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INTRODUCTION

THE EMERGENCE OF THE TRANSPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

We are what we think.

All that we are arises with our thoughts.

With our thoughts we make the world.

THE BUDDHA¹

In recent years it has become apparent that our traditional assumptions and thinking about who and what we are and what we can become may not have been generous enough. Evidence from a wide range of disciplines — psychological and nonpsychological, traditional and non-traditional, Western and non-Western—suggests that we may have underestimated the human potential for psychological growth and well-being. Much of this new data is inconsistent with our traditional psychological models, and transpersonal psychology arose in response to these inconsistencies in an attempt to integrate suggestions of greater human capacity into the mainstream of the Western behavioral and mental health disciplines.

DEFINING TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Transpersonal psychology thus aims at expanding the field of psychological inquiry to include areas of human experience and behavior associated with extreme health and well-being. As such it draws on both Western science and Eastern wisdom in an attempt to integrate knowledge from both traditions concerned with the fulfillment of human potentials. Its areas of interest extend widely, and the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, first published in 1969, defines itself as being concerned with “the publica-

tion of theoretical and applied research, empirical papers, articles and studies in transpersonal process, values and states, unitive consciousness, metaneeds, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experience, being, essence, bliss, awe, wonder, transcendence of self, . . . the theories and practices of meditation, spiritual paths, compassion, transpersonal cooperation, transpersonal realization and actualization and related concepts, experiences, and activities."

The term *transpersonal* was adopted after considerable deliberation to reflect the reports of people practicing various consciousness disciplines who spoke of experiences of an extension of identity beyond both individuality and personality. Thus transpersonal psychology cannot strictly be called a model of personality because personality is considered only one aspect of our psychological nature; rather it is an inquiry into the essential nature of being.

Defining transpersonal psychology and therapy is difficult because transpersonal experiences are essentially altered states and this raises the problems of state dependency and cross-state communication. Since definitions, like models, can be constricting, it is useful to consider those for transpersonal psychology as still in evolution rather than complete. With these caveats in mind, the following definitions are offered.

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.

Transpersonal psychotherapy includes traditional areas and concerns, adding to these an interest in facilitating growth and awareness beyond traditionally recognized levels of health. The importance of modifying consciousness and the validity of transcendental experience and identity is affirmed.

With the introduction of a variety of consciousness altering technologies, an increasing number of people, including mental health professionals, are beginning to have a range of transpersonal experiences. Stanislav Grof has provided a useful definition of transpersonal experiences as those involving an expansion of consciousness beyond customary ego boundaries and beyond the ordinary limitations of time and space. In his research with LSD psychotherapy, Grof noted that all his subjects eventually transcended the psychodynamic level and entered transpersonal realms. This potential may also be achieved without chemicals, either spontaneously, by practicing various consciousness disciplines — e.g., meditation and yoga — or in advanced psychotherapy. It seems therefore that such experiences represent an essential aspect of human nature that must be taken into account in any psychological theory that attempts to delineate a model of the whole person. This book attempts to provide the major features of such a model. By way of introduction, the following

paragraphs will examine the nature of models and psychologies, the evolution of Western psychology and the emergence of the transpersonal perspective, and the factors that have facilitated this emergence.

THE NATURE OF MODELS

Models are symbolic representations that describe the major features or dimensions of the phenomena they represent. As such they are extremely useful in breaking complex phenomena down into simpler and more readily comprehensible representations.

However, models come with certain prices attached to them. In recent years there has been an increasing awareness of the power of models and beliefs to shape perception. Especially when they are implicit, assumed, or unquestioned, models come to function as self-fulfilling, self-prophetic organizers of experience that modify perception, suggest areas of inquiry, shape investigation, and determine the interpretation of data and experience. The self-fulfilling, self-prophetic nature of this process indicates that models are self-validating. That is, their effects on perception and interpretation argue for their own validity, they shape perception in self-consistent ways. In other words, everything that we perceive tends to tell us that our models and beliefs are correct. But the greatest danger of this effect lies in the fact that most of it operates unconsciously. These factors are particularly important for our present discussion because all psychologies are models.

PSYCHOLOGIES AS MODELS

All psychologies are based on explicit or implicit models of human nature. Specific psychologies arise from the recognition and emphasis of specific areas or dimensions of this nature and tend to selectively perceive and interpret all behavior and experience from that perspective. For example, psychoanalysis and behavior modification hold very different views on the determination of behavior. For the psychoanalyst intrapsychic forces are the important determinants, whereas behaviorists emphasize the role of reinforcement from the environment.

