



# **Humanism Today**

## **A World without Religions**

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## From the Author



I do not believe that a “drive for knowledge” is the father of philosophy, but rather that another drive, here as elsewhere, used knowledge (as well as mis-knowledge) merely as a tool for humanism. But everyone who looks at people’s basic drives, to see how far they may have played their little game right here as inspiring geniuses (or demons), will find that they all practiced humanitarian philosophy at some point, and that every single one of them would be only too pleased to present itself as the ultimate purpose of existence and as rightful master of all other drives. Every drive craves

mastery, and this leads it to try philosophizing. Obviously, the truly scientific people, things might be different, even “better” if you will, with them, there might be something like a drive for knowledge, some independent little clockwork mechanism that, once well wound, ticks bravely away without essentially involving the rest of the scholar’s drives. For this reason, the scholar’s real interests usually lie somewhere else, as with the family, earning money, or even in politics; in fact, it is almost a matter of indifference whether his little engine is put to work in this or that field of research, and whether the promising young worker turns himself into a good philologist or fungus expert or chemist, it doesn’t signify anything about him that he becomes one thing or the other. In contrast and for sure, there is absolutely nothing impersonal about the philosopher; and in particular his morals bear decided and decisive witness to who he is, which means, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his own nature stand with respect to the other.

### Humanistic Basic Approach Summary

- Humans have free will; not all behaviour is determined.
- All individuals are unique and have an innate (inborn) drive to achieve their maximum potential.
- A proper understanding of human behaviour can only be achieved by studying humans - not animals.
- Psychology should study the individual case (idiographic) rather than the average performance of groups (nomothetic).

### **Strengths**

- Shifted the focus of behaviour to the individual / whole person rather than the unconscious mind, genes, observable behaviour etc.
- Humanistic psychology satisfies most people's idea of what being human means because it values personal ideals and self-fulfilment.
- Qualitative data gives genuine insight and more holistic information into behaviour.
- Highlights the value of more individualistic and idiographic methods of study.

### **Limitations**

- Ignores biology (e.g. testosterone).
- Unscientific – subjective concepts.
- E.g. cannot objectively measure self-actualization.
- Humanism ignores the unconscious mind.
- Behaviourism – human and animal behaviour can be compared.
- Qualitative data is difficult to compare.
- Ethnocentric (biased towards Western culture). Their belief in free will is in opposition to the deterministic laws of science.

Humanism encompasses atheists and agnostics, but it is an active philosophy far greater than these passive responses to one particular idea as found in the religions. With an approach to life based on humanity and reason, humanists recognise that moral values are properly founded on human nature and experience alone. We value the truth, and consider facts only as well as feelings in reaching a judgement. Humanists reject the idea of any supernatural agency intervening to help or hinder us. Evidence shows that we have only one life, and humanists grasp the opportunity to live it to the full. Death enters into nothingness.

Humanistic, humanism and humanist are terms in psychology relating to an approach which studies the whole person, and the uniqueness of each individual. Essentially, these terms refer the same approach in psychology.

Sometimes the humanistic approach is called phenomenological. This means that personality is studied from the point of view of the individual's subjective experience. For Rogers the focus of psychology is not behaviour (Skinner), the unconscious (Freud), thinking (Wundt) or the human brain but how individuals perceive and interpret events. Rogers is therefore important because he redirected psychology towards the study of the Self.

The humanistic approach in psychology developed as a rebellion against what some psychologists saw as limitations of the behaviourist and psychodynamic

psychology. The humanistic approach is thus often called the “third force” in psychology after psychoanalysis and behaviourism (Maslow, 1968).

Humanism rejected the assumptions of the behaviourist perspective which is characterized as deterministic, focused on reinforcement of stimulus-response behaviour and heavily dependent on animal research.

Humanistic psychology also rejected the psychodynamic approach because it also is deterministic, with unconscious irrational and instinctive forces determining human thought and behaviour. Both behaviourism and psychoanalysis are regarded as dehumanizing by humanistic psychologists.

**Humanistic psychology expanded its influence throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. Its impact can be understood in terms of three major areas :**

- 1) It offered a new set of values for approaching an understanding of human nature and the human condition.
- 2) It offered an expanded horizon of methods of inquiry in the study of human behaviour.
- 3) It offered a broader range of more effective methods in the professional practice of psychotherapy.

### **The History of Humanistic Psychology**

- \* Maslow (1943) developed a hierarchical theory of human motivation.
- \* Carl Rogers (1946) publishes *Significant aspects of client-centered therapy* (also called person centred therapy).
- \* In 1957 and 1958, at the invitation of Abraham Maslow and Clark Moustakas, two meetings were held in Detroit among psychologists who were interested in founding a professional association dedicated to a more meaningful, more humanistic vision.
- \* In 1962, with the sponsorship of Brandeis University, this movement was formally launched as the Association for Humanistic Psychology.
- \* The first issue of the Journal of Humanistic Psychology appeared in the Spring of 1961.

### **Humanist Thought**

Humanists retain faith in the idea that people can and will continue to solve problems, and that quality of life can be improved and made more equitable. Humanists are positive, gaining inspiration from a rich natural world, our lives and culture.

Humanist thought found particular expression during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and in the scientific, social and political revolutions of the modern age. Many people are tacit humanists, reaching similar conclusions

without meeting like-minded people or reading particular texts, because these ideas are founded on knowledge, not beliefs.

### **What is humanism?**

The sort of answer you will get to that question depends on what sort of humanist you ask!

The word "humanism" has a number of meanings, and because authors and speakers often don't clarify which meaning they intend, those trying to explain humanism can easily become a source of confusion. Fortunately, each meaning of the word constitutes a different type of humanism -- the different types being easily separated and defined by the use of appropriate adjectives. So, let me summarize the different varieties of humanism in this way.

**Literary Humanism** is a devotion to the humanities or literary culture.

**Renaissance Humanism** is the spirit of learning that developed at the end of the middle ages with the revival of classical letters and a renewed confidence in the ability of human beings to determine for themselves truth and falsehood.

**Cultural Humanism** is the rational and empirical tradition that originated largely in ancient Greece and Rome, evolved throughout European history, and now constitutes a basic part of the Western approach to science, political theory, ethics, and law.

**Philosophical Humanism** is any outlook or way of life centered on human need and interest. Sub-categories of this type include Christian Humanism and Modern Humanism.

**Christian Humanism** is defined by Webster's Third New International Dictionary as "a philosophy advocating the self-fulfilment of man within the framework of Christian principles." This more human-oriented faith is largely a product of the Renaissance and is a part of what made up Renaissance humanism.

**Modern Humanism**, also called Naturalistic Humanism, Scientific Humanism, Ethical Humanism and Democratic Humanism is defined by one of its leading proponents, Corliss Lamont, as "a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion." Modern Humanism has a dual origin, both secular and religious, and these constitute its sub-categories.

**Secular Humanism** is an outgrowth of 18th century enlightenment rationalism and 19th century free-thought. Many secular groups, such as the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism and the American Rationalist Federation, and many otherwise unaffiliated academic philosophers and scientists, advocate this philosophy.

**Religious Humanism** emerged out of Ethical Culture, Unitarianism, and Universalism. Today, many Unitarian- Universalist congregations and all Ethical Culture societies describe themselves as humanist in the modern sense.

The most critical irony in dealing with Modern Humanism is the inability of its advocates to agree on whether or not this worldview is religious. Those who see it as philosophy are the Secular Humanists while those who see it as religion are Religious Humanists. This dispute has been going on since the early years of this century when the secular and religious traditions converged and brought Modern Humanism into existence.

Secular and Religious Humanists both share the same worldview and the same basic principles. This is made evident by the fact that both Secular and Religious Humanists were among the signers of Humanist Manifesto I in 1933 and Humanist Manifesto II in 1973. From the standpoint of philosophy alone, there is no difference between the two. It is only in the definition of religion and in the practice of the philosophy that Religious and Secular Humanists effectively disagree.

The definition of religion used by Religious Humanists is a functional one. Religion is that which serves the personal and social needs of a group of people sharing the same philosophical world view.

To serve personal needs, Religious Humanism offers a basis for moral values, an inspiring set of ideals, methods for dealing with life's harsher realities, a rationale for living life joyously, and an overall sense of purpose.

To serve social needs, Humanist religious communities (such as Ethical Culture societies and many Unitarian-Universalist churches) offer a sense of belonging, an institutional setting for the moral education of children, special holidays shared with like-minded people, a unique ceremonial life, the performance of ideologically consistent rites of passage (weddings, child welcoming, coming-of-age celebrations, funerals, and so forth), an opportunity for affirmation of one's philosophy of life, and a historical context for one's ideas.

Religious Humanists maintain that most human beings have personal and social needs that can only be met by religion (taken in the functional sense I just detailed). They do not feel that one should have to make a choice between



meeting these needs in a traditional faith context versus not meeting them at all. Individuals who cannot feel at home in traditional religion should be able to find a home in non-traditional religion.

I was once asked by a reporter if this functional definition of religion didn't amount to taking away the substance and leaving only the superficial trappings. My answer was that the true substance of religion is the role it plays in the lives of individuals and the life of the community. Doctrines may differ from denomination to denomination, and new doctrines may replace old ones, but the purpose religion serves for PEOPLE remains the same. If we define the substance of a thing as that which is most lasting and universal, then the function of religion is the core of it.

Religious Humanists, in realizing this, make sure that doctrine is never allowed to subvert the higher purpose of meeting human needs in the here and now. This is why Humanist child welcoming ceremonies are geared to the community and Humanist wedding services are tailored to the specialized needs of the wedding couple. This is why Humanist memorial services focus, not on saving the soul of the dear departed, but on serving the survivors by giving them a memorable experience related to how the deceased was in life. This is why Humanists don't proselytize people on their death beds. They find it better to allow them to die as they have lived, undisturbed by the agendas of others.

Finally, Religious Humanism is "faith in action." In his essay "The Faith of a Humanist," UU Minister Kenneth Phifer declares 'Humanism teaches us that it is immoral to wait for God to act for us. We must act to stop the wars and the crimes and the brutality of this and future ages. We have powers of a remarkable kind. We have a high degree of freedom in choosing what we will do. Humanism tells us that whatever our philosophy of the universe may be, ultimately the responsibility for the kind of world in which we live rests with us. Now, while Secular Humanists may agree with much of what religious Humanists do, they deny that this activity is properly called "religious." This isn't a mere semantic debate. Secular Humanists maintain that there is so much in religion deserving of criticism that the good name of Humanism should not be tainted by connection with it.'

Secular Humanists often refer to Unitarian Universalists as "Humanists not yet out of the church habit." But Unitarian- Universalists sometimes counter that a secular Humanist is simply an "unchurched Unitarian."

Probably the most popular example of the Secular Humanist world view in recent years was the controversial author **Salman Rushdie**. Here is what he said on ABC's "Nightline" on February 13, 1989, in regard to his novel *The Satanic Verses*.

