in the Mediterranean area, such as the Babylonian ceremonies of Inanna and Tammuz, the Egyptian mysteries of Isis and Osiris, the Orphic Cult, the Bacchanalia, the Eleusinian mysteries, the Corybantic rites, and the mysteries of Attis and Adonis. According to a modern study by Hofmann, Wasson, and Ruck, the Eleusinian mysteries represented a psychedelic cult using a potion ("kykeon") which contained ergot preparations related closely to LSD. The procedure the neophytes were undergoing had to be extremely powerful and compelling, since these mysteries were conducted without interruption for a period of almost 2,000 years and disclosure of their secret to the uninitiated was punished by death.

However, of particular interest to transpersonally oriented researchers is the sacred literature of the various mystical traditions and the great spiritual philosophies of the East. Here belong the various systems of yoga, the theory and practice of Buddhism, Taoism, the Tibetan Vajrayana, sufism, Christian mysticism, the Cabala, and many others. Traditional psychology and psychiatry is dominated by materialistic philosophy and has no recognition for spirituality in any form. It makes no distinction between a mystical experience and a psychotic experience. In its rejection of religion, it does not differentiate between primitive folk beliefs or fundamentalist dwelling on literal interpretation of scriptures, on the one hand, and sophisticated mystical traditions and spiritual philosophies based on centuries of systematic introspective exploration of the psyche, on the other.

Mainstream psychiatric literature contains articles and books that discuss what would be the best clinical diagnosis for founders of various religions and their saints and prophets. St. John of the Cross has been called a "hereditary degenerate", St. Teresa of Avila dismissed as a severe hysteric, and Mohammed's mystical experiences have been attributed to his seizures suggestive of epilepsy. Other religious and spiritual personages, such as Buddha, Jesus, Ramakrishna, and Sri Ramana Maharishi have, because of their visionary experiences, been relegated into the realm of schizophrenic psychosis. Similarly, some traditionally trained anthropologists have argued whether the correct clinical diagnosis for shamans is ambulant schizophrenia, epilepsy, or hysteria. The famous psychoanalyst Franz Alexander, known as one of the founders of psychosomatic medicine, wrote a paper in which even Buddhist meditation is described as "artificial catatonia".

Traditional Western science relegates religious beliefs of any kind into the realm of primitive superstition, magical thinking, or unresolved parental issues from infancy and childhood, and sees direct spiritual experiences as manifestations of gross psychopathology. It also pathologizes the ritual and spiritual life of all pre-industrial societies and thus much of human history. By seriously studying and honoring the entire range of human experience, including perinatal and transpersonal experiences, transpersonal psychology offers a way of understanding the psyche that is universal - culturally sensitive, respectful to spiritual traditions, and applicable to any culture and historical period. It also acknowledges the deep human need for transcendental experiences and sees therefore spiritual pursuit as an understandable and legitimate activity.

## **2. Modern Clinical and Laboratory Consciousness Research.**

Another important source of supportive evidence for transpersonal psychology is modern clinical and laboratory work with non-ordinary states of consciousness. It includes systematic study of the effects of psychedelic substances, experimentation with powerful forms of experiential psychotherapy that profoundly change consciousness (such as primal therapy, rebirthing, hypnosis, or the Holotropic Breathwork), and investigation of laboratory mind-altering techniques- various forms of biofeedback, sensory isolation, sleep and dream deprivation, acoustic entrainment studies, and others.

The experiences and observations from all these areas require a large cartography of the psyche that includes the perinatal and transpersonal domain. Clinical work with psychedelic substances and Holotropic Breathwork has generated many remarkable insights that are of great theoretical and practical relevance. It has shown that psychogenic emotional and psychosomatic disorders have a complex multilevel dynamic structure which includes beside the usual biographical determinants also significant perinatal and transpersonal elements. For example, a serious phobia, psychogenic asthma, or addiction can have psychological roots in traumatic experiences from childhood and also significant additional roots in the difficult emotions and physical sensations associated with the trauma of birth. The deepest source of such disorders can then be found on the transpersonal level in the form of dramatic karmic or archetypal matrices.

Since the sources of many clinical problems lie in transpersonal realms of the psyche, there exist also important mechanisms of healing and personality transformation that operate on transpersonal levels. To reach a resolution of such problems, clients have to receive encouragement and support to confront unconscious material on all the levels involved - not only relive and integrate traumatic events from infancy and childhood, but also confront perinatal and prenatal material, as well as karmic issues, archetypal dynamics, and other transpersonal contents of the psyche. For this reason, the transpersonal perspective has very important practical implications for daily clinical work.