As discussed above, any model tends to be self-validating, but this effect is magnified in psychological models due to the complex nature of the determination of behavior. Any behavior is overdetermined, that is, it is the result or end product of many different factors. Conversely any particular factor of motivation tends to enter into the determination of most or all behaviors. Thus anyone who searches for a particular motivation is likely to find it. For example, the Freudian analyst looking for sexual libido as the prime motivator, the Adlerian analyst searching for superiority strivings, and the behaviorist examining for environmental reinforcers, are all likely to be successful in their search.

Problems arise, however, when clinicians and researchers assume that finding the postulated motivator or factor provides exclusive support for their particular model. Such assumptions ignore the overdetermined complexity and richness of behavior and thus lose sight of alternate interpretations and models. Moreover, phenomena that lie outside the scope of the model will tend to be either excluded from consideration or misinterpreted. Thus for example, psychoanalysis does not entertain the possibility of transcendent states of consciousness and hence has tended to interpret these from its own perspective as being pathological ego regressions of near psychotic proportions. Thus, mystical experiences have been interpreted as "neurotic regressions to union with the breast,"² ecstatic states viewed as "narcissistic neurosis,"² and enlightenment dismissed as regression to intrauterine stages.³

Usually different psychological models have been seen as necessarily antagonistic and much heat has been generated by proponents of particular models arguing that theirs was the only true way. However, a broader perspective suggests that at least some models may be complementary, and we might hope that a sufficiently broad and unbiased view might encompass and integrate many of the major models.

The transpersonal model, therefore, is not necessarily expected to replace or challenge the validity of earlier ones but rather to set them within an expanded context of human nature. For example, since transpersonal psychology recognizes a broad hierarchical organization of motives, including commonly recognized ones such as sex and superiority strivings, the Freudian and Adlerian models may be seen as appropriate to specific levels of the hierarchy of motives. Similarly much of the psychodynamic wisdom about defenses is not necessarily abrogated by the recognition that defenses may exist only in conjunction with specific ego states. Rather, the psychodynamic formulations can now be seen as appropriate to specific states rather than as universal. With this in mind let us now examine the evolution of the major Western psychological models.

THE EVOLUTION OF WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE TRANSPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Transpersonal psychology emerged in the sixties in response to a concern that the previous major models, the first three forces of Western psychology — behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and humanistic psychology — had been limited in their recognition of the upper reaches of psychological development. A growing number of mental health professionals felt that both behaviorism and psychoanalysis were limited in being derived largely from studies of psychopathology, in attempting to generalize from simple to more complex systems, in adopting a reductionistic approach to human nature, and in ignoring certain areas, concerns, and data relevant

to a full study of human nature, such as values, will, consciousness, and seeking for self-actualization and self-transcendence. It was also felt that this neglect was sometimes accompanied by inappropriately reductionistic and pathologizing interpretations.

Indeed, the psychoanalytic perspective effectively made it impossible to consider or detect any health-oriented or health-motivated behavior except inasmuch as it represented a defense, or at the very best a compromise, with basic destructive forces. Thus, motivations and behaviors aimed toward self-actualization and self-transcendence, and even the possibility of attaining such goals, could not be accorded validity even though non-Western psychologies contained detailed descriptions of them. Similarly, such models allowed only for psychotherapy that essentially aimed at adjustment and did not include work at self-actualizing or self-transcending levels. As Gordon Allport noted, "We have on the psychology of liberation—nothing."⁴ In fact, Freud's collected works contain over four hundred references to neurosis and none to health. Thus it was argued that while the behavioral and psychoanalytical models made major contributions, they also resulted in certain limitations for psychology and our concepts of human nature.

In the early sixties, humanistic psychology emerged in response to these concerns. It took as its major focus those areas that were uniquely human and particularly those aspects associated with health rather than pathology. For example, humanistic psychologists initiated studies of self-actualization and of those individuals who seemed to have matured furthest in these dimensions. Their concern with the whole person attempted to avoid compartmentalized views that reduced the human experience to mechanistic terms and lost the essence of both humanity and experience. Humanistic models recognized the drive toward self-actualization and explored ways in which this could be fostered in individuals, groups, and organizations. From this emerged the so-called human potential movement with its interest in actualizing the newly recognized potentials for development and well-being. Many humanistic ideas were incorporated in the evolving edge of a sizable counterculture and gained a considerable popular acceptance.

As more data became available on the farther reaches of well-being, the absence of relevant guidelines in traditional Western psychology became even more apparent. Indeed, the humanistic model itself began to show gaps and even the concept of self-actualization proved unable to encompass the newly recognized farther reaches of experience.