[My book says] that there is an old, old conflict between the secular view of the world and the religious view of the world, and particularly between texts which claim to be divinely inspired and texts which are imaginatively inspired. . . . I distrust people who claim to know the whole truth and who seek to orchestrate the world in line with that one true truth. I think that's a very dangerous position in the world. It needs to be challenged. It needs to be challenged constantly in all sorts of ways, and that's what I tried to do.

In the March 2, 1989, edition of the New York Review, he explained that, in *The Satanic Verses* he tried to give a secular, humanist vision of the birth of a great world religion. For this, apparently, I should be A tried. . . . "Battle lines are being drawn today," one of my characters remarks. "Secular versus religious, the light verses the dark. Better you choose which side you are on." The Secular Humanist tradition is a tradition of defiance, a tradition that dates back to ancient Greece. One can see, even in Greek mythology, Humanist themes that are rarely, if ever, manifested in the mythologies of other cultures. And they certainly have not been repeated by modern religions. The best example here is the character Prometheus.

Prometheus stands out because he was idolized by ancient Greeks as the one who defied Zeus. He stole the fire of the gods and brought it down to earth. For this he was punished. And yet he continued his defiance amid his tortures. This is the root of the Humanist challenge to authority.

The next time we see a truly heroic Promethean character in mythology it is Lucifer in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But now he is the Devil. He is evil. Whoever would defy God must be wickedness personified. That seems to be a given of traditional religion. But the ancient Greeks didn't agree. To them, Zeus, for all his power, could still be mistaken.

Imagine how shocked a friend of mine was when I told her my view of "God's moral standards." I said, "If there were such a god, and these were indeed his ideal moral principles, I would be tolerant. After all, God is entitled to his own opinions!"

Only a Humanist is inclined to speak this way. Only a Humanist can suggest that, even if there be a god, it is OK to disagree with him, her, or it. In Plato's *Euthyphro*, Socrates shows that God is not necessarily the source of good, or even good himself. Socrates asks if something is good because God ordains it, or if God ordains it because it is already good. Yet, since the time of the ancient Greeks, no mainstream religion has permitted such questioning of God's will or made a hero out of a disobedient character. It is Humanists who claim this tradition.



After all, much of Human progress has been in defiance of religion or of the apparent natural order. When we deflect lightning or evacuate a town before a tornado strikes, we lessen the effects of so called "acts of God." When we land on the Moon we defy the Earth's gravitational pull. When we seek a solution to the AIDS crisis, we, according to Jerry Falwell, thwart "God's punishment of homosexuals."

Politically, the defiance of religious and secular authority has led to democracy, human rights, and even the protection of the environment. Humanists make no apologies for this. Humanists twist no biblical doctrine to justify such actions. They recognize the Promethean defiance of their response and take pride in it. For this is part of the tradition.

Another aspect of the Secular Humanist tradition is skepticism. Skepticism's historical exemplar is Socrates. Why Socrates? Because, after all this time, he still stands out alone among all the famous saints and sages from antiquity to the present. Every religion has its sage. Judaism has Moses, Zoroastrianism has Zarathustra, Buddhism has the Buddha, Christianity has Jesus, Islam has Mohammad, Mormonism has Joseph Smith, and Bahai has Baha-u-lah. Every one of these individuals claimed to know the absolute truth. It is Socrates, alone among famous sages, who claimed to know NOTHING. Each devised a set of rules or laws, save Socrates. Instead, Socrates gave us a method --a method of questioning the rules of others, of cross- examination. And Socrates didn't die for truth, he died for rights and the rule of law. For these reasons, Socrates is the quintessential skeptical Humanist. He stands as a symbol, both of Greek rationalism and the Humanist tradition that grew out of it. And no equally recognized saint or sage has joined his company since his death.

Because of the strong Secular Humanist identity with the images of Prometheus and Socrates, and equally strong rejection of traditional religion, the Secular Humanist actually agrees with Tertullian--who said:

"What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?"

That is, Secular Humanists identify more closely with the rational heritage symbolized by ancient Athens than with the faith heritage epitomized by ancient Jerusalem.

But don't assume from this that Secular Humanism is only negative. The positive side is liberation, best expressed in these words of Robert G. Ingersoll:

When I became convinced that the universe is natural, that all the ghosts and gods are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison

crumbled and fell. The dungeon was flooded with light and all the bolts and bars and manacles became dust. I was no longer a servant, a serf, or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world, not even in infinite space. I was free--free to think, to express my thoughts--free to live my own ideal, free to live for myself and those I loved, free to use all my faculties, all my senses, free to spread imagination's wings, free to investigate, to guess and dream and hope, free to judge and determine for myself . . . I was free! I stood erect and fearlessly, joyously faced all worlds.

Enough to make a Secular Humanist shout "hallelujah!"

The fact that Humanism can at once be both religious and secular presents a paradox of course, but not the only such paradox. Another is that both Religious and Secular Humanism place reason above faith, usually to the point of eschewing faith altogether. The dichotomy between reason and faith is often given emphasis in Humanism, with Humanists taking their stand on the side of reason. Because of this, Religious Humanism should not be seen as an alternative faith, but rather as an alternative way of being religious.

These paradoxical features not only require a unique treatment of Religious Humanism in the study of world religions, but also help explain the continuing controversy, both inside and outside the Humanist movement, over whether Humanism is a religion at all.

The paradoxes don't end here. Religious Humanism is usually without a god, without a belief in the supernatural, without a belief in an afterlife, and without a belief in a "higher" source of moral values. Some adherents would even go so far as to suggest that it is a religion without "belief" of any kind-- knowledge based on evidence being considered preferable. Furthermore, the common notion of "religious knowledge" as knowledge gathered through nonscientific means is not generally accepted in Religious Humanist epistemology.

Because both Religious and Secular Humanism are identified so closely with cultural humanism, they readily embrace modern science, democratic principles, human rights, and free inquiry. Humanism's rejection of the notions of sin and guilt, especially in relation to sexual ethics, puts it in harmony with contemporary sexology and sex education as well as aspects of humanistic psychology. And Humanism's historic advocacy of the secular state makes it another voice in the defence of church/state separation.

All these features have led to the current charge of teaching "the religion of secular humanism" in the public schools.

The most obvious point to clarify in this context is that some religions hold to doctrines that place their adherents at odds with certain features of the modern world which other religions do not. For example, many biblical fundamentalists, especially those filling the ranks of the "Religious Right," reject the theory of evolution. Therefore, they see the teaching of evolution in a science course as an affront to their religious sensibilities. In defending their beliefs from exposure to ideas inconsistent with them, such fundamentalists label evolution as "humanism" and maintain that exclusive teaching of it in the science classroom constitutes a breach in the Jeffersonian wall of separation between church and state.

It is indeed true that Religious Humanists, in embracing modern science, embrace evolution in the bargain. But individuals within mainline Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism also embrace modern science--and hence evolution. Evolution happens to be the state of the art in science today and is appropriately taught in science courses. That evolution has come to be identified with Religious Humanism but not with mainline Christianity or Judaism is a curious quirk of politics in North America. But this is a typical feature of the whole controversy over humanism in the schools.

Other courses of study have come to be identified with Humanism as well, including sex education, values education, global education, and even creative writing. Today's Christian fundamentalists would have us believe that "situation ethics" was invented by 1974 Humanist of the Year Joseph Fletcher. But situational considerations have been an element of Western jurisprudence for at least 2,000 years! Again, Secular and Religious Humanists, being in harmony with current trends, are quite comfortable with all of this, as are adherents of most major religions. There is no justification for seeing these ideas as the exclusive legacy of Humanism. Furthermore, there are independent secular reasons why schools offer the curriculum that they do. A bias in favour of "the religion of secular humanism" has never been a factor in their development and implementation.

The charge of Humanist infiltration into the public schools seems to be the product of a confusion of cultural humanism and Religious Humanism. Though Religious Humanism embraces cultural humanism, this is no justification for separating out cultural humanism, labelling it as the exclusive legacy of a non-theistic and naturalistic religion called Religious Humanism, and thus declaring it alien. To do so would be to turn one's back on a significant part of one's culture and enthrone the standards of biblical fundamentalism as the arbiter of what is and is not religious. A deeper understanding of Western culture would go a long way in clarifying the issues surrounding the controversy over humanism in the public schools.

Once we leave the areas of confusion, it is possible to explain, in straightforward terms, exactly what the modern Humanist philosophy is about. It is easy to summarize the basic ideas held in common by both Religious and Secular Humanists. These ideas are as follows:

Humanism is one of those philosophies for people who think for themselves. There is no area of thought that a Humanist is afraid to challenge and explore.

Humanism is a philosophy focused upon human means for comprehending reality. Humanists make no claims to possess or have access to supposed transcendent knowledge.

Humanism is a philosophy of reason and science in the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, when it comes to the question of the most valid means for acquiring knowledge of the world, Humanists reject arbitrary faith, authority, revelation, and altered states of consciousness.

Humanism is a philosophy of imagination. Humanists recognize that intuitive feelings, hunches, speculation, flashes of inspiration, emotion, altered states of consciousness, and even religious experience, while not valid means to acquire knowledge, remain useful sources of ideas that can lead us to new ways of looking at the world. These ideas, after they have been assessed rationally for their usefulness, can then be put to work, often as alternate approaches for solving problems.

Humanism is a philosophy for the here and now. Humanists regard human values as making sense only in the context of human life rather than in the promise of a supposed life after death.

Humanism is a philosophy of compassion. Humanist ethics is solely concerned with meeting human needs and answering human problems--for both the individual and society--and devotes no attention to the satisfaction of the desires of supposed theological entities.

Humanism is a realistic philosophy. Humanists recognize the existence of moral dilemmas and the need for careful consideration of immediate and future consequences in moral decision making.

Humanism is in tune with the science of today. Humanists therefore recognize that we live in a natural universe of great size and age, that we evolved on this planet over a long period of time, that there is no compelling evidence for a separable "soul," and that human beings have certain built-in needs that effectively form the basis for any human-oriented value system.

Humanism is in tune with today's enlightened social thought. Humanists are committed to civil liberties, human rights, church-state separation, the extension of participatory democracy not only in government but in the workplace and education, an expansion of global consciousness and exchange of products and ideas internationally, and an open-ended approach to solving social problems, an approach that allows for the testing of new alternatives.

Humanism is in tune with new technological developments. Humanists are willing to take part in emerging scientific and technological discoveries in order to exercise their moral influence on these revolutions as they come about, especially in the interest of protecting the environment.

