

Plaidoyer for Transpersonal Psychology:
Theoretical and Practical Importance of Its Findings

Psychology and Psychiatry:

1. New extended **cartography of the psyche** including not only the biographical, but also the new perinatal and transpersonal domains
2. New understanding of **emotional and psychosomatic disorders** that do not have an organic basis; their deeper roots reach into the perinatal and transpersonal domains of the unconscious
3. New powerful **therapeutic mechanisms** operating on the biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal levels – deepening and acceleration of therapy, possibility of treating conditions that were previously not accessible for treatment
4. Radically new **philosophy and strategy of therapy**: work with the **inner healing intelligence**
5. Alternative therapeutic approaches to a large category of conditions previously diagnosed as psychotic and now seen as **“spiritual emergency”**

Abraham Maslow referred to my new cartography of the psyche as **“the most important contribution to personality theory in several**

decades” and called it “the 42 cm gun of the human potential movement (in reference to the super-heavy howitzer used by Germany in WW1).

Spirituality, Religion, Mysticism, and Shamanism:

1. The discovery that **perinatal and transpersonal experiences** are not pathological phenomena, but **manifestations of deep ontologically real domains of the human psyche** has profound implications for the understanding of **spirituality, religion, mysticism, and shamanism**. Experiences that originate on this level of the psyche have a quality that C. G. Jung (following Rudolph Otto) called **numinosity**. Properly understood, supported, and integrated, they lead to spiritual opening and radically transform the individual’s worldview; they also have a healing, transformative, and even evolutionary effects.

2. These observations **legitimize spiritual quest**, which mainstream science currently sees as an indication of lack of education, superstition, magical thinking, or even pathology. However, it is necessary to distinguish **spirituality** based on personal experience from **organized religions**; these remain incompatible with science, whether this is the old Newtonian/Cartesian science or new paradigm science. **Transpersonal psychology** is striving for a **comprehensive**

worldview integrating spirituality and science. It is not attempting to legitimize dogmas of organized religions. There cannot be a conflict between science and spirituality, if both are properly understood. Ken Wilber: "If there seems to be a conflict between science and religion, it is probably 'bogus' science' and 'bogus' religion."

3. Without a vast extension of the cartography of the human psyche, it is impossible to understand such phenomena as shamanism, rites of passage, ancient death/rebirth mysteries, the great religions of the world, and their mystical branches – different schools of Hinduism (yogas), Buddhism, Taoism, and Sufism, Kabbalah, Christian mysticism, and others.

4. Understanding of Art, Advancing Knowledge, and Liberating the Promethean Creative Impulse.

The extended cartography provides deeper insights into the content of art than those allowed by psychoanalysis (see Freud's analysis of Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Goethe, Marie Bonaparte's analysis of Poe). Examples of the new understanding: H.R. Giger, Jean Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, Edgar Allan Poe, many films, etc. It also makes it possible to understand the creative process itself, which Freud was not able to do. Willis Harman: "Higher Creativity." Genius channels cosmic creative energy (Mozart, Puccini, Newton, Rilke, Nietzsche, etc).

Special example: Psychedelics.

In the 1960s, James Fadiman, Robert McKim, Willis Harman, Myron Stolaroff, and Robert Mogar conducted a pilot study of the effects of psychedelics on the creative process, using administration of mescaline to enhance inspiration and problem-solving in a group of highly talented individuals.

In 1993, molecular biologist and DNA chemist Kary Mullis received a Nobel Prize for his development of the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) that allows the amplification of specific DNA sequences; it is a central technique in biochemistry and molecular biology. During a symposium in Basel celebrating Albert Hofmann's 100th anniversary, Albert revealed that he was told by Kary Mullis that LSD had helped him develop the Polymerase Chain reaction.

Francis Crick, the Nobel-Prize-winning father of modern genetics, was under the influence of LSD when he discovered the double-helix structure of DNA. He told a fellow scientist that he often used small doses of LSD to boost his power of thought. He said it was LSD that helped him to unravel the structure of DNA, the discovery that won him the Nobel Prize.

In his non-fiction book *“What the Dormouse Said: How the*

Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry,” John Markoff described the history of the personal computer. He showed that there is a direct connection between the psychedelic use in the American counterculture of the 1950s and 1960s and the development of the computer industry. Steve Jobs said taking LSD was among the two or three most important things he had done in his life.” He has stated that people around him, who did not share his countercultural roots, could not fully relate to his thinking. Douglas Engelbart, who invented the computer mouse, was someone who experimented and explored using psychedelic drugs. Kevin Herbert, who worked for Cisco Systems in the early days, has stated: “When I’m on LSD and hearing something that’s pure rhythm, it takes me to another world and into another brain state where I’ve stopped thinking and started knowing.” Mark Pesce, the coinventor of virtual reality’s coding language, VRML, agreed that there is a definite relationship between chemical mind expansion and advances in computer technology: “To a man and a woman, the people behind virtual reality were acidheads.”

5. Transpersonal Psychology and “Hard Science.”

When our small group (Abraham Maslow, Anthony Sutich, Jim Fadiman, Miles Vich, Sonja Margulies, and Stanislav Grof) first formulated the principles of **transpersonal psychology**, this new field seemed to make a lot of sense. It was not “ethnocentric,” but culturally sensitive; it was applicable to all human groups in all parts of the world and throughout history and did not pathologize spiritual and ritual life of humanity. It also incorporated the paradigm-challenging “anomalous phenomena” from various avenues of modern consciousness research

(study of “holotropic” states of consciousness). However, there seemed to be a formidable problem: the new psychology seemed to be in **irreconcilable conflict** with what Fritjof Capra called the “**Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm**,” that had dominated Western science for the last 300 years.

