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**Abstract:** Although previous research has shown a strong association between a sense of purpose and well-being, this research has tended to treat purpose as one conceptual entity, without investigating different types and levels of purpose. After summarising some of the previous research on purpose, and suggesting reasons why it is associated with well-being, this paper presents a model of different varieties of purpose, including ‘survival’, ‘self-accumulative,’ ‘altruistic/idealistic’, ‘self-expansive’ and ‘transpersonal’ purposes. Transpersonal purpose can be sub-divided further into three different aspects: spiritual development, creativity and altruism/idealism. Examples of these different aspects are given. Preliminary questionnaire-based research based on this model of varieties of purpose is summarised, suggesting that it is valid to highlight these different varieties, and that they are associated with different levels of self-reported happiness.

**keywords:** purpose, transpersonal, well-being, creativity, idealism, altruism

### **A Model of Purpose: From Survival to Transpersonal Purpose**

During the Second World War, the psychologist Viktor Frankl spent three years in concentration camps, and was one of the small proportion of people who survived the camps. In his own view, one of the main reasons why he survived was because, as a psychologist, he realised the importance of maintaining a sense of purpose. When he was originally taken to Auschwitz, he lost the manuscript of his first book, which he had been working on for several years. In the camps, he gave himself the purpose of reconstructing the book, writing key words in shorthand on scraps of paper and memorising passages. Reflecting on this later, he was sure that, ‘my deep desire to write this manuscript anew helped me survive the rigors of the camps’ (Frankl, 2004, p. 109). He was determined to survive so that one day the book would be published – as it was two years after the end of the war (under the German title *Die Psychotherapie in der Praxis*).

As he describes in *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl encouraged other inmates of the camps to do the same – to give themselves a sense of purpose, to keep hold of ideals and hopes, even in the face of such massive hardship and desolation. Time and again, he saw how people who let go of their hopes and aims became vulnerable to disease, and even to death. As he wrote, ‘Woe to him who saw no more sense to his life, no aim, nor purpose, and therefore no point in going on. He was soon lost’ (ibid. p.85).

Is it possible that, as Frankl believed, a strong sense of purpose can help to keep us alive? In a survey in 2000, more than 6000 people were asked whether they had a strong sense of purpose and direction, and similar questions. In 2014 researchers at the University of Carleton in Canada did a follow up study. Over those 14 years, around 9% of the participants had died. And the researchers found that people who reported a strong sense of purpose were 15% less likely to be amongst those who had passed away. This applied to every age group. Those who reported a strong sense of purpose were 15% more likely to still be alive (Hill & Turiano, 2014).

In an even more recent study, published in *The Lancet* in November 2014, researchers at University College London found that, for people over the age of 65, a high degree of ‘eudemonic wellbeing’ (including a sense of purpose and meaning) meant that they were less likely to die over a period of eight and a half years. Tracking the well-being and health of over nine thousand people, the study found that, at the end of the eight and a half year period, only 9% of people in the highest quartile of eudemonic well-being had died, compared with 29% in the lowest quartile. Those who reported the highest level of eudemonic wellbeing lived, on average, two years longer (Steptoe et al., 2014).

Other studies have shown that subjective well-being correlates strongly with a sense of purpose. Crumbaugh and Maholick (1963) developed the ‘Purpose in Life’ (PIL) test, to research Frankl’s theories. They found that a strong sense of purpose made people less susceptible to stress, substance abuse and depression. While in 1987, Zika and Chamberlain - using the same test - found a strong link between well-being and a sense of purpose and meaning. Similarly, Kass et al. (1991)

found that, the higher a person scored on a 'life purpose scale', the fewer psychological and physical problems they experienced. Ryff developed a model of psychological well-being which includes 'Purpose in Life' as one of its six dimensions of 'wellness' (the others are Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, and Self-Acceptance) (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Ryff and Keyes found that higher levels of purpose were strongly associated with increased life satisfaction, emotional stability, optimism and self-esteem.