Humanism is, in sum, a philosophy for those in love with life. Humanists take responsibility for their own lives and relish the adventure of being part of new discoveries, seeking new knowledge, exploring new options. Instead of finding solace in prefabricated answers to the great questions of life, Humanists enjoy the open-endedness of a quest and the freedom of discovery that this entails. Though there are some who would suggest that this philosophy has always had a limited and eccentric following, the facts of history show otherwise. Among the modern adherents of Humanism have been Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood and 1957 Humanist of the Year of the American Humanist Association; humanistic psychology pioneers Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, also Humanists of the Year; Albert Einstein, who joined the American Humanist Association in the 1950s; Bertrand Russell, who joined in the 1960s; civil rights pioneer A. Philip Randolph who was the 1970 Humanist of the Year, and futurist R. Buckminster Fuller, Humanist of the Year in 1969.

The United Nations is a specific example of Humanism at work. The first Director General of UNESCO, the UN organization promoting education, science, and culture, was the 1962 Humanist of the Year Julian Huxley, who practically drafted UNESCO'S charter by himself. The first Director-General of the World Health Organization was the 1959 Humanist of the Year Brock Chisholm. One of this organization's greatest accomplishments has been the wiping of smallpox from the face of the earth. And the first Director-General of the Food and Agricultural Organization was British Humanist John Boyd Orr.

Meanwhile, Humanists, like 1980 Humanist of the Year Andrei Sakharov, have stood up for human rights wherever such rights are suppressed. Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem fight for women's rights, Mathilde Krim battles the AIDS epidemic, and Margaret Atwood is one of the world's most outspoken advocates of literary freedom--Humanists all.

The list of scientists is legion: Stephen Jay Gould, Donald Johanson, Richard Leakey, E.O. Wilson, Francis Crick, Jonas Salk, and many others--all members

of the American Humanist Association, whose president in the 1980s was the late scientist and author Isaac Asimov.

The membership lists of Humanist organizations, both religious and secular, read like Who's Who. Through these people, and many more of less reknown, the Humanist philosophy has an impact on our world far out of proportion to the number of its adherents. That, I think, tells us something about the power of ideas that work.

This may have been what led George Santayana to declare Humanism to be "an accomplishment, not a doctrine."

So, with modern Humanism one finds a philosophy or religion that is in tune with modern knowledge; is inspiring, socially conscious, and personally meaningful. It is not only the thinking person's outlook, but that of the feeling person as well, for it has inspired the arts as much as it has the sciences, philanthropy as much as critique. And even in critique it is tolerant, defending the rights of all people to choose other ways, to speak and to write freely, to live their lives according to their own lights.

So, the choice is yours. Are you a Humanist?

You needn't answer "yes" or "no." For it's not an either-or proposition. Humanism is yours--to adopt or simply to draw from. You may take a little or a lot, sip from the cup or drink it to the dregs.

It's up to you.

## **Humanistic Psychology Assumptions**

Humanistic psychology begins with the existential assumptions that phenomenology is central and that people have free will. Personal agencies' the humanistic term for the exercise of free will. Personal agency refers to the choices we make in life, the paths we go down and their consequences.

A further assumption is then added - people are basically good, and have an innate need to make themselves and the world better. The humanistic approach emphasizes the personal worth of the individual, the centrality of human values, and the creative, active nature of human beings. The approach is optimistic and focuses on noble human capacity to overcome hardship, pain and despair.

Both Rogers and Maslow regarded personal growth and fulfilment in life as a basic human motive. This means that each person, in different ways, seeks to grow psychologically and continuously enhance themselves. This has been captured by the term self-actualization which is about psychological growth,

fulfilment and satisfaction in life. However, Rogers and Maslow both describe different ways of how self-actualization can be achieved.

Central to the humanist theories of Rogers (1959) and Maslow (1943) are the subjective, conscious experiences of the individual. Humanistic psychologists argue that objective reality is less important than a person's subjective perception and understanding of the world. Because of this, Rogers and Maslow placed little value on scientific psychology especially the use of the psychology laboratory to investigate both human and animal behaviour.

Humanism rejects scientific methodology like experiments and typically uses qualitative research methods. For example, diary accounts, open-ended questionnaires, unstructured interviews and unstructured observations. Qualitative research is useful for studies at the individual level, and to find out, in depth, the ways in which people think or feel (e.g. case studies). The way to really understand other people is to sit down and talk with them, share their experiences and be open to their feelings.

Humanism rejected comparative psychology (the study of animals) because it does not tell us anything about the unique properties of human beings. Humanism views human beings as fundamentally different from other animals mainly because humans are conscious beings capable of thought, reason and language. For humanistic psychologists' research on animals, such as rats, pigeons, or monkeys held little value. Research on such animals can tell us, so they argued, very little about human thought, behaviour and experience.

Humanistic psychologists rejected a rigorous scientific approach to psychology because they saw it as dehumanizing and unable to capture the richness of conscious experience. In many ways the rejection of scientific psychology in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was a backlash to the dominance of the behaviourist approach in North American psychology.

### **Critical Evaluation not to follow**

The humanistic approach has been applied to relatively few areas of psychology compared to the other approaches. Therefore, its contributions are limited to areas such as therapy, abnormality, motivation and personality.

A possible reasons for this lack of impact on academic psychology perhaps lies with the fact that humanism deliberately adopts a non-scientific approach to studying humans. For example their belief in free-will is in direct opposition to the deterministic laws of science. Also, the areas investigated by humanism, such as consciousness and emotion are very difficult to scientifically study. The outcome of such scientific limitations mean that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the key theories of the approach.



However, the flip side to this is that humanism can gain a better insight into an individual's behaviour through the use of qualitative methods, such as unstructured interviews. The approach also helped to provide a more holistic view of human behaviour, in contrast to the reductionist position of science.



*Dr. Roberto Assagioli (the bearded man at the centre), at Sundial House (UK)*

## **What is Dr. Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis?**

In its most basic sense, psychosynthesis is simply a name for the process of personal growth: the natural tendency in each of us to harmonize or synthesize our various aspects at ever higher levels of organization. In its more specific sense, Psychosynthesis is a name for the conscious attempt to cooperate with the natural process of personal development. All living things contain within them a drive to evolve, to become the fullest realization of themselves. This process can be supported consciously, and psychosynthesis is one means to do this.

Cooperating effectively with this process can be assisted by a conceptual understanding of the nature of this evolution, and by practical techniques. Psychosynthesis provides these and integrates them into an inclusive and ever growing framework designed to support the individual, groups, and the planet in their process of unfolding.

As an inclusive approach to human growth, Psychosynthesis dates from 1911 and the early work of Roberto Assagioli, an Italian Psychiatrist. Though one of the pioneers of psychoanalysis in Italy, Assagioli maintained that Freud had not given sufficient weight to the "higher" aspects of the human personality, and recognized a need for a more inclusive concept of humanity. From this

beginning Assagioli and an increasing number of psychotherapists, educators, physicians, social workers, clergy, and others have worked to develop and refine this inclusive view of human growth. The task is considered to be an open one, one that will never be finished. Each year, new discoveries in psychology, new developments in education, religion, anthropology, physics and other disciplines add to the principles and to the techniques of Psychosynthesis. Psychosynthesis, by its very nature, is always open to new approaches to human development.

Over the past sixty years, a number of conceptual points and a number of methods have proven themselves to be fundamental. These provide a working structure for Psychosynthesis.

Dr. Roberto Assagioli M.D. was a practicing Jew and an Occultist, felt in all his works, which we respect. As atheists we believe in freedom of thought, respecting his great work in modern psychology. All religions begin and end in the mind of man, and is therefore man-made. Outside the mind of man there is nothing supernatural as taught by the religions.

**Dr. Roberto Assagioli**, founder and a contemporary of Freud and Jung, was trained in psychoanalysis and became disenchanted with its limiting and imbalanced focus on the lower instincts. Early in his career he introduced his view that the natural unfolding process of psychosynthesis is just as important and necessary in understanding how we grow and develop. Assagioli's model includes recognition of **transpersonal** experiences and its higher qualities as a natural and vital part of who we most essentially are. His approach is sometimes described as "a psychology with a soul".

It is **an active way of being** and a way to help people move toward greater self-fulfillment and expression. Assagioli was attracted to the work of **Abraham Maslow**, a humanistic psychologist, and shared his view of growth and development as a process of **evolving synthesis** of the many unique attributes and potentials each person brings into his or her life. At its core Psychosynthesis thus is aligned with the **holistic humanistic** approach. Psychosynthesis includes the utilization of various **techniques and exercises** as determined by *the unique needs and situation of each person*. Psychosynthesis is 'person-specific'.

The approach and practice of psychosynthesis first and foremost recognizes the unique experience of each person.

“...by not giving any undue importance to any one technique .. .by the steady cultivation and use of the synthetic spirit, by the constant endeavor to keep the entire picture in view, to relate always the part to the whole and last, by emphasizing in theory and in practice the central, decisive

importance of the *human* factor, of the living interpersonal relation between the therapist [practitioner] and the patient [client/student].”  
Assagioli, Psychosynthesis, p. 60.

Psychosynthesis is a **positive, strength-oriented** approach. Psychosynthesis embodies all of who we are - it addresses the whole person. Its role is to bring **balance** to an of otherwise pathological and deficit oriented paradigm - a perspective that continues today unfortunately in the field of clinical psychology. This was Assagioli’s primary contribution and life work - to address and realize that we are more than the basement of a house - we have a middle-story and upper story as well.

But more than that, psychosynthesis is **a vision** and **a voice** of our times. The **seeds of change** have already been planted and nature, in its unfathomable wisdom has brought to the fore a new generation with a sense of a higher purpose, with a sense of ‘ soul’ and just in the nick of time as the industrial, corporate and military-driven society begins to absorb and realize its imbalanced and inadequate (harmful) perspective. We have been mostly unwittingly dragged along kicking and screaming as instruments in this process of synthesis. Assagioli’s voice and primary message is that through **conscious awareness** and **will** we can join in and be an active part of our own process of change and evolving.

## **Seven Basic Constructs of Psychosynthesis**

### **Summary**

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## **1. Introduction**

This is the second of two companion articles which present concise and thorough overview of psychosynthesis as a whole system. The former article, *Psychosynthesis in Western Psychology*, Russell addresses the question, "How is psychosynthesis related to other psychologies?" This article is a response to the question, "How does psychosynthesis view human beings and their world?" Since practical applications are discussed by many other authors, I focus here on the abstract and theoretical. bringing to the foreground a world-view which is the context in which techniques are applied. The word "psychosynthesis" is often used in two distinct ways. In its broad sense, it is a name for the human experience of syntropy-nature's tendency to evolve toward ever-more inclusive and highly-organized wholes In this meaning, psychosynthesis is a process, a trend, a goal; and reducing it to definitions or theories confines, limits and distorts what is essentially a living process-one of the mysteries of the universe. However, in its more narrow sense, "psychosynthesis" denotes a particular form of transpersonal psychology. As such it must be expressed in terms of propositions and hypotheses which can be tested using the scientific method. This article is written as a reference work for theory-building and refining knowledge of psychosynthesis as a scientific psychology. My intent is to provide a comprehensive statement in the language and metaphors commonly used in psychosynthesis literature and training programs. I see this as a step toward delineating already-existent assumptions, models, theories and hypotheses leading toward a general theory of psychosynthesis. The fundamental assumptions of psychosynthesis are presented here through a discussion of seven constructs: synthesis, personality, evolution, energy, higher consciousness, the Self, and the will. Each construct is a detailed set of

relationships and ideas. All seven are interwoven in psychosynthesis so that explaining any one of them involves mentioning several of the others. Thus while each section of this article could stand alone, a full picture of any one construct emerges only when all seven are studied together.