Toward the end of his life, Abraham Maslow, one of the major pioneers in humanistic psychology, called attention to possibilities beyond self-actualization in which the individual transcended the customary limits of identity and experience. In 1968 he concluded that, "I consider Humanistic, Third Force Psychology, to be transitional, a preparation for

tion of theoretical and applied research, empirical papers, articles and studies in transpersonal process, values and states, unitive consciousness, metaneeds, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experience, being, essence, bliss, awe, wonder, transcendence of self, . . . the theories and practices of meditation, spiritual paths, compassion, transpersonal cooperation, transpersonal realization and actualization and related concepts, experiences, and activities."

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a still "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."⁵

Thus the humanistic model also revealed its limitations for encompassing the continuously broadening span of recognized human experience and potential. It should be noted that this recognition of limitations in models represents a necessary and desirable phase in their evolution that involves the continued recognition of the limits and biases of current models and their replacement by more comprehensive ones. Yesterday's model becomes a component of today's, what was context becomes content, and what was the whole set becomes an element or subset of the larger set. Furthermore, the new model is not all-encompassing, but hopefully a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the reality it attempts to describe. Unfortunately, with time we usually come to believe our own models rather than remembering that they are only approximate maps, and become attached to our models and resist their replacement, thereby slowing the evolutionary process.

Thus the transpersonal model presented in this book incorporates areas beyond the usual views of behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and humanistic psychology. However, this transpersonal model is not "the Truth," but only a larger though necessarily still limited, picture that in its turn will presumably be replaced by even more comprehensive models.

FACTORS FACILITATING THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

In addition to the desire to complement and expand existing psychological models, several other factors facilitated the emergence of transpersonal psychology. Some of these occurred within the culture at large. The initial recognition of the inadequacy of the materialistic dream led some people to begin to look within for the source of satisfaction that external strivings had failed to provide. This shift resulted in the human potential movement, which nudged mental health practitioners to reassess their concepts of health and motivation.

The widespread use of psychedelics and consciousness altering techniques such as meditation also had a major impact. Suddenly, large numbers of people found themselves having extraordinarily powerful experiences of a range of states of consciousness quite outside the realm of daily living or of anything previously recognized by Western psychology. For some these included transcendental experiences, which historically had occurred only as rare, short-lived, spontaneous events, or even more rarely as gradual shifts in awareness among individuals who devoted major portions of their life to contemplative, meditative, or religious disciplines. Suddenly, what had for centuries appeared to Westerners as mystical,

arcane, nonsensical, or even nonexistent became overwhelmingly real and sometimes central to the lives of a sizable minority.

Many such individuals developed compelling insights into the possible validity and importance of certain non-Western psychologies and religions. As theoretical understanding of altered states of consciousness evolved, it was gradually recognized that these traditions represented technologies designed for the induction of higher states of consciousness. It gradually became apparent that the capacity for transcendent states, which could be interpreted either religiously or psychologically as one chose, and the deep insights into self and one's relationship to the world that accompanied them, lay latent within us all.

For some individuals, the possibility of realizing an enduring state of being such as that glimpsed in moments of deep meditation or described by various non-Western disciplines proved a compelling attraction. Since just such an enduring state was the goal of the non-Western consciousness disciplines, increasing numbers of the most unlikely candidates began such practices. Many of them, who would have scoffed at the idea only a few years previously, found themselves sitting in meditation, practicing yoga, or studying texts that had previously been the preserve of Eastern mystics or an occasional Western intellectual philosopher or student of religion. The number of people involved in such practices continues to increase and has now extended into the millions in the United States alone.

Those not involved with such experiences sometimes reacted with bewilderment, concern, and judgment. Talk of altered states of consciousness, mystical unity, deep insight into the nature of being, expansion of identity beyond the ego and personality, may make little sense to one with no similar experience. One response has been to dismiss these experiences as nonsense at best or psychopathology at worst. This is a classical example of the difficulty of describing altered states to those with no experience of them. Communication across states of consciousness is a complex task limited by several factors. Unless these limitations are appreciated, the naive response is to dismiss such reports as nonsensical or pathological.⁶

Empirical research has gradually provided support and legitimization for certain claims about state-dependent and related phenomena. Both animal and human studies have validated the concept of altered states of consciousness and the unique properties of learning and communication that go with them.

Biofeedback has demonstrated the possibility of voluntary control of parts of the nervous system and body long thought to be automatic, e.g., heart rate, blood pressure, gastro-intestinal activity, and hormone secretion. Interestingly enough, Eastern yogis for centuries had claimed to be able to do just this, but their claims had been dismissed as impossible by

Western scientists whose theories and personal experience denied this possibility. This is an interesting example of a recurrent theme; namely that claims for capacities beyond our own currently recognized limits tend to be dismissed as deceptive.