### **Positive Psychological Effects of Purpose**

Why does a sense of purpose have such powerful positive psychological (and physical) effects? I would suggest seven main reasons, which I will describe briefly.

**Motivation.** Purpose provides an ongoing sense of motivation. It means that a person never wakes up in the morning wondering, 'What's the point of all this?' With a sense of purpose, there is always a reason to get up in the morning. All daily activities are infused with motivation, not just activities related to a person's goals. There is always a *raison d'être*.

**Orientation.** In a similar way, purpose provides a strong sense of direction in life, making it less likely that a person becomes disoriented and overwhelmed by myriad different possibilities and opportunities. A strong sense of purpose means that there is always a clear destination. We know exactly where we are, and exactly where we are going.

**Resilience.** A sense of purpose enables the individual to overcome challenges and transcend difficulties which might normally overwhelm them. It gives them the determination and endurance to keep going in the midst of hardship and suffering. We feel it is worth enduring difficulties in order to realise their goals. Viktor Frankl is a great example of this. As Nietzsche wrote: 'He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how' (in Frankl, 2004, p.109).

**Optimism and Hope.** Working towards a goal implies that a person feels that the goal is attainable, and that their lives will change for the better once they have reached it. It implies hope - depending on the type of purpose, hope for a better life for ourselves, a fairer and more just society, liberation from suffering and oppression for others, a healthier world, and so forth.

**Flow.** Purpose is linked to 'flow' - the state of intense absorption (studied most closely by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi [e.g. 1990]) in which a person forgets their surroundings and themselves. If a person has a strong sense of purpose, they are likely to experience flow more frequently. (As Csikszentmihalyi [1990] has shown, flow is a powerful source of well-being. The more flow we experience, the happier we feel.)

**Self-Esteem.** Purpose enhances self-esteem. So long as a person feels that they are successfully dealing with challenges and moving closer to their goals, their self-confidence increases. They feel a sense of competence and achievement, an enhanced ability to deal with difficulties and challenges.

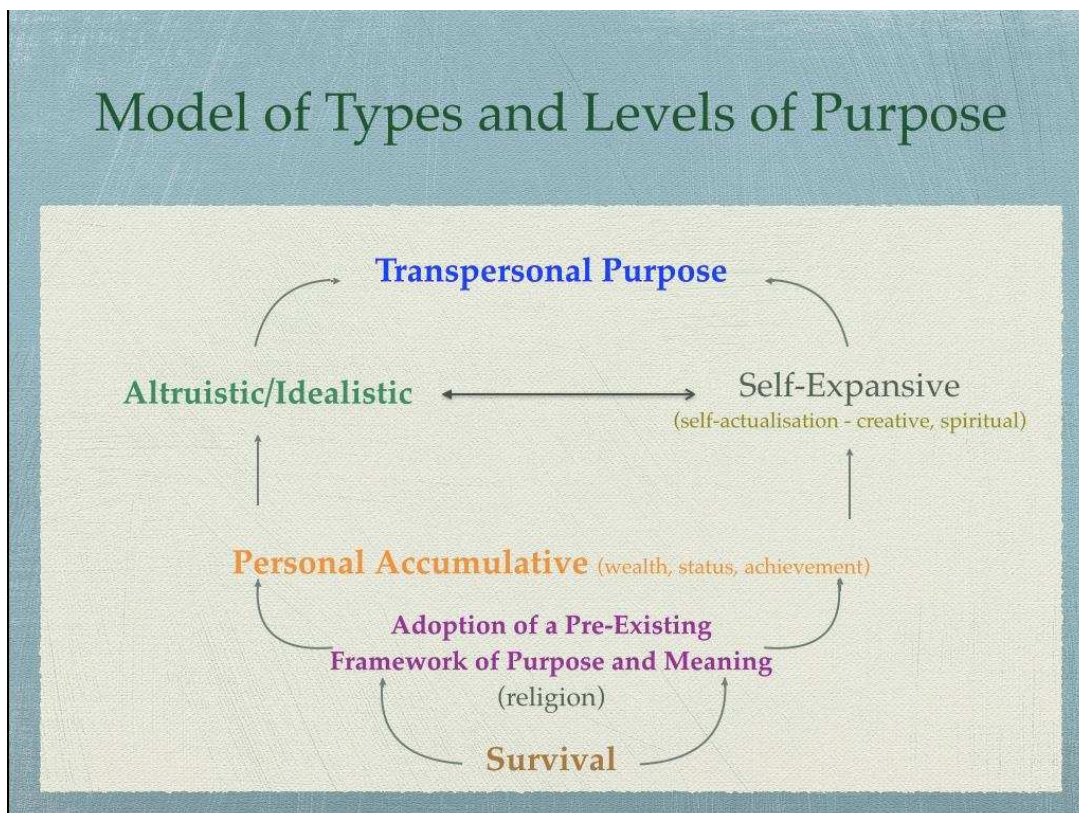
**Resistance to Psychological Discord.** Purpose also promotes positivity because it provides resistance to states of 'psychological discord' (Taylor, 2012) such as depression, anxiety, boredom and frustration. This may be partly because, by focusing our attention externally, and giving us a constant source of activity to channel our mental energies into, purpose means that we spend less immersed in the associational chatter of our minds, which often triggers negative thoughts and feelings (Taylor, 2012). (Csikszentmihalyi [1990] calls this negativity 'psychic entropy' and suggests that 'flow' makes us less vulnerable to it. He suggests that this is one of the main reasons why flow is associated with well-being.) Perhaps this is also because aligning ourselves to a