## **2. Synthesis**

The word "synthesis" comes from a Greek root meaning "to put together." "Synthesis" is the combining of various parts to form a coherent whole. In its theory, psychosynthesis puts together various aspects of Western psychology with mystical and religious viewpoints. In its methods, psychosynthesis combines techniques of psychotherapy, education and spiritual disciplines. Its goal is to foster a synthesis of the psyche.

When there is a true synthesis, the result is something new. In chemistry, for example, either hydrogen or oxygen alone manifests as a gas, whereas their combination can be a liquid-water. The fusion of diverse elements can also release tremendous potentials, as evidenced by some nuclear reactions.

### **2a. Individual and Group Synthesis**

For individuals, a personal synthesis begins with the resolution of inner conflicts and the combining of diverse personality elements leading toward a sense of wholeness and harmony. As this personality integration is realized, a deeper synthesis becomes possible wherein the ordinary personality is fused with extraordinary human qualities and abilities so that a transformation occurs internally and in relationships. In this process, limitations are transcended and a new sense of identity emerges-new depths of power, love and creativity are contacted and expressed in everyday living.

In human relationships, the synthesis of two people in friendship, partnership or marriage can generate new possibilities far beyond the capacities of the two individuals alone. In some cultures, the deep relationship of two individuals is believed to create a third entity which has its own energies and characteristics in addition to the attributes of the two individuals involved. Both partners are thus enriched by their union as individuality and separateness are transcended. A form of synthesis can also be observed in groups. Sometimes a team functions so well that it becomes something more than a collection of individuals. The team seems to act as one entity, with its many facets perfectly related within the whole. Many groups take on a collective identity. A given organization or a nation has qualities and characteristics that affect all the individual members.

## **2b. Planetary Synthesis**

Psychosynthesis also recognizes a potential for the synthesis of humanity as a whole. Great ideals or principles could be applied to all human behavior for the realization of planetary cooperation and harmony. Such ideals of conduct have been presented in many spiritual traditions and in such political documents as the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, and the Atlantic Charter. Such teachings and documents embody principles which, if followed, would lead into an era of goodwill, peace and disarmament.

Many signs of the beginnings of planet-wide synthesis are evident through developments in the twentieth century. The formation of a United Nations is a step in the political arena toward synthesis. The proliferation of international scientific conferences demonstrates that there is a world community of thinkers and explorers who want to combine their efforts. There are more cultural exchange programs than ever before, and a great deal of foreign travel mingling peoples of various lands. There are more summit conferences, a European Common Market, and a recognition of a large group of nations with similar issues--the Third World. Universities offer more and more programs in interdisciplinary studies and fields that used to be separate are now seen as interrelated.

Psychosynthesis aims to foster this synthesis of individuals, couples and groups contributing toward the synthesis of humanity. Psychosynthesis promotes synergy, where people joining together generate ideas and projects that release tremendous power. Synthesis creates fusion and the birth of new wholes. Psychosynthesis holds the belief that the potential for positive change on our planet is enormous when many individuals unite in a spirit of cooperation to strive toward common goals.

Many people are already attuned to the spirit of peace and the power of synthesis. They choose to participate consciously in the larger whole. They identify themselves as planetary citizens, members of the family of humanity. These people have already achieved some measure of synthesis within--a necessary step toward inter-individual psychosynthesis. They have learned to overcome the inner fragmentation, the sense of alienation, the effects of so much stimulation in our urban environments.

Psychosynthesis is one means for us to move toward that inner harmony. With a sense of wholeness within, individuals can draw on inner resources to sustain responsibilities and commit to higher values, leading to group and planetary synthesis.

## **2c. Unity in Diversity**

From the standpoint of synthesis all polarities can be seen as potentially harmonious-as interrelated and complementary rather than necessarily opposed and conflicting. There is a shift from an "either/or" attitude to a "both/and" attitude. On the planetary level, for example, there are signs of the beginnings of a rich blend of viewpoints joining aspects of East and West; North and South; First, Second, and Third Worlds. This creates such possibilities as a global economy that combines the best features of capitalism and communism. As individuals become more integrated as personalities, transpersonal qualities can emerge from the higher unconscious. In other words, when we are not in conflict or fragmented, our deeper human tendencies can come forth. [his combining of the everyday personality with higher potentials is the true individual synthesis. This involves more than altering or rearranging various personality elements. To synthesize the personality with an inner talent or higher quality or transcendent human ability brings a profound change of identity. This kind of change goes beyond an inner adjustment: it changes our world.

## **3. The Personality**

In psychosynthesis the personal aspect of the individual is seen as interrelated with a whole network of other personalities, and capable of transcending limitations by contacting and expressing higher human qualities and abilities. The personality experiences separateness, diversity and change. There is a sense of individual identity, a variety of roles to play and a range of actions, thoughts and feelings each day. The personality is thus a multifaceted, dynamic entity with the potential to grow throughout the life cycle.

The growth process is seen as a series of awakenings. New awarenesses require a reordering of personality-elements to accommodate a broader self-concept. New modes of experience and expression and new degrees of mastery become evident as life goes on. The goal of personal psychosynthesis is to promote growth and to integrate this personality: to coordinate various personality aspects, to resolve inner conflicts, and create a sense of ease and harmony. There is also the recognition that at each level of integration, the personality has the potential to transcend itself once again, temporarily dis-integrating on the way toward a more inclusive and comprehensive sense of wholeness. The personality may be viewed from several perspectives, each of which will be explored below.

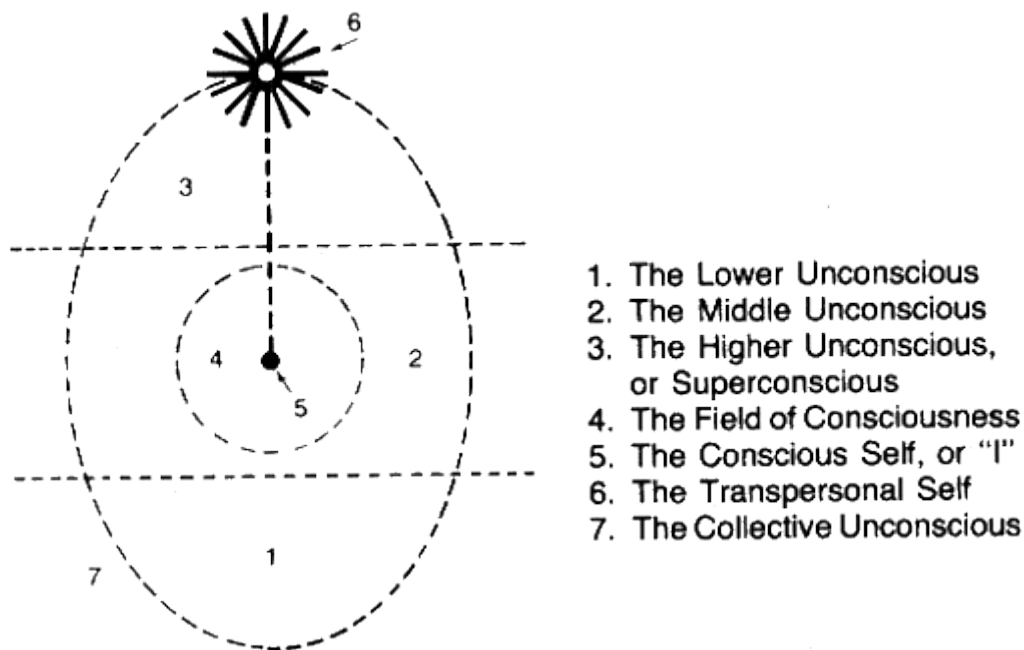
The personality:(1)as conscious and unconscious elements,(2)has a set of psychological functions,(3) consists of a multiplicity of subselves or subpersonalities; and (4)has a three-part structure-body, feelings and thinking



mind-with an integrating centre and a relationship to higher consciousness.

### 3a. Conscious and Unconscious Elements

One way of conceptualizing the personality is by recognizing that it is influenced by conscious and unconscious factors. Assagioli's "egg diagram" portrays these factors and includes both personal and trans-personal dimensions:



### The Assagioli Egg

1. The Lower Unconscious
2. The Middle Unconscious
3. The Higher Unconscious or Superconscious
4. The Field of Consciousness
5. The Conscious Self or "I"
6. The Higher Self
7. The Collective Unconscious

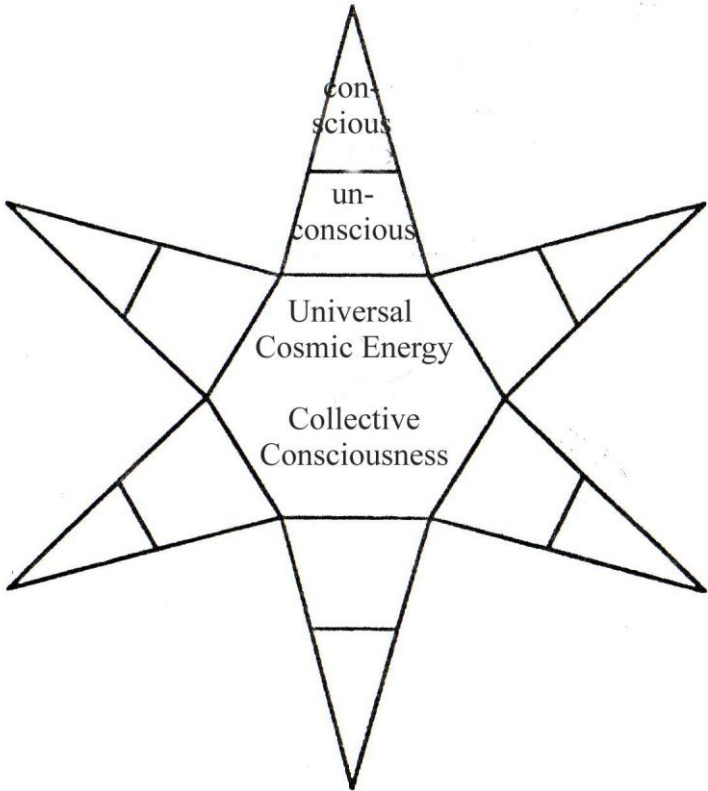
The dot in the centre of the inner circle represents the personal self, the coordinating/integrating centre of the personality. The circle represents one's personal reality at any given moment—awareness of data coming through the senses plus current feelings and thoughts. Just beyond the circle are the personality elements that are momentarily forgotten but easily accessible to

consciousness. Recent memories, or skills which are not being used are there, in the middle unconscious.