Laboratory techniques for inducing non-ordinary states of consciousness, such as sensory isolation, sleep and dream deprivation, lucid dreaming, and biofeedback, can also evoke a broad spectrum of experiences which includes transpersonal states of mind. Such work therefore naturally leads to and requires a transpersonal perspective.

### **3. Experiential Encounter with Death.**

Some of the most convincing evidence for transpersonal understanding of consciousness and of the human psyche comes from thanatology, a relatively recent scientific discipline studying death and dying. Spiritual literature of various cultures of the world and historical periods contains descriptions of the "posthumous journey of the soul" - complex adventures in consciousness that accompany and follow the experience of biological demise. Special texts have been dedicated to this subject; the most famous

among these are the Egyptian Book of the Dead (Pert Em Hru), the Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thödol), and the European Art of Dying (Ars Moriendi). The Aztec (Nahuatl) Borgia Codex describing the journey of Quetzalcoatl through the Underworld and the Mayan "Ceramic Codex" portraying the adventures of the Hero Twins and their death and rebirth belong to this category.

Many aspects of these descriptions, initially considered wishful fantasies and fictional stories of eschatological mythology, have been confirmed by modern thanatological studies by such researchers as Raymond Moody, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Kenneth Ring, and Michael Sabom. At the time of Moody's study published as the best-selling *Life After Life*, only one of the 150 people studied indicated that the attending medical personnel- people dealing professionally with death and dying on a daily basis- knew anything about near-death experiences (NDEs). Since that time, the phenomenology of the NDE- the panoramic life review, passage through a dark tunnel, meeting of ancestors, visions of divine light, and judgment by a Being of Light - have become well known to professionals, as well as general audiences, and even served as inspiration for popular movies, such as *Resurrection*, *Ghost*, or *Flatliners*.

The existence of NDEs of a transpersonal nature has been confirmed beyond any reasonable doubt and it has become increasingly impossible to discard them as being simply hallucinations resulting from biological damage to the body and the brain. It has been repeatedly confirmed that people facing clinical death often experience their consciousness detaching from the body and observe the scene of the accident or the resuscitation procedures from above. When they return to normal consciousness, they are able to give detailed retrospective accounts of all the events that occurred. They know, for example, who was present at the scene, who came and left through which door, what gadgets were wheeled in and out of the operation room, and sometimes even what the little pointers were showing on the gauges of the equipment used for resuscitation.

Occasionally, these people are able to witness accurately what is happening in other parts of the same building or even in remote locations. And there exist case histories of congenitally blind persons, who at the time of their clinical death were able to observe the environment optically and in colors, only to lose their sight after they regained ordinary consciousness. It is difficult to imagine a more serious blow to the traditional scientific paradigm and a more convincing support for the transpersonal perspective than observations of this kind.

#### **4. Psychospiritual Crises (Spiritual Emergencies).**

Another area where the transpersonal approach offers important theoretical understanding and practical guidance is the problem of psychospiritual crises. These are episodes on non-ordinary states of consciousness that can occur in the course of powerful spiritual practice, as a reaction to various physical and psychological situations, or "spontaneously"- for reasons that we can not identify. They can take many different forms, such as that of awakening of Kundalini energy, a shamanic crisis, John Perry's renewal process by activation of their central archetype, Abraham Maslow's peak experience, emergence of a disturbing past life experience, precipitous opening of psychic abilities, possession states, and many others. Episodes of this kind have been repeatedly described in spiritual literature of various traditions.

The intensity of emotions and psychosomatic manifestations accompanying these states, as well as the rich spectrum and exotic nature of the experiences involved, makes them incomprehensible in the context of traditional psychiatry and psychology. Since they combine in various ways perinatal and transpersonal experiences, a system of thinking that does not recognize these levels of the psyche and which is limited to postnatal biography and the Freudian individual unconscious, has to attribute them to brain pathology of unknown etiology.

People experiencing these episodes are therefore labeled as psychotic and routinely treated by suppressive medication. A transpersonal approach using a large encompassing cartography of the psyche makes it possible to understand that these states are potentially healing, transformative, and evolutionary. It also offers sensitive support and guidance through these states as an important therapeutic alternative to the routine suppressive psychopharmacological approach. In the transpersonal context, these episodes appear to be crises of transformation ("spiritual emergencies").