purpose often makes us less self-centred. We feel a part of something bigger, something outside ourselves, and this makes us less focused on our own worries and anxieties. Our own problems seem less significant, and we spend less time thinking about them, and so our sense of well-being increases.

It is usually when we lose our sense of purpose that we become vulnerable to psychological discord. According to Frankl (2004), a lack of meaning and purpose in our lives makes us vulnerable to what he termed ‘noögenic neurosis’ (a spiritual or existential neurosis), arising from a frustration of the ‘will to meaning.’

This may be the reason for the connection between a loss of a sense of purpose and addiction. Finding a sense of purpose is an essential part of recovering from addiction (Carroll, 1993; White et al, 2006). As Laudet et al. (2006) note, a sense of purpose and meaning in life ‘can serve as a catalyst of recovery initiation, an anchor for recovery maintenance, and a source of recovery enrichment’ (p. 19). And contrarily, the loss of purpose may give rise to addiction, or increase the likelihood of relapse from recovery. Addiction can be seen as an attempt to regain a basic sense of purpose when no other is available. The purpose becomes for the person to supply themselves with the substance they are addicted to.

**Fig 1: Model of Different Types and Levels of Purpose**



### Varieties of Purpose

One issue with research on purpose such as that described above is that the concept is treated very generally, as one homogenous entity. This is slightly misleading, since it is possible to identify several different types and levels of purpose, with varying characteristics and effects. I have attempted to describe some of these in Fig 1. This model has some similarities to Maslow’s (1954) ‘hierarchy of needs’, in the movement from basic (e.g. survival) to more rarefied levels of purpose. However, this should not be seen as hierarchical model, as Maslow’s is intended, because it is

possible to be oriented around more than one purpose at the same time. The different types of purpose often combine, and often merge into one another. (In the diagram, this is indicated by the curved arrows that connect some types of purpose to others.)