Studies of meditation have also been supportive. Although still in an early stage, research lends preliminary support to ancient claims that meditation can enhance psychological development; modify physiological (including brain) processes, and induce a range of altered states.⁷

All of these factors have led to a renewed interest in the empirical investigation of consciousness. This is a relatively recent development in Western psychology, for although William James laid the groundwork for a psychology of consciousness at the turn of the century, there followed a period of some fifty years during which Western psychology shunned anything suggestive of introspection in an effort to secure its recognition as one of the objective hard sciences. Seen from one contemporary perspective: "Psychology is primarily the science of consciousness. Its researchers deal with consciousness directly when possible and indirectly, through the study of physiology and behavior, when necessary."⁸ In recent years a gradual shift seems to be occurring toward a more balanced position that acknowledges both the importance of consciousness and the difficulties Western science faces in researching it directly.

Another supportive research area is, strangely enough, modern physics. In recent years the physicist's picture of the world has undergone a shift so radical and far-reaching in its implications as to shake the very foundations of science. For the reality revealed, especially at the subatomic level, is so paradoxical as to defy description in traditional terms and theories and to call into question some of the most fundamental assumptions of Western science and philosophy. Traditional descriptions were largely based on Greek philosophical concepts, and described the universe as atomistic, divisible, static, and nonrelativistic. These descriptions are being supplemented by models that acknowledge a holistic, indivisible, interconnected, dynamic, relativistic reality inseparable from, and a function of, the consciousness of the observer.⁹

Though these findings do not fit at all with our usual pictures or reality, they are strikingly reminiscent of descriptions given repeatedly across centuries and cultures by advanced practitioners of the consciousness disciplines. Indeed, physicists themselves have suggested that some discoveries can be viewed as a rediscovery of ancient wisdom.

The general notions about human understanding... which are illustrated by discoveries in atomic physics are not in the nature of being wholly unfamiliar, wholly unheard of, or new. Even in our own culture they have a history, and Buddhist and Hindu thought a more considerable and central place. What is new is the recognition and encouragement, and a refinement of

—Oppenheimer¹⁰

For a parallel to the lesson of atomic theory [we must turn] to those kinds of epistemological problems with which already thinkers like the Buddha and Lao Tzu have been confronted, when trying to harmonize our position as spectators and actors in the great drama of existence.

—Babr¹¹

Sometimes it is difficult to decide whether descriptions of this reality are excerpted from textbooks of physics or the consciousness disciplines. Compare, for example, the description of space-time by the Buddhist master Suzuki, with that first introduced into physics by Hermann Minkowski in 1908:

We look around and perceive that... every object is related to every other object... not only spatially but temporally... As a fact of pure experience, there is no space without time, no time without space; they are interpenetrating.

—Suzuki¹²

The views of space and time which I wish to lay before you have sprung from the soil of experimental physics, and therein lies their strength. They are radical. Henceforth space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality.

—Minkowski¹³

At the most fundamental and sensitive levels of modern science, the emerging picture of reality resembles the most fundamental picture revealed by the consciousness disciplines.

This is not to say that the two disciplines are describing the same phenomena or that they have converged.¹⁴ However, what is apparent is that a cutting edge of modern science is pointing to an underlying view of reality that parallels in certain ways the reality said by the consciousness disciplines to be revealed whenever our usual perceptual distortions are removed. Transpersonal psychology is interested in studying the nature of these distortions and the nature of self and reality revealed by their removal.

Notes

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WIDER VISION: NEW PARADIGMS FOR OLD

Projection makes perception. The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that. . . . It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition. As a man thinketh, so does he perceive. Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world.

ANONYMOUS¹

Every point of view rests on certain assumptions about the nature of reality. When this is recognized, assumptions function as hypotheses; when it is forgotten, they function as beliefs. Clusters of hypotheses create models or theories, and clusters of theories constitute paradigms.

A paradigm is a kind of general theory of such scope that it is capable of encompassing or providing a context for most of the known phenomena in its field.² For example, the theory that planets revolve around the sun is an example of a paradigm that guides astronomy. Any scientific theory or paradigm is supposedly continually accessible to modification or refutation. However, when theories are successful they tend eventually to be taken for granted. These "normative paradigms"³ then become implicit unquestioned conceptual frameworks and filters that supply the "natural and sensible" way of looking at things. For example, before the Copernican revolution, the idea that the sun moved around the earth was unquestioned and was thought of as fact rather than theory or interpretation. Similarly, we tend to forget that the modern paradigm that the planets revolve around the sun is also only a theory or interpretation.

Once a paradigm becomes implicit, it acquires a tremendous yet unrecognized power over its adherents, who become believers.⁴ In