The idea that a pathological process afflicting the brain could in itself produce the rich and complex experiences of this kind, such a past life experience in ancient Egypt or in the French revolution, glorious identification with the dancing Shiva, or abduction by extraterrestrials in a flying saucer is so bizarre and implausible that it is difficult to believe that it has been seriously considered by respectable researchers. It would be comparable



to believing that a damage to a computer could transform its program into a completely different one, but equally complex and comprehensible. Damage to the brain can explain disturbances of thinking, intellect, and memory. Transpersonal experiences are clearly genuine manifestations of the psyche as such, but they reveal that the dimensions of human consciousness reach much farther than academic psychiatry and psychology ever suspected.

#### **5. Parapsychological Research and Psychic Phenomena.**

The list of areas that are relevant for transpersonal psychology should also include parapsychology. Prominent researchers, such as J. B. Rhine, Jules Eisenbud, Hans Bender, L. L. Vasiliev, Charles Tart, Stanley Krippner, Russell Targ, Harold Puthoff, Keith Harary, and many others have conducted meticulous laboratory and field studies and amassed vast supportive evidence for the existence of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, remote viewing, psychometry, telekinesis, out-of-body experiences, and Poltergeist phenomena. The results of their meticulously conceived and conducted research have been ignored because of their basic incompatibility with the leading scientific paradigm.

The relationship between parapsychology and transpersonal psychology is very interesting. The results of parapsychological research are in full congruence with the transpersonal perspective. However, in the new context, there is no reason to limit parapsychological studies to their traditional topics, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, psychometry, or telekinesis. As I mentioned earlier, just about every form of transpersonal experience can become a source of information received through extrasensory channels. If in the future transpersonal psychology becomes a recognized discipline, parapsychology might have to expand the range of its activities to other types of transpersonal phenomena, or even lose its separate identity and be completely absorbed and integrated into the new field.

#### **6. UFO Phenomena and Alien Abduction Experiences.**

The transpersonal perspective is also very useful in the study of a group of unusually puzzling and confusing phenomena that baffle traditional researchers - the experiences of encounters with extraterrestrial visitors. The reports involving unidentified flying objects (UFOs) are certainly among the most controversial materials of the modern

era. Since 1947 when the American civilian pilot Kenneth Arnold first saw them in the mountains near Mt. Rainier and gave them the name "flying saucers", countless people all over the world reported related experiences. Many of them described daytime sightings of unusual objects and night time visions of strange lights. Others claimed they observed landings of alien spacecrafts and saw their crews or interacted with them. Occasionally, such reports referred to abductions, visits to the interiors of the spaceships, medical examinations and interventions, or even space flights to more or less remote extraterrestrial destinations.

The controversy surrounding these phenomena is of unprecedented proportions and deserves more detailed discussion. On the one hand, the descriptions of alien creatures and their mysterious machines defying the laws of nature as we know them seem to be too fantastic to be taken seriously. In addition, an extensive study conducted by the US Air Force and headed by a special committee at the University of Columbia declared most UFO reports to be results of natural causes or of mental disorders of the observers. On the other hand, serious researchers such as Allen Hynek and Jacques Vallée disagreed with these conclusions. Analyzing the same material, they found the data sufficiently interesting and convincing to dedicate their lives to their study.

A fascinating aspect of the UFO experiences is that they often seem to be associated with events occurring in the material world and it is not rare that they leave some physical evidence. This includes impressions and burnt soil at the site of alleged landings, materials that can not be identified by chemical analysis, photographs and amateur movies, stigmata-like marks on the bodies of abductees, mysterious cattle mutilations, and others. The nature of the evidence is often ambiguous, almost of a trickster quality, and leaves open various ways of interpreting it. In many instances, emotionally stable and intelligent witnesses gave detailed independent descriptions of the same UFO events that were practically identical. The phenomena continue to attract much attention and the media alternate in seriously reporting sensational events and debunking them. Special conferences and meetings of the UFO abductees are held regularly and have large numbers of participants.

These phenomena are clearly too complex to be ignored or to be dismissed as artefacts of pathological processes in the brain. The discussions in this area are usually limited to the question whether or not the Earth has been visited by material spacecrafts from other regions of the universe. The Newtonian - Cartesian paradigm of materialistic

science with its sharp and absolute dichotomies - subjective or objective, material reality and hallucination - has no other alternative. However, it seems that the problems involved are much more complicated and that transpersonal psychology can bring some new light into this confusing situation.

C. G. Jung, who was very interested in UFOs wrote a fascinating book entitled **Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies**. It was based on careful historical analysis of legends about flying discs and actual apparitions throughout ages that had occasionally caused mass hysteria. Jung came to the conclusion that the UFO phenomena might be archetypal visions originating in the collective uncon-scious rather than alien hardware or intrapsychic hallucinations. This would explain the frequent synchronicities associated with them and the fact that they have what Jung called a "psychoid" quality- they seem to operate in the twilight zone between intrapsychic processes and consensus reality.