The problematic status of transpersonal psychology among “hard sciences” changed very radically during the first two decades of the existence of this fledgling discipline. As a result of **revolutionary new concepts and discoveries in various scientific fields**, the philosophy of traditional Western science, its basic assumptions, and its Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm were increasingly seriously challenged and undermined. Each of these new discoveries became a piece in the mosaic of an exciting new scientific worldview, the “**new**” or “**emerging paradigm**.” Like many other theoreticians in the transpersonal field, I have followed this development with great interest and described it in the first part of my book *Beyond the Brain* as an effort to bridge the gap between the findings of my own research and the established scientific worldview.

The influx of this exciting new information began by the realization of the profound **philosophical implications of quantum-relativistic physics**, forever changing our understanding of physical reality. The astonishing convergence between the worldview of

modern physics and that of the Eastern spiritual philosophies, foreshadowed already in the work of [Albert Einstein](#), [Niels Bohr](#), [Werner Heisenberg](#), [Erwin Schroedinger](#), and others, found a full expression in the ground-breaking book by [Fritjof Capra](#), his *The Tao of Physics*. In the following years, Capra's pioneering vision has been complemented and refined by the work of [Fred Alan Wolf](#), [Nick Herbert](#), [Amit Goswami](#), and many others.

Of particular interest in this regard were the contributions of [David Bohm](#), former co-worker of Albert Einstein and author of prestigious monographs on theory of relativity and quantum physics. His concept of the explicate and implicate order and his theory of holomovement expounding the importance of holographic thinking in science gained great popularity in the transpersonal field, as did [Karl Pribram's](#) holographic model of the brain.

The same is true for biologist [Rupert Sheldrake's](#) theory of morphic resonance and morphogenetic fields, demonstrating the importance of non-physical fields for the understanding of forms, genetics and heredity, order, meaning, and the process of learning. Additional exciting contributions were [Gregory Bateson's](#) brilliant synthesis of cybernetics, information and systems theories, logic, psychology, and other disciplines, [Ilya Prigogine's](#) studies of dissipative structures and order out of chaos, [James Gleick's](#) chaos theory itself, the anthropic principle in astrophysics, [Ervin Laszlo's](#)

connectivity hypothesis and his concept of the psi- or Akashic field, **Ken Wilber's** integrative vision, and many others.

It has been very exciting to see that **all the new revolutionary developments in science**, while irreconcilable with the seventeenth century Newtonian-Cartesian thinking and monistic materialism, have been **compatible with transpersonal psychology**. As a result of these conceptual breakthroughs in a number of disciplines, it has become increasingly possible to imagine that transpersonal psychology will be in the future accepted by academic circles and become an integral part of a radically new scientific world view. As scientific progress continues to lift the spell of the outdated seventeenth century monistic materialistic worldview, we can see the general outlines of an emerging radically new comprehensive understanding of ourselves, nature, and the universe we live in. This new paradigm should be able to reconcile **the best of science** with experientially based **spirituality of a non-denominational, universal, and all-embracing nature** and bring about a **synthesis of modern science and ancient wisdom**.

6. Transpersonal Psychology and the Current Global Crisis.

Since time immemorial, proclivity to **unbridled violence** and **insatiable greed** have been the principal elemental forces driving human history. In the past, these violent events had tragic consequences for the individuals, who were directly involved in them, and for their immediate families. However, they did not threaten the future of the human species as a whole and certainly did not represent

a danger for the eco system and for the biosphere of the planet. Even after the most violent wars, nature was able to recycle all the aftermath and completely recover within a few decades.

This situation changed very radically in the course of the **twentieth century** due to **rapid technological progress, exponential growth of industrial production, massive population explosion, and particularly the development of atomic and hydrogen bombs and other weapons of mass destruction.** We are facing a **global crisis of unprecedented proportions** and have the dubious privilege of being the first species in history that has achieved the capacity to eradicate itself and threaten in the process evolution of life on this planet. **Diplomatic negotiations, administrative and legal measures, economic and social sanctions, military interventions, and other similar efforts** have had **very little success**; as a matter of fact, they have often produced more problems than they solved. It is becoming increasingly clear why they had to fail. The strategies used to alleviate this crisis are rooted in the same ideology that created it in the first place.

It has become increasingly clear that the **global crisis** we are facing reflects the **level of consciousness evolution of the human species** and that its successful resolution or at least alleviation will have to include a **radical inner transformation of humanity** on a large scale. Modern consciousness research and transpersonal psychology have brought **new insights into the roots of human aggression and greed** on the biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal level. We now also have

effective strategies for working with destructive and self-destructive tendencies in the human species.

Responsible work with holotropic states of consciousness (systematic spiritual practice, experiential psychotherapies, shamanic work, psychedelic therapy, and others) typically results in considerable decrease of aggression and makes people more peaceful, comfortable with themselves, and tolerant of others. It tends to reduce irrational drives and ambitions and causes a shift of focus from the past and future to the present moment. It enhances the ability to enjoy simple circumstances of life, such as everyday activities, food, love-making, nature, and music. Another important result of this process is emergence of spirituality of a non-denominational, universal, all-encompassing, and mystical nature that is very authentic and convincing, because it is based on deep personal experience. Transpersonal experiences engender great ecological sensitivity and responsibility. If the above changes could occur in a large number of people, it would certainly increase our chances for planetary survival.

As the crisis in the world escalates, it triggers in many individuals spontaneous episodes of holotropic states, currently diagnosed as psychotic and suppressed by tranquilizers. The new understanding of these states as psychospiritual crises (“spiritual emergencies”) makes it possible to use the healing, transformative, and evolutionary potential of bring these episodes to successful completion and integration associated with the positive changes described above.

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