At the upper and lower ends of the oval are aspects of the individual that are being repressed. The lower unconscious contains elements of personal history: various instincts, tendencies and complexes. In the higher unconscious are individual talents and potentials which, if glimpsed by the personality, reveal inner strengths and visions of the future which can inspire one to face the difficulties and barriers along the path of growth~ At the top of the oval is the radiant point that symbolizes the Higher Self, the center of higher consciousness thought to be the inner source of the drive toward growth and self-actualization. The personality reaches new levels of integration by bringing unconscious elements into the field of consciousness where they can be integrated into an expanded identity.

### 3b. Psychological Functions

A second way of viewing the personality is to see it as a set of psychological functions. Assagioli diagrammed these functions in the Act of Will:



### The Star Diagram

- 1. Sensation
- 2. Emotion~Feeling

3. Impulse Desire
4. Imagination
5. Thought
6. Intuition
7. Will
8. Central point: The I, or personal self

He believed that the will was the function closest to the Self-the energy employed by the Self to regulate and direct all the other functions. Such executive and synthesizing abilities discussed by the ego psychologists as ego functions, (Hartman, 1958) are seen in psychosynthesis as functions of the Self. To work on conscious development or planned reconstruction of the personality, the individual can assess which functions are required to his purposes at a given time, and then actively develop any function which is weak. All human beings have all the basic functions, although a given individual would likely have a natural inclination to emphasize some more than others.

### **3c. Subpersonalities**

A third way of seeing the personality is through the notion of subpersonalities or subselves. (Vargiu,1974) The idea of subpersonalities is a way of conceptualizing how we shift from one identification to another as we move through life. In a single day we may move through playing the "victim," "critic," "lazy-bones," "striver," "lover," "frightened child," and so on. A subpersonality functions mechanically. It is like playing a tape, acting out a routine; or in psychoanalytic terms a "repetition compulsion." While a subpersonality is just a portion of the personality, we can become totally identified with it, placing its needs and perspectives above all else. Subpersonalities often act out unconscious motivations to the detriment of the personality as a whole.

The subpersonality concept is particularly useful for taking charge of an automatic reaction pattern or for resolving inner conflicts. By recognizing and naming subpersonalities, disidentifying from them and dialoguing with them, their underlying needs and higher qualities become apparent. Their distorted behaviors can be transformed and energies released for the benefit of the total person.

### **3d. Body, Feelings and Mind**

A fourth major way of conceptualizing the personality is acknowledging it as a three-part structure-body, feelings and thinking mind- with an integrating center, the self. These three aspects are considered to be means of getting information

about the surrounding world: they are instruments of knowledge. They are also means of self-expression: vehicles for sharing our inner world with others. The goal of personal psychosynthesis is to integrate or harmonize the three aspects by recognizing conflicts or splits in the personality and working toward healing them. A classic split in our culture is between mind and body, wherein we overvalue the mind and ignore the body's needs, leading to stress and disease. Another typical split is between mind and emotions, as evidenced in traditional male/female conditioning. The stereotype is: "men are rational, women emotional." In psychosynthesis, there is a recognition that every personality, whether it has a male or female body, has mental and emotional aspects, and both aspects must be functioning effectively for any human being to be whole. For most people, one of the three personality aspects is emphasized more than the other two. For example, dancers and athletes may emphasize the physical, whereas scientists and technicians often prefer the mental. This tendency to focus on a certain aspect of the psyche was recognized by Jung in his classification of four basic types: sensation, feeling, thinking, and intuitive. (Jung, 1976)

The values and perceptions of various types can differ considerably. Suppose three people observe a brand-new train passing by and each expresses a reaction. The physical type might say, "That train was enormous and moving so fast I felt the ground shake beneath my feet!" The feeling type might say, "I felt great excitement and a sense of awe as the train rushed by." The mental type might say, "As the train passed, I was thinking how far humanity has come in technological development in the past one hundred years." Each of the three types observes the same physical phenomenon but has a very different internal experience.

This view of types can explain communication problems and misunderstandings that arise between individuals and groups. Thinking types may be critical of the expression of feelings, focusing on the irrational or illogical way the other is talking. The feeling type may be critical of the mental type, characterizing that person as "out of touch," lacking warmth or empathy. Interpersonal difficulties can be relieved when each type can appreciate the style of the other and the value of alternative styles. Psycho synthesis employs typologies for understanding and appreciating that individuals inhabit different worlds even though they live side-by-side. Even so, psychosynthesists are mindful of Maslow's concern with the danger of rubricizing, of categorizing a given person, and losing a sense of that individual's specialness. (Maslow, 1968)<sup>3e</sup>. The Centre of the Personality

A repeated theme in this section on the personality is the idea of a central identity: the "I" which governs the various personality vehicles or functions. Just

as an automobile may be driven by an unskilled driver, an ordinary driver or a specially trained professional driver, so the personality vehicles may be governed by various aspects of the individual, which greatly affects the quality of expression of the personality. When governed by a succession of sub-selves, the personality is divided or conflicted and cannot function with integrity. When governed by the centred self or personal self, the personality functions in an integrated manner, with awareness of self and others, and a sense of inner freedom of choice. When governed by the Higher Self, the personality is capable of functioning at its highest and best level, actualizing potentials and translating peak moments into actions which upgrade the quality of life for all. This construct envisions the continual changing of our personalities and our universe as a process with a definite direction, with cycles and patterns. This is the growth process—a natural progressive movement occurring in individuals and in all humanity. Psychosynthesis agrees with others who see this movement as a series of rearrangements toward increasing order—toward more complex and inclusive wholes. (Fuller, 1963; Huxley, 1953; Szent-Gyorgyi, 1974; Teilhard de Chardin, 1960.) This is the movement toward an ever-wider synthesis. The idea of evolution or growth is so highly valued in psycho synthesis that an article on energy transformation states: "We will define the term 'negative' energy in this context as psychological energy, including attitudes, thoughts, emotions, physiological states, etc., which is antithetical to our own growth and/or the growth of others; 'positive' energy will be defined as that which promotes growth." (Crampton, 1974) A major goal of psychosynthesis is to confront and transform barriers to evolution. Psychosynthesis teaches people to cooperate with and to actively foster their own natural growth process.

### **3f. Universal Patterns**

Psychosynthesis recognizes the patterns of growth that have become widely known through work in developmental psychology. (Erickson, 1980; Lid, 1968; Paget, 1978; Sheehy, 1974) A universal pattern based on the model of a three-part personality involves a focus first on mastering the physical body, then learning to regulate and direct emotional energies, which leads to mental development and the potential for personality integration and transcendence. In early childhood, the main challenge is achieving mastery of the physical body. A baby grows to greater autonomy by learning to feed, dress and clean itself. In grade school the child is involved in a complex network of relationships among family, peers, teachers, and must learn appropriate expression and sublimation of emotions and desires to make a healthy adaptation to the social environment Emotional development continues to be a focus into adolescence where intellectual growth and mastery can become the central developmental task. Moving toward maturity the potential exists for developing the sense of a centred self—an identity which transcends family

patterns and social conditioning. Many people can continue growing toward the sense of an even deeper identity--the soul or Higher Self.

In humanity as a whole this same sequence can be observed: the movement from focusing on physical mastery to emotional then mental mastery and beyond to higher consciousness. In times when people lived in caves, most of the energy was expended on sheer physical survival. Full-time work was required for gathering food, hunting game, protecting the group from wild animals or hostile humans, and maintaining adequate shelter. As time went on, animal husbandry and agriculture were developed along with cities and specializations. Physical survival then became easier for many, and there was time for growth of human relationships in the realm of emotions and desires. Eventually emotional focus was achieved for the masses of humanity which predominates today. We see political campaigns and advertising appealing to our emotional or desire nature to be effective for the general public.

Mental development has just begun for the vast majority of human beings, placing the race at an adolescent stage in its development. Assagioli has compared the relations of nations to immature adolescent behavior. (Assagioli, 1965) Only a minority of human beings today have highly trained thinking mind, and fewer still have the ability to live everyday as a centred self, in touch with the abstract mind and Higher Self.

### **3g. Individual Uniqueness**

Within this universal pattern, each individual faces life's challenges their own pace and in their own way. Psychosynthesis places a very high value on these individual differences, assisting people in discovering their unique contributions to the larger whole. We often ask the questions, "Who am I?" "What is my next step ahead?" "What are blocks to taking that step?" "What can I do at this time to foster my growth process?"

The construct "evolution" embodies a belief that there is an inner blueprint which guides our growth. In plants, such a hidden pattern suggested by the growth of a seed into a mature plant. Each acorn, for example, sprouts and develops following a specific sequence. As bark and leaves are formed they display characteristics that are the same for all oak trees. Even so, each tree develops a unique arrangement of branches.

Psychosynthesis assumes that human beings develop similarly: the higher unconscious contains a blueprint for growth which can be brought to awareness. The blueprint has a universal aspect and a unique individual aspect. A person

who is out of touch with this inner pattern may experience excessive amounts of stress, pain, or frustration.

### **3h. Dynamic Harmony**

While the creation of a harmonious personality is a major goal in psychosynthesis, this does not mean that life can be all sweetness and light. As Krishna, the spiritual teacher in the Bagavad Gita counsels his student Narjuna, who shrinks from entering a battle, there is a time when engaging in conflict is the necessary move for one on the spiritual path. (Saraydarian) Tough-mindedness, bold assertiveness and a strong will are aspects of human nature that have their rightful place in the whole, along with peace, love and joy. To be in harmony with our growth means mastering and expressing any human qualities when appropriate.

Harmony is also fostered by learning to recognize and accept the natural cycles of change. Personality elements are rearranged from time to time, accommodating new awarenesses and abilities. When this process of integration, dis-integration and reintegration is understood and appreciated, inner peace can prevail even in times of adversity or conflict. A broad sense of perspective can be experienced through all difficulties. There is the wisdom to appreciate that whatever our current experience or sense of identity may be, it is only a moment in time-a step in a larger process of development.

The construct "evolution" then, gives us a perspective on life that would have us look at each experience, any condition of life, all circumstances, as opportunities for growth. We can always ask ourselves, "What is the message in this?" "What can I learn from this experience?" and "What is my unique contribution to the group and to humanity at this time?" This is a most constructive approach in which life itself becomes an exciting adventure in learning.

## **4. Energy**

Sages of the ancient East believed that all change and all forms were the expressions in time and space of a single universal energy governed by spiritual laws. Modern physicists now embrace a similar view: that all phenomena which we register with our physical senses are made up of energy, which at the subatomic level is governed by the laws of quantum physics. (Capra, 1975; Toben, 1975) When applied to human behavior, the idea of "energy" becomes a synthesizing concept-a common thread linking the viewpoints of Eastern spiritual traditions, the physical sciences and Western psychology. Psychosynthesis conceives of the human being as an energy system. Actions, images, emotions, and thoughts may be seen as basically varied forms of energy.