Many studies conducted in the years following the publication of Jung's book have come to conclusions that were similar to his interpretation. John Mack, a Harvard professor of psychiatry recently published a study entitled **Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens**. On the basis of his analysis of over fifty people who had retrieved memories of UFO abduction, he concluded that the material represents a serious challenge to the entire philosophy of Western science. As could be expected, he encountered severe criticism of his colleagues and much ridicule from the media. However, there is no doubt that the UFO phenomenon cannot be easily dismissed and deserves systematic study. It seems to offer fascinating new insights into the nature of human consciousness and the nature of reality. This makes them a subject of great interest for transpersonal psychologists.

#### **7. Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD).**

Another fascinating frontier of transpersonal psychology is the study of multiple personality disorders. This phenomenon that was once very rare and unusual, has in recent years mushroomed and reached almost epidemic proportions. The traditional approach to multiple personality is to see it as a result of dissociation and splitting off of various aspects of the same personality. The entire problem would thus be contained inside the skull and the brain of the person involved.

Modern research has brought extraordinary new data which challenge the traditional understanding and make the research of MPDs to another exciting frontier of trans-personal psychology. The new evidence has profound implications for the understanding of human consciousness and of the relationship between the mind and the body. It indicates that consciousness is not a mere product of the brain and that its relationship to the body is much more complex than originally assumed. This only supports similar conclusions made by foremost brain researchers, such as Wilder Penfield, Karl Pribram, and John Eccles.

There have been instances where one of the personalities showed the symptoms of a serious disease, such as diabetes, and others did not. Similarly allergies to certain foods can be limited only to some personalities. Each personality has a distinct handwriting which is quite consistently associated with its appearance. In some instances the client has serious vision problems and needs strong glasses to correct them, while some of the alternate personalities show no such difficulties and can see well without glasses. Even color-blindness can afflict only some personalities and not others, as indicated by the results of objective tests used for diagnosing this disorder. All this suggests the possibility that under certain circumstances several separate units of consciousness can compete for the control of the same body. Some researchers have concluded from these observations that even an ordinary personality is composed of a larger number of units of consciousness.

In addition, patients with multiple personalities often have a history of ritual cult abuse. The traditional understanding of this strange phenomenon, whose incidence has also grown enormously in recent years, is very superficial and unconvincing, because it misses entirely the critical role of the perinatal and transpersonal dimensions involved. Transpersonal psychology is thus finding exciting supportive evidence in another area where traditional thinking has failed to provide adequate answers.

#### **8. Consciousness Evolution and Human Survival.**

The most important problem area where transpersonal psychology could offer important theoretical and practical contribution is the current global crisis that threatens to destroy the life on this planet. The exploration of the psychological, philosophical, and spiritual roots of this crisis is of great interest to transpersonally oriented researchers. We

all have the dubious privilege of living in an era when the world drama is reaching its culmination. The violence, greed, and acquisitiveness that shaped the human history in the past centuries has reached such proportions that it could easily lead not only to complete annihilation of the human species, but to extermination of all life on this planet. The various measures of a diplomatic, political, military, economic, and ecological nature that are intended to alleviate the situation seem to make it worse rather than improving it.

In view of the power of the weapons of mass destruction and the continuing deterioration of the natural environment, it is more than obvious that humanity will not survive, unless it can find effective ways to overcome its deeply rooted intolerance, violence, and greed. However, mainstream science has very little to offer to understand these destructive tendencies within human nature and even less in terms of finding promising solutions and remedies. The "naked ape" hypothesis that sees an explanation of human violence in biological killer instincts is not very convincing since there are no parallels in the animal kingdom for the bestiality occasionally manifested by humans (Erich Fromm's "malignant aggression"). Traumatic experiences in infancy and childhood do not adequately explain the extremes of individual violence, let alone the horrors of Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia, Yugoslavia, Rwanda and of the South African Apartheid, or the atrocities committed by the Chinese in Tibet.

The work with non-ordinary states of consciousness has confirmed that traumatic experiences in infancy and childhood are important sources of aggression. However, it revealed even more elemental roots of violence in the domains of the psyche which lie beyond postnatal biography. The experiences of people reliving the trauma of birth are characterized by murderous aggression and abound in imagery portraying wars, revolutions, concentration camps, and genocide. It seems only logical to see the potentially life-threatening situation of the human birth that can last many hours or even days as an important source of extremely difficult emotions, particularly anxiety and aggression.

