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On Transcendence in Transpersonal Psychology

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Abstract

This paper examines the meaning of "transcendence," distinguishing between the phenomenological and metaphysical uses of the term and considering various difficulties with the approaches to transcendence taken by Jung and Wilber. I suggest that transpersonal psychology should adopt a more phenomenological perspective on transcendence and should be more cautious and explicit in its metaphysical assumptions.

The "trans" in transpersonal is often taken to mean "transcendence". Yet the more I think about this, the more I realise that the concept of transcendence is a rather difficult and slippery one and one that can imply very different things to different people. My unease in relation to transpersonal psychology is the sense I have that many people use this notion of transcendence to smuggle into this field all sorts of questionable but generally unquestioned metaphysical and ontological assumptions. I notice such smuggling whenever I have a conversation with someone, or read a book, where certain words are introduced without comment or explanation. Words such as "God," "Goddess," "spirit," "soul," "reincarnation," "karma," "auras," "chakras," "third eye," "akashic records," "angels," or "demons". I often find myself very uncomfortable in these situations. My unease is mainly that in being drawn into this dialogue I am being asked to accept and collude with metaphysical assumptions that I simply do not share, or that I know are not shared by large numbers of other people. If these words were being used phenomenologically - as short hand descriptions of people's actual experience, then that would be quite another matter. My sense, however, is that they are very rarely used in this way. Rather they seem to be used as a way of implying and asserting a metaphysical reality that is beyond question.

The point I am making has very real implications for transpersonal psychology. This relatively new area of interest has had (and is still having) a very hard time convincing sceptics both within and outside the psychological profession that it represents a valid area of scientific concern. One of the main reasons for this, I think, is that it is seen by these people as implying and based on a metaphysics that is antiquated, false, dubious or incapable of demonstration. For these reasons, therefore, transpersonal psychology cannot be considered to be a science. It is at best a comforting and therapeutic system of quasi-religious belief and practice. At worst, it is mumbo-jumbo, mythmongering and humbug.

The answer to these concerns, I believe, is for transpersonal psychology to be very cautious and self-critical in its definitions and theories. In particular, it is vital that we question very carefully the metaphysical beliefs behind our statements and either take pains to eliminate what are often unnecessary assumptions, or else be quite clear and explicit about the metaphysical bases of our research, theory and practice. In other words, we need to adopt the phenomenological rule of *époché* and learn to bracket or put to one side wherever possible, our preconceptions and beliefs.

An interesting example of this is shown in the debate that took place in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* several years ago, on the definition of transpersonal psychology. From a survey, review and summary of 40 definitions published from 1968–1991, Lajoie & Shapiro (1992, p. 91) proposed that transpersonal psychology is:

“... concerned with the study of humanity’s highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness.”

However, Walsh & Vaughan (1993) have argued that there are various problems with this definition. I will leave aside for the moment the point that there is more to the transpersonal than achieving states of consciousness. More immediately relevant is that Lajoie & Shapiro include in their definition several terms that, even if they do not clearly or explicitly say so, at least imply a particular set of metaphysical beliefs. Thus the assumption seems to be that there is a "spiritual" reality that "transcends" our ordinary consciousness and that humanity's "highest potential" is to achieve an experience of "unity" with this transcendental reality.

We can demonstrate that this implies a system of religious or metaphysical belief simply by pointing out that other belief systems do not agree with these assumptions. For example a materialist would have difficulty accepting the reality of the "spiritual", whereas certain theologians and religious fundamentalists, while accepting the reality of the spiritual, would reject the implied notion of "union" with the Divine. What Lajoie & Shapiro are presenting here, under the guise of an objective, scientific definition, is a particular version of mystical ontology.

To circumvent these difficulties, Walsh & Vaughan (1993) present their own definition of transpersonal experiences which is deliberately constructed in such a way as to make as few disputable metaphysical assumptions as possible. Their definition is:

"Transpersonal experiences may be defined as experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans.) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos. " (p. 203)

The only ontological realities implied by this definition are human beings, life, psyche and cosmos. Furthermore the only other assumption is that it is possible to have experiences in which the sense of self can extend beyond the individual or personal realm - an assumption justified and very easily demonstrated from empirical evidence.

In my view, Walsh & Vaughan's definition provides an excellent starting point for our investigations into the transpersonal, and it is my own preferred definition. The concepts of "psyche" and "cosmos" are sufficiently clear and uncontroversial, yet they are also broad enough to encompass the widest possible range of human experiences, from those of simple rapture and flow, to love and merging with another person or group, to full-blown mystical unitive experience and cosmic consciousness.