As people begin seeing their behaviour simply as energy, without the usual labels, the possibility of transformation becomes much more real and alive for them, opening many new options for expression. A behaviour pattern or belief system or typical emotional reaction may seem very difficult to change, yet when the underlying energy of these patterns is contacted, it can be redirected. Then there can be a movement, for example, from "Here comes my usual angry reaction" to "I sense an energy: do I want to express it by yelling, or stating I'm angry, or withdrawing, pouting, asserting myself, creating something, moving, or playing?"

Perceiving the surrounding world from the standpoint of energy evokes subtle awarenesses. Two people may appear to be about same in height and weight, yet our sense of their energy may reveal this. They have very different inner qualities. Energy awareness takes us beyond the world of appearances to the world of meaning. A person may smile and say hello. The appearances is friendly, yet the quality may be sincere and warm, merely polite and formal, or distant and phoney.

Thinking in terms of energy is also valuable for getting inner guidance Through energy awareness, perception extends beyond the forms of one's life into the realms of higher consciousness. To live and move in the world of energies evokes intuitions, revealing new inner qualities and sense of the next step ahead. In groups, guidance can come from asking, "Where is the energy right now?" This often points the way toward solving a problem or provide cues for recognizing that a person or subgroup is strongly motivated to make a contribution. Awareness of the flow of energy gives guidance for facilitating the group process without imposing the will of the leader.

Energy awareness, then, aids in developing the potential for transformation, subtle sensitivities and inner guidance. We learn to extend the range of perception beyond the limits of the physical senses. In fact the book "Psychosynthesis" suggests that such expanded perception is experienced by creative artists, geniuses and mystics, who are naturally attuned to higher frequency energies. (Assagioli, 1965a) A task of spiritual psychosynthesis is facilitating the ability to perceive and master these subtle levels of the energy spectrum.

Dr. Roberto Assagioli believed that a major force in psychology in future years will be "psycho-energetics," having energy as its main focus. (Assagioli, 1980) A system emerging along these lines is which includes psychosynthesis as one of its applied branches. (Gerard, 1973a) Energy field theory in integral psychology postulates that the quality of consciousness is related to the frequency of energies in and around the body. (Gerard, 1972) Thus, the higher

the frequency, the more expanded the consciousness. In this view, the more concrete realms of human experience-the worlds of the physical senses, emotions and concrete thoughts-are areas of denser vibration, of lower frequencies. Higher consciousness is directly related to high-frequency. (Golas, 1971) The energy of fear or hate would be of a lower frequency than the energies of love and joy. Techniques have been developed for expansion of awareness and self-transformation based on contacting, absorbing, circulating and radiating high-frequency energies.

Psychosynthesis, then, conceives of the universe as one energy which manifests in a variety of ways. We live in a sea of energies of various frequencies which can interact to create forms and patterns. We can learn to extend our ability to experience the vastness of our universe, to aware of broader and deeper levels of the spectrum of consciousness. Then we can ground these experiences in work and relationships to positively affect the quality of life on earth. The wide range of experiences reported by mystics, sorcerers, yogis and masters have become more available to Westerners as psychosynthesists and others have translated spiritual training methods into form appropriate to our modern age.

## **5. Higher Consciousness**

The exploration of an expanded experience of human identity, capacity and potential is a journey into transpersonal dimensions. These dimensions encompass the higher levels of the energy spectrum: realms of higher consciousness that transcend the everyday awareness of the personality. People experience their higher consciousness when they are their highest and best, when their talents, abilities or higher qualities are manifesting. This is an experience of going beyond the usual personal concerns, beyond the semi-automatic and unremarkable activities and awarenesses of dressing, eating, going to work, and relating with others to sustain our existence. The experience of a higher consciousness includes such phenomena as peak moments, transcendence of the consensual social reality, times of extraordinary insight and clarity, times of great love, joy, deep understanding, a strong sense of purpose or meaning; as well as abstract thinking, intuition, religious or mystical experiences, ESP, out-of-body experiences, telepathy, reincarnation clairvoyance, precognition and psychic healing but not necessarily. Many psychic phenomena are strictly emotional or delusional, tinged with fears, personal prejudices and wishful thinking. Psychosynthesis is interested in understanding all these extraordinary ways to actively develop them when appropriate. A miraculous human experiences, determining their value and finding

## **5a. Personal and Spiritual or Mental Psychosynthesis**

Psychosynthesis fosters growth toward higher consciousness in two overlapping stages: personal and spiritual psychosynthesis. In personal psychosynthesis there is a process of mental centring: learning to use the mind to transcend the limitations of being governed by drives. Impulses, emotions, desires, and partial identifications. By training the mind to embrace healthy realistic beliefs and attitudes, to focus and direct one's energies, one learns to confront blocks to growth, resolve inner conflicts, disidentify from subpersonalities and identify with centered self within. One's personal reality is enriched and expanded, encompassing a higher consciousness than that of the personal ego. Stepping further into higher consciousness is fostered by transpersonal or spiritual psychosynthesis which facilitates contacting and expressing energies of the Transpersonal Self or Higher Self. The consciousness of the Higher Self includes intuitive awareness, a broad perspective of one's and the human condition and a sense of purpose. The field of awareness of the Higher Self is the "superconscious," where transpersonal qualities and experiences are easily accessible. The goal of spiritual psychosynthesis is the fusion of the Higher Self with the personal self, so that the personality functions as a vehicle for expression of higher consciousness in the everyday world.

While the construct "higher consciousness" points to the direct experience of an altered state of consciousness which transcends ego and personality, in another sense, "higher consciousness" is a relative term. Each new step in evolution brings expanded awareness and a new area of mastery, and one's consciousness is then somewhat higher than the prior consciousness. No matter where a person is in their growth, there is always the opportunity to move toward a higher consciousness than that of the past. This is a dynamic view of human life as a process of continual change with vast future potentialities.5b.

The Higher Unconscious Psychosynthesists have observed a great deal of guilt and pain coming from the inability to actualize our potentials-the lack of contact with higher consciousness. One of Assagioli's most significant contributions to psychology was to incorporate the idea of a "higher unconscious" -an area of the psyche where higher human abilities are hidden from awareness. He believed that neurotic patterns could often be transcended or eliminated by creating conditions or techniques which allow the emergence of higher human possibilities from the higher unconscious into the world of everyday reality. Many of the defences which are used to keep the drives or complexes hidden are also used to keep higher qualities from conscious awareness. For example, many people use the defence of denial, dismissing their own potential for love and fulfilment, or ignoring their talents. Others use the defence of projection, admiring very successful people or looking up to political or spiritual leaders

rather than owning up to their own special gifts or their spiritual side. Psychosynthesis also recognizes what analysts call character defences. (Reich, 1949) A common one among people exploring spirituality is a spiritual-mystical facade which denies one's true emotional range, or excludes the body, or places an overemphasis on inner world experiences, discounting political, social and economic realities. The spirit of psychosynthesis is to strive to integrate inner and outer, higher and lower to achieve a sense of wholeness. Unblocking the higher unconscious is often the major key to psychological healing. A classic article in psychosynthesis, "The Repression of the Sublime", includes an in-depth discussion of the features of the higher unconscious. (Haronian, 1972) After exploring aspects of the sublime--the higher consciousness--Haronian explains the difficulties of realizing this realm in everyday life. These difficulties include the fear of too much mobility, avoiding risks inherent in growing, the fear of the unknown, and concern being too different from others. There is also the avoidance of sharing deeply with others when lacking a strong sense of personal identity: the fear of getting lost in others' needs and the fear being diminished or "taken over" by the power of one's own Higher Self and tendencies. To facilitate growth beyond such fears and defenses, psychosynthesis has developed methods of opening the doors of perception to higher consciousness and techniques for integrating higher energies into the everyday world. Thus psychosynthesis is tied to the need in psychology for what Robert Gerard calls a "psychoanalysis of the spirit (mind)." (Miller, 1981)

### **5c. Synthesis of Practical and mindful Spiritual Life**

It is important to recognize that the synthesis of higher consciousness everyday life is not a matter of completely ending old patterns. Often it is a matter of expanding--of adding more varied experiences life. In fact, a person who begins to meditate, to unblock his personality, to contact high frequency energies, can find some negative frequencies being stimulated by the incoming energies. This is why personal psychosynthesis must accompany spiritual work: to ensure stability and balance in the face of powerful new experiences. Sometimes spiritual psychosynthesis brings dramatic changes in behavior. A person who is transformed may change careers or create new relationships. On the other hand, there are few outward signs of some expansions of consciousness, since they are more qualitative than quantitative. One's inner life, the quality of one's inner experience can be vastly altered while roles and relationships--the forms of one's life--remain about the same. Assagioli has illustrated in his story of the three stone cutters working on building a church. (Assagioli, 1973) Each stone cutter has a different perception and experience of the job. The first is in a dull routine of cutting stones all day, the second is earning a living for himself and his family, the third is joyously building a temple for the Lord.

So as we evolve toward a higher consciousness, the forms of our lives may or may not change outwardly, but the point of view shifts and inner life expands to include a broader perspective, a greater wisdom, depth of understanding, and new meaning. In the spirit of synthesis we do not split off from our everyday needs and responsibilities to live in some transcendent realm. A zen statement of this is, "Before enlightenment, lifting water, carrying wood; after enlightenment, lifting water, carrying wood." The Sufi's have their way of saying that one does not forsake the material world for the spiritual life: "Pray to Allah, but tie your camel first."

A similar perspective on higher consciousness is that of the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo, who writes of the results of yogic disciplines being the "descent of the force." (Satprem, 1968) Again we have the notion that going "higher" does not necessarily mean to be above the everyday world, out of the body or beyond the reach of people around us. It means to manifest higher qualities of being, here and now, in this world. Karma Yoga is particularly in tune with this idea also: any action can be performed with a high quality of consciousness, in attunement with the larger whole. The good karma yogi, like the third stone cutter, approaches all tasks from the inner space of harmony with the cosmos while serving a meaningful role in this world.

Ways of moving into the experience of higher consciousness include reading inspirational literature, listening to great music and experiencing great art. Such creations are produced by people who can touch and express higher consciousness. The highest human qualities are embodied in their works and evoked in us by exposure to them. Meditative disciplines and other spiritual or religious practices can facilitate contacting and integrating transpersonal awarenesses. Sensing one's participation in the larger whole, acts of cooperation with evolution, and service to humanity can bring a fulfillment and joy characteristic of higher consciousness. Psychosynthesis encourages development of habits which foster high quality living, and arranging circumstance and environments that evoke the highest and best from individuals and groups.