The most basic type of purpose for all living beings – including human beings – is survival. Most human beings throughout recorded history – and sadly, probably still most human beings alive today – have been mainly oriented around this purpose. Due to poverty, they're forced to give most of their time and attention to trying to satisfy their (and their children's) basic needs for survival, for food, shelter, safety and security. But the purpose of survival may not be sufficient in itself. Even while mainly preoccupied with trying to keep themselves and their children alive, most people need a more rarefied and meaningful type of purpose. Many people gain this through religion, by taking on a pre-existing belief system and aligning their lives with it. Research has suggested that strongly religious people tend to have higher levels of well-being than the non-religious and the nominally religious (e.g. Graham & Crown, 2014). This is probably largely because of the strong sense of purpose and meaning which religions provide (Compton & Hoffman, 2013). If you're strongly religious, there is a clear purpose to everything you do: to follow the conventions and principles of your faith, to attain salvation, and/or to convert other people to your faith.

If we are fortunate, we may reach a point where our basic needs are satisfied, and survival no longer need be our primary purpose. This is potentially quite a difficult point, because it may mean that we lose our sense of motivation and orientation. Frankl believed – partly as a result of his experiences in the concentration camps – that human beings are naturally purposive. Psychologically, we need and crave for purpose in the same way that, physiologically, our bodies require and crave for food. Once our survival needs are satisfied, it is important to transfer to a different type of purpose, otherwise we will be exposed to what Frankl called 'the existential vacuum', a lack of meaning and purpose in our lives. We will experience what he termed 'noögenic neurosis', arising from a frustration of the 'will to meaning' (Frankl, 2004).

If we have already aligned ourselves to a religious belief system, this may satisfy our need for purpose. However, for many of us in the secular modern world, however, religion may not be a viable source of purpose. In modern secular cultures, some people may gain a sense of purpose and meaning through affiliation to a sports club, which performs a similar psychological function to religion. (See Wann et al. [2001] for a discussion of some of the similarities between sport and religion in terms of psychological effect.) If a person follows a football club, they are also part of a pre-existing framework of purpose. Their purpose is for the team to win the next match and overall, to win that season's league or tournament, or at least to perform well, and finish in a good position in the league table.

Others may take on what may be termed a 'personal-accumulative' purpose. This means that the main purpose of a person's life is to accumulate more wealth, more achievement or more status or success. They might aim to become famous or powerful, or to rise to the higher levels of our profession. People who have already adopted a religious belief system and moved beyond the survival level may also adopt a personal-accumulative purpose, without relinquishing their religious worldview. This can operate alongside their religious framework (e.g. a power-seeking politician or wealth-seeking businessman who is also a fundamentalist Christian) or through their religious beliefs (e.g. when a fundamentalist religion person's main goal is to extend the influence of their religion, by converting others). In the latter example, what might be called a 'group-accumulative' purpose is operating, which can be seen as a variant of the personal-accumulative purpose. A group-accumulative purpose occurs when a person feels so strongly identified with a group – for example, a religion, a nation, an ethnic group - that there is no distinction between their personal purpose and the purpose of the group. Their purpose to extend the influence and power of the group itself.

Moving beyond a self-centered accumulative orientation, purpose may become altruistic or idealistic, where the individual is not so concerned with their own well-being so much as other

people's. Their main aim might be to improve or contribute to society, or contribute to the human race in general. They might devote their time and energy to aiding the development of other people, helping them to overcome obstacles or acting to alleviate their suffering.

Also beyond an egoic orientation, a 'self-expansive' purpose may emerge. (Maslow [1954] referred to this as 'self-actualisation.')

A self-expansive purpose is distinct from a personal-accumulative purpose in that a person's aim is not to add wealth or status to themselves, but to uncover and express their potential, to deepen and expand themselves. For many people, this occurs through creativity, or through hobbies and experiences which challenge them and help them to grow. This could include intellectual growth, based on curiosity and a desire to understand the world. It could also refer to spiritual growth. A person who is mainly oriented around a self-expansive purpose may undergo therapy to try to overcome obstacles to their development, or meditate regularly in order to try to facilitate a shift in awareness. They may have an impulse to expand or intensify their consciousness, by following a spiritual path such as Buddhism or Yoga.