However, while one of the virtues of Walsh & Vaughan's definition is that it is all-encompassing, the question still begs to be asked, how does this precisely relate to the concept of transcendence?

Abraham Maslow (1973) lists 35 meanings of "transcendence". These include loss of self-consciousness, mystical fusion, letting be, letting things happen, unselfish love, getting off the merry-go-round, enjoying the cosmos, being self-determined,

surpassing one's limitations, being independent of culture, being fully accepting of the self, doing one's duty, accepting death, having intrinsic conscience, being absorbed in what one is doing, integrating dichotomies, and being metamotivated. None of these meanings is in any way controversial, although we need to note that Maslow understands the notion of "mystical fusion" phenomenologically, as an experience. This does not, therefore, necessarily imply the existence of a metaphysically transcendent reality to which we actually become fused. Maslow is himself very clear to distinguish between this phenomenological approach and the metaphysical one. Thus in discussing another meaning of transcendence he notes:

"Transcendence also means to become divine or godlike, to go beyond the merely human. But one must be careful here not to make anything extrahuman or supernatural out of this kind of statement. I am thinking of using the word 'metahuman' or 'B-human' in order to stress that this becoming very high or divine or godlike is part of human nature even though it is not often seen in fact. It is still a potentiality of human nature."

Maslow, 1973, p. 286-287.

Maslow is here adopting a view that is very reminiscent of Carl Jung's approach to the question of metaphysical realities. Thus, for Jung, the spiritual realm is very real, and includes God, the Goddess and other divine archetypes. However, for Jung, these archetypes exist as undeniable psychological or experiential realities - they are a basic constituent of the *human* condition. But the implication of this is that these spiritual archetypes do not, and indeed cannot, exist in a fundamentally transcendental sense - if we mean by this that they have a separate reality beyond the realm of human experience. In other words, the "transcendental" is only *experienced* as transcendent. It is in fact an essential, perhaps the most intimate, part of our human nature.

The question that needs to be addressed here, I think, is whether the spiritual or divine realm is an actual Other. Now "Otherness" can be understood in two main ways. Firstly, otherness implies separateness or independence in the sense that the Other could exist without us. From this point of view the flowers in the field, the mountains and stars are genuinely Other. They would exist even if humankind had never evolved, and will continue to exist long after our species has become extinct. From the perspective of the individual human being, another person is also fundamentally Other in having a separate and independent existence. It is important

to note, however, that the "Otherness" of persons is also characterised by a recognition of their subjectivity. This is the second meaning of Otherness. Another person is therefore an other *Being*, not merely a separate *object*. He or she is therefore someone with whom we can genuinely enter into what Martin Buber calls an I-Thou relationship, based on an acceptance and respect of the Other's subjectivity and essential Otherness. But what of God? What of the Goddess?

Maslow and Jung both seem to be arguing that the Divine is an aspect of our common or collective *human* experience. As Maslow puts it, we must not make of the divine "anything extrahuman or supernatural". Or as Jung argues:

"It should not be overlooked that I deal with those psychic phenomena which prove empirically to be the bases of metaphysical concepts, and that when I say 'God,' I can refer to nothing other than demonstrable psychic patterns which are indeed shockingly real."

Jung, cited in Wehr, 1988, p. 472.

The paradox, some would say contradiction, in Jung's position is that he often writes (especially in *Answer to Job*, Jung, 1969) seemingly from the viewpoint of a theologian rather than a psychologist. In this way he discusses God as if He was an actual subjective Other with whom one could have a real conversation and a genuine I-Thou relationship. For Maslow, the problem is less acute because he advocates a form of mystical atheism that does not fully acknowledge the kind of personalised religious experience reported by Jung.

This highlights, I believe, an interesting problem for Jung and for transpersonal psychology in general. Many people, although I am not one of them, claim that their understanding of the transpersonal derives from their experience of a very personal relationship with God. I note here that it usually is God rather than the Goddess - a fact that may be of more than passing significance and to which I shall briefly return later. Furthermore, and essentially, in these people's experience God is apprehended as a genuine Other - as an actual Transcendental Subject or Thou. How do we make sense of this metaphysically and psychologically? It seems to me that there are only two possibilities. Either God actually exists as a Thou - as an independent person or quasi-person, or else these people are experiencing a kind of illusion, albeit one that may be, for many, a source of joy and comfort. According to the second

interpretation, God only *appears* to be Other, perhaps because of a projected religious fantasy, or because of our failure to move beyond what Wilber would call subtle levels of consciousness.