## **6. The Self**

Fundamental to psychosynthesis is a deep exploration into experience of the Self. "Who am I?" is a central question here as it is in some spiritual traditions. Psychosynthesists have developed ideas about the Self and techniques for exploring the many layers and dimensions of identity that one discovers in the course of pursuing growth into realms of higher consciousness. The growth process can be described as a series of identifications with ever-more inclusive wholes. The personality moves through cycles of integration, dis-

integration, and re-integration wherein the individual disidentifies from the person he used to be and identifies with the person he has become. At the centre of each new whole is an integrating factor, a centre of awareness and will, a point of identity: a Self.

## **6a. Definitions and Distinctions**

This construct encompasses the many dimensions of the human experience of identity from the sense of being a conflicted and fragmented person to the sense of complete transcendence of individuality. Psychosynthesis has focused on two particular experiential levels of Self: the personal self and the Higher Self. The level of Self which is the integrating centre of the personality is named the "self" (with a lower case "s"), "personal self," or "centred self." The level of Self which is the center of the individual's higher consciousness is named the "Self" (with an upper case "S"), "Higher Self," "Transpersonal Self," or "soul." In the psychosynthesis literature the terms "self," "ego," and "I," have often been used interchangeably. However, dictionary definitions of these three reveal subtle differences. In my opinion, a clear delineation of "ego," "self," and "I" is a vital step toward an adequate psychosynthesis theory of the Self. To define, "ego" psychosynthesis can turn to psychoanalysis: "ego" is the aspect of the individual which is adapted to society. It consists of various functions, habits and defences. It is comprised of conscious and unconscious contents of the personality.

The personal "self" is considered to be a centre of pure awareness in the personality; beyond any personality content. Its awareness encompasses one's present sensations, feelings and thoughts, and its will is the power to choose. It is a non-judgmental observer, who makes conscious choices with a perspective on the personality as a whole. This personal self is described as a, projection of the Higher Self into the personality: it is superordinate to all personality contents. It is the coordinator, the director, the integrating centre of the personality. Ego and "self," then, denote specific states of consciousness related to the personality.

The "I" moves through many' states of consciousness: it is the subjective sense of identity at any given moment. For example, when identified with the "critic" subpersonality an individual says, "I am a critical person." When centered, the same individual says, "I am not the critical part of me, I am the self-the one who is aware, the one who chooses." During peak moments, the "I" is identified with the Higher Self: "I am wise and creative." In a state of complete transcendence of individuality there may be a direct experience of the Universal Self: "I am cosmic energy." "I am God," The terms "Higher Self" and "Universal Self" denote specific states of consciousness that transcend the personality.

The Higher Self or Transpersonal Self is experienced as the highest and best within us. Its awareness is higher consciousness and its will is the sense of purpose and direction in life. Its awareness encompasses the past, present and future of the individual over a period of years, decades even whole lifetimes. This awareness includes the entire personality, the qualities and abilities of the superconscious, and a deep sense relationship with various groups and all humanity.

The Universal Self is experienced as complete transcendence of separate individual or group identity. Its awareness is planetary consciousness and its will is the unfolding evolutionary pattern of humanity and all life on earth-the Universal Will. It has been described as union with cosmic forces, at-one-ment with a Divine Being, or as identification with the one Humanity as an organism within a living planetary entity.

### **6b. From the Ego to the Self**

Before we can sense our identity as a self and transcend the personality, we evolve through a period of identification with the ego. For many this is their primary identity throughout life. Rare moments of ego transcendence may occur but the conditioned identity soon reasserts its dominance in the personality. The ego is the result of particular culture and time, reflecting the belief and structures of family and society. Its concern is survival and maintenance of life style. When the personality is ego-dominated there is a fair amount of automatic behaviour many motives are unconscious and there is a lack of the sense of personal freedom. Often habit patterns predominate, even if one consciously doesn't like them and wants to change. There is great usefulness in the ego's coping patterns and subconscious behaviours: when we eat, get dressed, drive a car, or do other routines necessary for daily living, we can do them effectively without having to think through or relearn them each time. The process of evolution involves learning a skill, and when mastery is achieved, the details drop below the threshold of consciousness so we can operate efficiently, free to focus attention elsewhere. Thus the goal in psychosynthesis is not to eliminate ego, but to heal its neurotic aspects and to place it in perspective so it ceases to be the dominant force in the personality. Through personal psychosynthesis the centre of identity shifts to the personal self. The personal self, or centred self, is the pure awareness that is at the core of the ego. By contrast with the ego, the centred self is fully conscious. Its consciousness is also limited, but it is aware of its limits. The personal self can focus primarily on personal concerns and ego gratification as it evolves it shifts focus more and more to the transpersonal. The self can examine cultural conditions and choose alternative ways of perceiving the world. The self has



the potential to discover the underlying dynamics of unconscious habit patterns and to choose new behaviours.

While the ego is a product of the past the self is aware in the present and moves toward the future. While ego-dominated behaviours reflect stereotyped responses, self-dominated behaviours are characterized by freedom of choice and spontaneity. While the ego is culture-bound the self can move toward changing conditions in society.

In relationships, the ego-dominated personality focuses primarily on "my needs, my desires, my goals," with the sense that "my viewpoint, my experience is the truth." The self-dominated personality can perceive both its own needs and the needs of others. It can enter into an "I-Thou" relationship. (Buber, 1958) There is a sense that "my point of my experience is one of many valid ways of perceiving the word."

The personal self is an evolving self. It is always at the center of the personality; and since the personality is growing into ever-more inclusive wholes, the center shifts accordingly. At the centre of an expanded personality is a self with broader awareness and a greater range of choices than those of the previous self. There is always a next higher level of the centred self within the personality as evolution proceeds.

### **6c. The Higher Self**

The terms "Higher Self" or "Transpersonal Self" denote a distinct state of consciousness. Its major characteristics include purpose, wisdom, unconditional love and creativity.

When we transcend our everyday behaviour and have a peak experience we are identified with the Higher Self. Peak moments occur for many when they are out in nature and experience a connectedness with all life around them. Others experience peaks when everything functions perfectly in performing a task: it seems that there is a natural knowing of exactly what to do at each moment and all decisions and moves are correct. Others experience peak moments in high states of giving or receiving love, in deep experiences of beauty or goodness, or a profound sense of purpose and order in life.

To illustrate that the Higher Self is a specific state of consciousness, an experiential level distinct from that of the personal self and the ego, let's compare the perspectives of ordinary consciousness and higher consciousness. For most people, their ordinary consciousness is of the "I" shifting between ego and self or embracing some combination of the two. When we are identified

with the ego, the experience of the Higher Self is repressed in the higher unconscious. When identified with the personal self, the potential to connect directly with the Higher Self is available and we can evolve toward fuller expression of our higher consciousness.

From the perspective of ordinary consciousness, there are occasional flashes of insight, momentary awakenings to the consciousness of the Higher Self. The Higher Self is experienced as something deep within, or as something beyond, above or outside of us. From the perspective of higher consciousness, the ego is experienced as a partial identification; the personal self is experienced as a projection into the personality of the aware, integrative, synthesizing energies of higher consciousness.

We have noted that a basic characteristic of the Higher Self is the sense of purpose. To ordinary consciousness there may be a lack of purpose. Life can seem meaningless, absurd. As the "I" is increasingly able to identify with the self, one's purpose is glimpsed as "the next step ahead." It may seem that the Higher Self is presenting a vision of future possibilities or calling. Some people sense the prompting of an inner wise guide, or the voice of the Lord. The energy of the Higher Self is experienced as a drive toward growth and transcendence. A classic symbol of the Higher Self in this aspect is a wise being, spiritual teacher or guide.

When one identifies with the Higher Self there is immediate and complete understanding of the blueprint for one's life. There is a deep knowing that this individual life has meaning and that one's role in the world is part of a larger purpose. As a Higher Self, one is wise, with a profound understanding of self, others and life itself. There is a sense of having penetrated farther than usual into life's mysteries.

Other aspects of the Higher Self are illuminated by studying and contemplating another classic symbol of the Higher Self: a radiant point of light above the head that shines like the sun. This represents the source of our life energy, just as the sun is the source of life for the earth. Because it is above the head it represents a higher inspired part of us, above and beyond the thinking mind, symbolized by the brain. Because it always shines it represents the quality of unconditional love. The sun does not withhold its rays because of any rules of right and wrong. It simply shines on everyone, regardless of their behaviour, with no conditions attached, asking nothing in return.

The Higher Self has the quality of unconditional love for self and others. Human beings all over the world demonstrate a capacity to contact and express abundant love. Love is the basis of empathy and understanding: it holds relationships

together and is a universal healing energy which nurtures our growth. Since people are deeply loving and empathetic when identified with the Higher Self, the Higher Self is said to be of our interdependence and underlying unity. The personal self has consciousness of others too, yet its major purpose is to focus on ego needs and self-interest. As a personal self one can participate in group greed and selfishness as in an oppressive organization, subculture or nation. When identified with the Higher Self we experience directly our interrelated-ness with the whole human family. Our relationships are characterized by deep intimacy and rapport that transcends the usual boundaries of time and space and the usual world of the physical senses. The Higher-Self-dominated personality expresses a natural spirit of cooperation, participating in group activities to create a better world for all.

The Higher Self is creative by nature. Maslow's observation that healthy people are naturally creative indicates to me that our deeper identity is related to universal creative processes. As people grow, they tend to become more creative thinkers, more original and innovative in their approach to problem-solving and to all aspects of life. Spiritual psychosynthesis supports the development of creativity since this brings people into closer rapport with the Higher Self.

#### **6d. The Universal Self**

Beyond this Higher Self, at the essence of human nature, at the spiritual core is an experience that transcends all sense of separateness which is associated with such experiences as mystical union, cosmic consciousness, communion with God. While the idea of a universal Self is mentioned by Assagioli, there is little detail in the psychosynthesis literature about this highest Self within us, although its will aspect is discussed briefly as the "Universal Will." (Assagioli, 1973) Perhaps only a small percentage of human beings have experienced it. Here we have reached the limits of psychosynthesis, which values focusing on the practical. The ultimate nature of the Self and the experience of cosmic consciousness are not given much attention in psychosynthesis because of the already broad range encompassed by the tasks of integration of the personality and the synthesis of personality and higher consciousness. For people who have achieved a measure of synthesis, however, these become a natural next step ahead, and the work of psychosynthesis is transcended and included in an even vaster work on higher spiritual levels.

#### **7. The Will**

Dr. Roberto Assagioli observed that most Western psychologies neglected the will, yet awareness and will are two fundamental attributes of the Self. His second book, *The Act of Will*, presents the construct "will" as going far beyond the Victorian concept of the strong, iron-clad will. Emphasis on the will as

power has led to authoritarian personalities, rigidity, criticalness, harshness, cruelty, and oppressive political regimes. Psychosynthesists see power as just one aspect of our multidimensional will.

