

# *A Definition of 'Transpersonal'*

*David Fontana and Ingrid Slack*

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The term 'transpersonal' (proposed by Maslow in 1966) derives from the Latin word 'trans', meaning 'beyond' or 'through', and 'persona', meaning 'mask'. In its strict sense, transpersonal psychology thus studies those experiences which allegedly enable the individual to see beyond the conditioned ego, and to identify some deeper and more enduring sense of being. In current usage, the definition of the term has been expanded to cover those beliefs (such as religious beliefs) that hold individual existence to carry meaning only when seen as an expression of some wider aspect of humankind, whether this aspect is defined in terms of an impersonal life force such as Nature, or personalised into a deity or deities. Transpersonal psychology therefore explores all the correlates of transpersonal experiences and beliefs, including their form, variety, causes, and consequences, as well as those things inspired by them. When Maslow established the transpersonal psychology movement as the so-called 'fourth force' within psychology in 1966, he predicted that it would subsume the 'third force' (humanistic psychology) founded by him some years previously, and events have proved him right in that the two movements have drawn increasingly together.

Transpersonal experiences and beliefs have, across centuries and cultures,

proved to be among the most potent influences upon thought, morality, behaviour and the socio-cultural order. The world's major religions, and much of the world's greatest music, fine art, sculpture and architecture, owe their inspiration to transpersonal themes. Currently, some of the intolerance, discrimination and violence underlying many national and international conflicts can be traced to the fundamentalism that in certain instances accompanies transpersonal beliefs.

Transpersonal psychology is also concerned with the exploration and application of a number of therapeutic practices, techniques for personal growth and responses to the creative arts. Importantly, its concern includes the increasing lay and professional interest in: (a) eastern psychospiritual traditions and their associated activities, such as meditation, contemplation, prayer and ritual; (b) peak experiences and the higher levels of human emotions, such as love, empathy and sacrifice; (c) various holistic therapies and healing techniques; and (d) mystical and similar exalted states such as those reported in the religious and spiritual traditions.

It is clear that there is a pressing need to bring these inter-related areas under the scrutiny of properly constituted psychological enquiry.

*David Fontana is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society and a professor at the University of Wales and at the University of Minho in Portugal. Ingrid Slack is a course manager with the Open University and an Associate Fellow of the BPS. This piece is taken from a proposal to form a BPS Section in Transpersonal Psychology.*