If a projected fantasy, then, of course, God does not really exist at all as an actual Being - as a Thou - he is simply an image conjured up from the personal or collective unconscious, an image that in practice is likely to be strongly influenced by cultural myths and beliefs. We therefore never really had a genuine I-Thou relationship with God - the apparently personal relationship was rather one of I-It - based upon our projected collective fantasies of what God must be like.

This, I think, is also the contradiction in Jung's whole approach to the religious questions. He writes as if he is in an I-Thou relationship with God, but essentially he considers God to be an archetypal *It*, existing within or perhaps containing the entire collective unconscious. God is therefore the archetypal product of humankind's millions of years of psychological evolution and, as such, is fundamentally dependent upon humankind for His very existence. Humankind has created God, not the other way round. For Jung, God may be real, but He is a real *thing*, an archetypal "psychic pattern", not a real person. Furthermore, because God exists as a pattern within the human psyche, He is not even a truly separate *object*. The implication therefore seems to be that when humankind becomes extinct, so shall God.

According to this way of thinking it is possible to have a "conversation" with God in the same way that we can query our computer's vast database. The Voice of God therefore speaks to us simply as a manifestation and constellation of the collective experience and wisdom of human beings throughout the ages, not as the utterances of an actual transcendent Other. This, indeed, is very much the way that I read and understand the alleged "Conversations with God" reported by Neale Donald Walsch (e.g., 1997) in his series of bestselling books.

Wilber takes a rather different position, but one that has, I think, rather similar implications. According to Wilber, what we experience as "God" is simply a limited manifestation of the larger reality of Spirit as seen through the particular lens of subtle or archetypal awareness. If we develop to the supposed "higher" realms of causal and ultimate consciousness we will firstly realise our essential Identity with God and finally transcend entirely all such archetypal forms in our experience of boundless awareness and One Taste. In this way, our experience of God is seen as a kind of stepping stone to the non-dual absolute. From this point of view, Spirit was

just masquerading as God. Thus Spirit appears, in subtle awareness, as a transcendent Thou, but really Spirit is our own face all along. In non-dual awareness, therefore, we transcend entirely the distinction between Self and Other that is implied in the I-Thou relationship.

One of the major difficulties with both Jung's and Wilber's interpretations is that they do not accord with most religious people's own interpretations of their relationship with God. In the first place, these people would be offended by and would strongly deny the suggestion that their religious experience is based on any form of projection, whether personal or archetypal-collective. This is the danger of psychologism, which Jung himself recognised and that he attempted to deny was a feature of his own position. Thus he writes:

"I have been asked so often whether I believe in the existence of God or not that I am somewhat concerned lest I be taken for an adherent of 'psychologism' ... What most people overlook or seem unable to understand is the fact that I regard the psyche as real... God is an obvious psychic and non-physical fact, i.e., a fact that can be established psychically but not physically."

Jung, 1969, p. 463-464.

But this is a very weak defence. What Jung seems to fail to recognise is that he *is* advocating a form of psychologism, that he is doing it in this statement, and that this is the fundamental problem that religious people have with his work. Thus, for Jung, God is a psychic fact, not a transcendent Thou.

Wilber does not fall into the trap of psychologism, because he bases his theories on an understanding of Spirit, not of psyche. However, a problem with Wilber's position is that he clearly advocates a *particular* metaphysical and religious doctrine, and one that has the effect of devaluing theistic religious experience, even if it does not deliberately seek to do so. I find it very hard not to draw the conclusion from Wilber's work that Buddhism and certain forms of Hinduism, particularly the Dzogchen, Zen and Advaita Vedanta traditions, represent a higher form of religion than the traditional monotheisms of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

In my view Wilber should be more explicit or at least more cautious about the metaphysical assumptions behind his work, as indeed should all people working in

this area. Wilber does address this question in various places and his answer has consistently been that his theories are based upon a *universal* metaphysics - in other words that they simply represent what Aldous Huxley (1947) called the "Perennial Philosophy" which all intelligent people in all times and cultures have agreed upon.