Several major perspectives on the will are explored below. The will includes: (1) a wide range of qualities; (2) three major aspects: strong, good, and skilful; (3) six stages: purpose, deliberation, decision, affirmation, planning and implementation; and (4) three levels: personal, transpersonal and universal. Readers familiar with *The Act of Will* will notice some differences here in the organization of concepts and in terminology which I believe bring more clarity to this subject

### **7a. Qualities of the Will**

Dr. Roberto Assagioli observed that most people directly experience a whole range of expressions of the will. They do make choices in everyday life, and they do set and achieve goals. Yet there is often the lack of a coherent will. The true sense of a will does not occur until there is a capacity to be centred identified with the personal self. Often decisions are made by a subpersonality, and other parts of the personality later rebel. The individual is unable to follow through on a decision, or lacks the energy to achieve a goal. Our best-laid plans can be forgotten or sabotaged by our own bad habits or unconscious defences. In the personality, the will energy may manifest physically in the form of drives and urges, emotionally as desire, and mentally as goal-setting and planning. In higher consciousness will can manifest as purpose, vision and ideals which give direction and meaning to human existence. The will, then, takes various forms at personal, group, planetary and cosmic levels. It is viewed here as a major type of universal energy which is expressed as a whole range of qualities including concentration, determination, patience, courage, discipline, mastery, intensity, power, organization, integration, and synthesis.

### **7b. Aspects: Strong, Good and Skilful Will**

The misuses and abuses of power by individuals, organizations and governments demonstrate the dangers to human life and well-being that result from the overemphasis on the will as strength. Psychosynthesists observe that the will can be developed in a constructive way by balancing the strong will with a good will and a skilful will. Individuals and groups can continue to safely develop higher and higher degrees of power and intensity so long as goodness and skill continue to be developed also and blended with strength. Qualities associated with strong will include courage, determination and decisiveness.

The good will is an expression of will based on humanistic and spiritual values. Love for self and others is needed for a benevolent expression of power. The good will synthesizes self-interest with the interests of others. Qualities associated with the good will include patience, faithful-ness and right action. The skilful will is an expression of wisdom and the drive toward excellence. Discrimination, subtlety and refinement are needed to avoid the pitfalls of applying excessive force. The skilful will involves a good sense of timing, and appreciation of the steps required to achieve an objective. Qualities associated with skilful will include discipline, organization and mastery. Many people have had the experience that strong will alone is inadequate to achieve goals. Inhuman relations, the direct application of power can meet with resistance or rebellion. Skill in communication, goodwill and right timing can be crucial factors in effective problem-solving. Skill is also required to achieve excellence and mastery. In learning a musical instrument, for example, fine motor skills are required. Patience and discipline are needed to be effective: the skilful will is more important here than the strong will. The good will is needed to achieve personality integration and a synthesis of humanity. It is important to learn to develop tolerance for others' weaknesses and to accept our own limitations and shadow side. When we hate another person, or reject a negative tendency in ourselves, we maintain a separation or split that prevents achievement of wholeness and harmony: there is struggle or conflict and the lack of a coherent will.

### **7c. Stages of the Will**

Assagioli developed a model of six stages to describe the act of will. The model can clarify the nature of the process of moving from idea to action. The six stages are: (1) purpose, (2) deliberation, (3) decision, (4) affirmation, (5) planning, and (6) implementation. First we have dreams, goals or a purpose. We proceed to deliberate on the range of alternatives and the consequences of various choices available to us. We then make a decision to carry out that purpose, to achieve our goal. Next we affirm-say yes to-our intention, and work up the energy and resources we need to follow through. Then we proceed with planning, thinking through a sequence of steps toward the goal, placing dates on our calendar, making commitments, setting deadlines. Finally comes implementation of our plan. In this sixth stage we take physical action and our idea, vision or purpose manifests, becomes grounded. We monitor this action to be sure that we stay true to our original purpose, getting feedback and new information along the way that may require revision of the plan for effective implementation of the purpose.

This model of stages is very helpful for activating the will. Mobilizing oneself effectively. Ideally all of us will have developed all six stages of the will so that

we can make our visions and dreams a reality with economy of effort. Some people find that their will is ineffective because they consistently skip one or more of the stages. Many people have wonderful ideas (stage 1) but never make a concrete plan (stage 5) that they could follow to make their dreams a reality. Others may be very active (stage 6) but without a clear sense of purpose (stage 1) so they are very busy yet accomplish little that is really satisfying. Others work toward specific goals (stage 1) but they have never clearly and definitely decided to carry through (stage 3), and inner conflicts sabotage their projects.

#### **7d. Levels: Personal, Transpersonal and Universal Will**

At the ego level, there is the lack of a coherent will. Various subpersonalities vie for power and attention or stay locked in conflict. There is no consistent action toward defined goals. The will of the ego is the will to survive and to satisfy personal desires and to maintain one's lifestyle. The striving toward goals may be at the expense of other people. The good will is underdeveloped, and strength and skill may be lacking.

The will of the personal self, the personal will is the freedom to choose and take action based on conscious decisions. In setting clear directions we experience a strong sense of personal identity. Our choices in life help to determine who we are in the world.

As we become integrated personalities. We can align our thoughts, desires and actions in the pursuit of goals, and our will can become very powerful. We may also become highly skilful. Psychosynthesis works simultaneously on personal and spiritual levels so that as the personality becomes integrated, it is also opened to the values and wisdom of higher consciousness. Hitler had a highly developed strong and skilful will. Goodness was missing. The qualities of the soul are needed so that the process of personality integration does not encourage tendencies toward an imbalance which is destructive of self and others. The Higher Self, by contrast with the personal self, functions essentially beyond the world of everyday choices. The will of the Higher Self-the-Transpersonal Will-includes the inner blueprint. The growth patterns unfolding in the individual life over a period of years and decades. This will is basically the sense of purpose.

The Transpersonal Will is a natural blend of goodness. Skill and strength. Since the Higher Self is group conscious, intuitively aware of the interdependence of all individuals, the Transpersonal Will motivates actions based on a sense of responsibility. This Higher Will motivates actions that involves service to others, often requiring sacrifices to serve group needs and purposes. The Transpersonal Will guides the individual in positive directions: it is the force

motivating right livelihood, right vocation, right action and right human relations. The will of Higher Self synthesizes the personality and higher consciousness, creating personality transformation that elevates the quality of group.

The will of the Universal Self encompasses a growth pattern that is unfolding for all humanity. It is a planetary trend of evolution that is a synthesis of all individual purposes in a grand design of the Universal Will. As we study physical and social evolution over hundreds and thousands of years, we get a sense of this great Plan and we can choose to cooperate with it. In recent years, this movement forward—the next step is for all humanity—has been characterized by various writers as: *The Greening of America* (Reich, 1970); *The Third Wave* (Toffler, 1980); *The Transformation* (Leonard, 1972); *The New Renaissance* (Gerard, 1973b); *The New Copernican Revolution* (Harman, 1969); *New Ways of being* (Houston, 1978); *the Aquarian Conspiracy* (Ferguson, 1980); and *The New Age* (Assagioli, 1981; Bailey, 1944, 1954; Gerard, 1973a; Rudhyar, 1975; Satin, 1976; Spangler, 1971).

This universal change is a movement toward new values, new ways of being ourselves and the world. It is a spontaneous movement of individuals all over the world toward identifying more closely with the higher Self—a movement which could reach critical mass so humanity could be guided by a planetary synthesizing center of higher consciousness, a Universal Self.

This movement of the Universal Will is also reflected by advances in technology. Through electronic communications we now have instant information from all over the world that gives us a sense that this is a global village. (McLuhan, 1964) With the negative results of industrial development we have experienced ecological crises, energy crises, (making us aware that we are all interdependent on this planet. With men on the moon we have had a vision of “spaceship earth.” (Fuller, 1969) humanity is thus moving from an age of separateness, national sovereignty and competition toward an age of interdependence, global unity, cooperation . The paradigms of materialistic science are giving way to recognition of subjective realms of experience that can be systematically studied with scientific method. (Tart, 1975) There is a recognition of the complementarities of intuition and reason. (Harman, 1969) Individuals are awakening to the notion that they can change their own consciousness from within—that they need not be confined by culture-bound views. (Ferguson, 1980)

People are now called upon to become responsible world citizens. There are enormous human potentials to be released, limits to be transcended and inner resources to be tapped by liberating ourselves from the viewpoints and values of

the particular nation and subculture in which we live. A declaration of universal human rights has been developed by the United Nations that all could follow. The Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals have held individuals responsible to place universal principles of human conduct above the authority of a particular leader, nation or group.

Humanity is evolving mentally so that more and more individuals are learning to think for themselves, not blindly following leaders. As people find the means to change their consciousness from within they can form an enlightened public opinion that presses for world peace and goodwill toward all. There is a vision of a new civilization, a new world order, and a sense of optimism that in this time of international crisis with the danger of total destruction of life through nuclear holocaust, that humanity will rise to the occasion and triumph. These planet-wide movements toward synthesis are signs of the manifesting of an awareness of Universality and a Universal Will; and we are all subject to these unfolding evolutionary patterns. The choice for psychosynthesis is to participate in this progressive movement of a better world for all.

## **8. Summary**

This is the second of two companion articles written as a detailed response to the question, “What is psychosynthesis?” The first article, Psychosynthesis in Western Psychology, brought out many of the unique features of psychosynthesis by comparing and contrasting it with other psychologies and by highlighting major influences on the development of psychosynthesis over the past seventy years. This article presents seven sets of ideas which I see as the foundations for a theory of psychosynthesis: synthesis, personality, evolution, energy, higher consciousness, the Self, and the will.

These basic constructs interweave to form a picture of a vast process of synthesis in human life. Psychosynthesis is one expression of that process in the field of Western psychology. The broad framework of ideas and practical methods of psychosynthesis can contribute to planetary health and well-being by providing guidance and inspiration to individuals and groups as we move through the great challenges of the last two decades of the twentieth century and beyond.

Psychosynthesis aims to foster psychological healing and growth in the human personality: to nurture inherent patterns of evolution toward an integration of that personality into a sense of wholeness and harmony. Then a further integration with other personalities is actively developed as well as a synthesis with higher consciousness. Psychosynthesis recognizes that the average human being has awareness and mastery of only a small fraction of the energies of our



universe and that there is a potential to expand through contacting and expressing the many levels and qualities of the Self and its central function, the will.

Psychosynthesis emphasizes exploring the highest and best aspects of human nature and contributes toward the ideal of peace on earth and a high quality of life for all. At the same time, it recognizes the realities of the shadow side of human life-the individual and group pathology that is rampant in many quarters, and the clear and present dangers of ecocide and nuclear holocaust. Psychosynthesis acknowledges that humanity must go through far-reaching changes to achieve its highest ideals. Psychosynthesis affirms the inherent goodness evident in most human beings and the dawning of a New Age that gives us cause to be optimistic for ourselves and for future generations. While this article emphasizes ideas, and the larger context in which individuals live and grow, psychosynthesis in practice is a down-to-earth approach to human development with applications to personal and spiritual growth, psychotherapy, education, medicine, business and the creative arts.

Video of Dr. Roberto Assagioli, MD.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9rVWAxE2hQ>

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