The relationship between the trauma of birth and the psychology of wars has been confirmed by the research of psychohistorian Lloyd de Mause who found that the demagogic talks of military leaders around the time of wars and revolutions abound in figures of speech and metaphors related specifically to biological birth. Similarly posters and political caricatures revolve around perinatal images. Sam Keen has shown in his excellent book **Faces of the Enemy** that nations and groups who are involved in war portray

each other with the use of symbolic stereotypes. Analysis of these images shows that they are identical with the art of clients depicting their perinatal experiences.

However, significant additional roots of violence and psychological patterns breeding aggressive feelings and behavior can be found on the transpersonal level of the psyche. They are associated with archetypes of wrathful deities, karmic material, consciousness of various animal forms, and other transpersonal matrices. C.G. Jung believed that the archetypes of the collective unconscious not only have a powerful influence on the behavior of individuals, but also govern large historical movements. From this point of view, entire nations and cultural groups might be enacting in their behavior important mythological themes. For example, in the decade preceding the outbreak of WW II., Jung found in the dreams of his German patients many elements from the Nordic myth about Ragnarok, or the twilight of the gods (Götterdämmerung). He concluded from this that this archetype was emerging in the collective psyche of the German nation and predicted that it would lead to a major catastrophe which would ultimately turn out to be self-destructive.

In many instances, leaders of nations specifically use archetypal images to achieve their political goals. Thus Hitler exploited the mythological motifs of the supremacy of the Nordic race and of the millennial empire, as well as the symbol of the solar eagle and the ancient Aryan swastika. The initial appeal of Communism was partially due to the fact that its presumably atheistic program for the world revolution was using archetypal symbolism of the spiritual death-rebirth process - a bloody upheaval that frees us from oppression and brings about a paradisaic future of universal brotherhood and fulfillment of our inner potential. The intolerance of any departure from the marxist-leninist and stalinist dogmas, rigid iconography of the socialist realism, and serious public declaration of Stalin's infallibility further illustrate the similarity between Communism and a rigid religious system. Similarly, Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein succeeded to ignite the imagination of their Moslem followers by references to "jihad", the holy war against the infidels. Many similar examples can be found in recent and more remote history.

The best protection against such efforts of dictators and demagogues to exploit people's transcendental needs for political purposes is intimate intellectual and experiential knowledge of the transpersonal realms. In addition, deep experiential self-exploration can result in full conscious experience and transformation of the destructive and self-destructive forces in the human psyche. Transpersonal experiences of

psychological death and rebirth and of oneness with other people, with nature, with the entire universe, and with cosmic consciousness can drastically reduce the level of aggression, increase compassion and tolerance, and automatically lead to high ecological awareness. I have seen over the years profound transformations in many people who were involved in serious and systematic inner quest.

Some of these people were meditators and had a regular spiritual practice, others had spontaneous episodes of psychospiritual crises, and many participated in clinical programs of psychedelic therapy and various forms of experiential psychotherapy and self-exploration. Their level of aggression decreased and they became more peaceful, more comfortable with themselves, and more tolerant of others. Their ability to enjoy life, particularly simple aspects of everyday existence, increased considerably. Deep reverence for life and ecological awareness have been among the most frequent consequences of the psychospiritual transformation that accompanies responsible work with non-ordinary states of consciousness. The same was true for the emergence of universal spirituality of a mystical nature based on deep personal experience.

Experiences and observations of this kind suggest that the theory and practice of transpersonal psychology could be a significant contribution to the alleviation of the global crisis if applied systematically in the life of each of us. It would mean that we would all complement whatever we are doing in our everyday life to ease the situation in the world with systematic deep self-exploration and work on ourselves. In this way, we would be able to tap the deep wisdom of the collective unconscious and use it as a guiding principle in our private affairs, as well as professional, political, and social activities. This is a strategy of existence recommended by C.G. Jung; it involves a constant dynamic interaction and ongoing dialogue between the conscious ego and the Higher Self.

Such an approach to life can mediate a process of inner transformation and individuation, as well as provide guidance for our everyday activities from a source of wisdom that by far transcends any ordinary human resources. From the perspective of transpersonal psychology, this appears to be the optimal strategy to lead a fulfilling individual life and to make the best possible contribution to our collective wellbeing. Moreover, if it turns out that humanity is on an irreversible self-destructive course in spite of all our our efforts to steer in a more positive direction, the same strategy of focusing on inner transformation will prepare us to face whatever has to come with more equanimity.

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