In my opinion this will not do. For a start the idea of the Perennial Philosophy seems to me to offer the potential for gross exaggeration and over-simplification, and in practice can often represent a failure and refusal to examine fully important differences among the world's religions. Secondly, while there may indeed be some kind of common denominator among the religions, such as the belief in a Divine reality, or the idea of the Great Chain of Being, these perennial features appear rather minimalist and anaemic when compared to the highly developed philosophies of any of the World's great religions. Certainly these common denominators fail to capture the sense of richness, depth and authority found within real living traditions. More importantly, however, Wilber's metaphysics are *not* universal or perennial, even in the general and minimalist sense proposed by Huxley. Rather, Wilber's whole approach is avowedly and specifically Buddhist. Moreover, it represents a particular form of Buddhism, one that is closely associated with the Vajrayana and Zen traditions, which Wilber himself practices.

Let me make it clear that I have no personal axe to grind here. I do not follow any religion, but if I were forced to do so, then I would probably adopt some form of Buddhism. Rather I am trying to say that Wilber is, I believe, smuggling in a particular form of Buddhist metaphysics, theory and practice under the glib and appealing cloak of the "perennial philosophy". Nor is it acceptable, I would argue, for Wilber to use his idea of the perennial *psychology* to present disguised metaphysical beliefs. There may indeed be very strong parallels and complementary relations between different psychological approaches, as Wilber's brilliant analyses have shown. But we need to be very cautious in drawing *metaphysical* conclusions from these *psychological* data. In this sense there is perhaps some redeeming virtue in Jung's clearly professed psychological approach, and his consistent refusal to get drawn into metaphysical speculation.

Let me return to the question of transcendence. Of the 35 meanings of transcendence listed by Maslow (1973) it is interesting that only three of these make any specific reference to the spiritual or transcendental realm and then, as we have seen, somewhat ambiguously or reluctantly. These three are:

- *"mystical experience. Mystic fusion"* (No. 7)
- *"to be divine or godlike, to go beyond the merely human"* (No. 23)
- *"Bucke's ... cosmic consciousness"* (No. 31)

Furthermore, when Maslow condenses all the meanings of transcendence into an overall summary definition, he ends up with this:

"Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than as means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature and to the cosmos."

Maslow, 1973, p. 292.

What is notable here is how *humanistic* this definition is and how, like Walsh & Vaughan's (1993) rather similar definition, it makes no reference whatsoever to spiritual, religious or metaphysical dimensions. For Maslow, it seems, transcendence is essentially a very human phenomenon, clearly this-worldly rather than other-worldly.

In my opinion, this is a very significant observation, especially when we consider how, by way of contrast, the dominant theoretical paradigms in transpersonal psychology tend to promote a quasi-religious perspective on the transpersonal. Thus transcendence is largely seen within these paradigms as equivalent to the achievement of psychic, spiritual or mystical states and structures, a process that can be very much facilitated through various forms of psycho-spiritual practice such as meditation. For example, Wilber's model essentially equates transpersonal development with the movement from grounded personal authenticity and individuation (the "Centaur" stage) to the higher levels of psychic, subtle, causal and non-dual consciousness. Moreover, in order to bring about such transpersonal development, Wilber advocates some form of explicit, structured spiritual practice.

"authentic spirituality does involve practice ... such as active ritual, contemplative prayer, shamanic voyage, intensive meditation, and so forth. All of those open one to a direct experience of Spirit, and not merely beliefs or ideas about Spirit ... A qualified teacher with whom you

feel comfortable, is a must. One might start by consulting the works of Father Thomas Keating, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, the Dalai Lama, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Bawa Muhaiyadeen, or any of the many widely acknowledged teachers in any of the great lineages."

Wilber, 1999, p. 568

I don't think that we can let this go unchallenged. For a start, of course, Wilber is making metaphysical assumptions about the reality of Spirit (note the big "S") and is also essentially *equating* the transpersonal life with the religious or quasi-religious life. Although Wilber (e.g., 1999) also argues for the importance an integral approach to practice, which attempts to work simultaneously on all the levels and quadrants of our Being, he is still committed to the notion that the "higher" transpersonal levels involve explicit spiritual practice. Furthermore, as John Heron has powerfully argued in *Sacred Science* (1998), Wilber is advocating a very patriarchal approach to spirituality, based on what Heron considers to be projected authority onto spiritual teachers (mostly men) rather than a faith in one's own inner authority.

James Horne (1978) has suggested an interesting and I believe important distinction between "serious mysticism", based on intentional practice, and "casual mysticism" which represents a more relaxed, open attitude in which mystical experiences are acknowledged and welcomed when they come but are not explicitly sought. Andrew Rawlinson (1997) also makes a similar distinction between "structured" and "unstructured" traditions in his wonderful and extraordinary encyclopaedia "*The Book of Enlightened Masters*". Although Wilber is clearly an advocate of a serious, disciplined, structured soteriology, the point is that *both* serious or structured and casual or unstructured approaches are possible and perhaps both are equally valid.

In my youth I was very much a believer in serious mysticism, whereas in the last ten years or so I have become much more casual, some would say lazy in my approach. Not only has my attitude changed, but I now also question the dominance of the mystical or, as I have elsewhere (Daniels, 2000) called it, the *exotic transcendent* agenda within transpersonal psychology. One of the major unresolved debates in this area is that between Wilber and his feminist critics. From the feminist point of view (for example John Heron, 1998; Peggy Wright, 1998), Wilber's whole notion of transcendence is flawed by the patriarchal, androcentric, authoritarian, and hierarchical assumptions upon which it is based. According to Wright, transpersonal

development does not necessarily represent an instrumental, agentic ascent to higher modes of mystical consciousness. From a feminine perspective, the transpersonal is more about achieving wholeness and integration, about learning to become open or more permeable to one's body, to others and the environment, and about love, communion, relationship and interconnectedness. One thing that I particularly note here is the relative absence of any *metaphysics* of the spiritual realm in this approach. It seems to me that the feminine approach to the spiritual is very much of spiritual with a small "s". It is about transcendence, but not about the Transcendental. Although the feminine approach sometimes promotes the image of the Goddess or Great Mother rather than of God, this is generally done, it seems to me, in a more or less casual or symbolic fashion. Thus the Goddess is seen as an archetypal image that represents the principles of communion, oneness with nature, ecological harmony, nurturing and benevolence rather than being seen as an actual transcendental Other with whom one has a personal spiritual relationship. Actually I wonder sometimes whether it is mainly the *men* who relate to the Goddess as a transcendent Other - but that is a different and rather larger matter.

This feminine perspective seems much more compatible with the general humanistic agenda and also with many of the meanings of transcendence compiled by Maslow (1973). For example, Maslow includes among his list:

- *"To accept the natural world ... to let it be itself" (No. 9)*
- *"Transcendence of the We-They polarity" (No. 10)*
- *"Identification love" (No. 12)*
- *"Transcendence of non-involved, neutral, non-caring, spectator-type objectivity" (No. 25)*
- *"Fusion of facts and values" (No. 26)*
- *"The recognition of (the) value, and wonder of individual differences" (No. 33).*

The distinction made by Peggy Wright and others between the male and female value spheres echoes other differentiations that are often made in this area. These include the classical theological distinction between transcendence and immanence, Wilber's (e.g., 1996) description of ascending (other-worldly) and descending (this worldly) spirituality and the related principles of Eros and Agape, and also the distinction made by Warwick Fox (e.g., 1993) between vertical and horizontal transcendence. Fox is especially relevant in the present context because he

recognises that *both* of these are forms of transcendence in the sense that both vertical and horizontal development involve an extending or expanding of our sense of self beyond its ordinary egoic boundary. Furthermore, Fox asks some very pertinent questions.

"Transpersonal ecologists ask transpersonal psychologists: Does a focus on consciousness per se put us in touch with genuinely "higher" - more real or more evolved - states of being and forms of reality or is consciousness more like a hall of mirrors in which we can "lose ourselves" in endless fascination but to no inherently "higher" end? This question is highly relevant to the question of whether we attempt to transcend our duly limited (and often painfully defensive) egoic sense of self by "vertical" means (e.g., by attempting to experience "higher" states of being and forms of reality) or by "horizontal" means (i.e., by attempting to experience ourselves as intimately bound up with the world around us; as leaves, as it were, on a single evolutionary Tree of Life)."

Fox, 1993, p. 241

Fox's conclusion, as also of most others who have looked at these questions, including Wilber, is that both approaches are important and both should be acknowledged and honoured. It is in this spirit that I have elsewhere presented a taxonomy that seeks to acknowledge the value and significance of both "mundane or immanent" and "exotic or transcendent" experiences and practices (Daniels, 2000).

I should make it clear that in making this distinction I am using the term "transcendent" in its narrow and very specific sense, to refer to experiences and practices that seem to imply the existence of a transcendental metaphysical reality. This contrasts with the broader use of the term "transcendence" implied by Maslow (1973), Walsh & Vaughan (1993) and Fox (e.g., 1993), to refer to experiences in which the sense of self is expanded or extended beyond our usual ego boundaries. I have elsewhere used the concept of "transformation" to refer to this kind of expansion or extension (e.g., Daniels, 1998, 2000).

For me, the transpersonal is precisely about the expansion and extension of our sense of self - about the transformation of the self beyond its relatively enclosed and impermeable egoic boundary. Such transformation constitutes transcendence in the

broad, Maslowian sense. It may involve any of the various types of transformative experience and practice - both mundane and exotic, positive and negative - that I have elsewhere identified (Daniels, 2000). Importantly, as we have seen, this notion of transformation, or of transcendence in the broad sense, makes no assumptions whatsoever about the metaphysical existence of a spiritual or transcendental reality. As far as I am concerned there may be no such thing as Spirit with a big "S", of Spirit-as-transcendental-reality. I say this even if certain transpersonal experiences, on the face of it, do seem to suggest such a reality. But this does not therefore mean that I do not recognise or believe in the experiential reality of the human spirit or of the value of spiritual development (both with a small "s"), nor that I am therefore not really a transpersonalist.

If we are to succeed as transpersonal psychologists, we should, I believe, take an intelligent interest in and always be open to the possible metaphysical interpretations of our researches into religious experiences and states of consciousness. But it is equally important to make explicit and to question these metaphysical interpretations. This is particularly true when certain metaphysical assumptions come to dominate a field in the way that those of Ken Wilber have done.

Jung claimed that he was essentially a phenomenologist who, rather like William James, was principally concerned with describing and interpreting the facts of religious experience, quite apart from their metaphysical implications. Unfortunately Jung's writings do not always confirm this impression. In contrast, Ken Wilber is not primarily a phenomenologist, but rather a theoretician and metaphysician. As I have tried to show, Wilber's theories and metaphysics, while claiming to be "perennial", are essentially Buddhist and non-theistic. Given that this is the case, it begs the question: to what extent is Wilber in a position to recognise and discuss adequately the significance of theistic religious experience, which is easily dismissed within his scheme as "merely" subtle?

I am not suggesting at all that we should adopt a theistic metaphysics, but rather that we should aim to bracket as far as possible ALL metaphysical assumptions in what should essentially become a phenomenological examination of experiences of transformation, or of transcendence in the broad sense. This, it seems to me, is a reasonable and legitimate agenda for transpersonal psychologists, at least in the short and medium term. Furthermore we can do this, I believe, even while ourselves following our own individual or collective spiritual paths, whether exotic or mundane,

structured or unstructured. Indeed, being a good phenomenologist - being able to examine experience as it is, prior to its possible distortion and contamination by beliefs and interpretations - is one of the essential features of meditation practice as I understand it. Also it is perhaps important for anyone, but particularly those who would follow a religious or spiritual path, and especially if they are also transpersonal psychologists, to constantly acknowledge and to question the often unspoken assumptions upon which their practice is based. Otherwise we indeed risk becoming ideologues and mythmongers.

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I suggest that transpersonal psychology should adopt a more phenomenological perspective on transcendence and should be more cautious and explicit in its metaphysical assumptions. The "trans" in transpersonal is often taken to mean "transcendence". Yet the more I think about this, the more I realise that the concept of transcendence is a rather difficult and slippery one and one that can imply very different things to different people.Â Transpersonal Psychology is concerned about the development of humanity's highest potentialities through transcendental states of consciousness. Daniel's [54] interpretating Lajoie's et al. What is self-transcendence in psychology? Definition, examples, theory, scales, and quotes about self-transcendence. Read more here!Â You might have a hazy idea of "transcending" being akin to "rising above" and think of the concept as rising above oneself, but you don't really know what it is beyond that. If this describes you as well as it described me, you've come to the right place! In this piece, we will define self-transcendence, look at its components and characteristics, think of some examples, and explore how it can be achieved. Interested? Read on! "Transpersonal ecologists ask transpersonal psychologists: Does a focus on consciousness per se put us in touch with genuinely "higher" - more real or more evolved - states of being and forms of reality or is consciousness more like a hall of mirrors in which we can "lose ourselves" in endless fascination but to no inherently "higher" end?Â Such transformation constitutes transcendence in the. Transpersonal Psychology Review, Vol. 5, No. 2, 3-11. (2001) [Preprint Version].