I have spoken of them separately, but often an altruistic/idealistic purpose and a self-expansive purpose combine. That is, people who are altruistic and idealistic are often focused on self-expansion at the same time. These are both facets of trans-egoic development. At this stage, the main aim of our lives is no longer to protect, enhance and bolster the ego. The individual is in the process of transcending the ego, and beginning to experience the connectedness and freedom of exploration which ego-transcendence brings.

It is also possible, however, that a person who is mainly oriented around a personal accumulative purpose may have an altruistic/idealistic purpose to some degree, and vice-versa. This might occur when a person has only partly - but not fully - moved beyond a self-centred egoic orientation. There are clearly no sharp divisions between different types of purpose, but many gradations between them.

And as with a personal-accumulative purpose, if a person has already adopted a religious framework, both altruism/idealism and self-expansion may be expressed through it. Their altruistic/idealistic impulses may be reinforced by or centered around the compassionate aspects of their religion (e.g. Jesus' teachings on non-resistance to violence and forgiveness). Their self-expansive impulses may express themselves through the transcendent or mystical aspects of their religion (e.g. the Sufi teachings of Islam, or the tradition of mystical and contemplative Christianity). At this level, the distinction between 'traditional' and 'transcendent' religion becomes very apparent (or as I have referred to them, 'dogmatic religion' and 'spiritual religion' [Taylor, 2012]). The function of the latter is to provide reinforcement, identity and belonging. It is associated with a sense of 'otherness' towards other religions, in a belief in the exclusive 'truth' of one's faith, and a strong desire to convert others.. On the other hand, spiritual or transcendent religion is trans-egoic, helping the individual move beyond self-centredness and separateness, towards connection with a divine principle. It is associated with an openness to other faiths, and a belief that there is a similar spiritual core in all religious traditions. (Wilber [2000] makes a similar distinction between the 'translative' and 'transformative' functions of religion.)

## **Transpersonal Purpose**

Following an idealistic/altruistic, creative or spiritual purpose may lead to a point where purpose becomes 'transpersonal.' This emerges as a person moves further beyond a self-centred orientation, and begins to uncover a deep, authentic purpose inside them. They align themselves to this purpose. Their own personal desires, interests and fears begin to fade in importance, as they connect to a larger superconscious source. Their impulses and actions become the expression of. They become the channel for a purpose which flows through them. Rather than them carrying the purpose forward, the purpose begins to carry them.

At this point, purpose becomes more effortless. The individual does not need to strain or exhaust themselves pushing their purpose forward, trying to realize ambitions or achieve goals. Rather than pushing, they can simply flow with the purpose. There is often an intoxicating sense of

momentum, as if the individual is swimming with the current of a fast-flowing river. They may not even have a clear idea about what their purpose is, but they trust it. The important thing is to *step aside* – that is, for the individual to put their own personal interests, desires and fears to one side, so that they do not block or distort this purpose.

There are three main ways in which transpersonal purpose can express itself: spiritual development, creativity and altruism/idealism. Of course, these three types of expression often combine and merge.

When it is expressed through *spiritual development*, transpersonal purpose can be seen in terms of aligning oneself with the dynamic evolutionary impulse of life itself, towards an expansion and intensification of consciousness. Since the beginnings of life, there has been a tendency for life forms to become increasingly complex in physical terms, with increasing numbers of cells and increasingly complex interactions between those cells. And at the same time as becoming more complex physically, life forms have become increasingly conscious - that is, their awareness of their surroundings has become more expansive and intense, both perceptually and conceptually. Their awareness has become wider, deeper and more intricate. Living beings have also - in the most recent stages of the evolutionary process - developed increasing *self*-consciousness. So when an individual feels an overriding impulse to expand and intensify their own awareness through spiritual development, they have effectively become an expression of this evolutionary impulse. Their own *self*-evolution is an expression of evolution itself, and they further the dynamic progress of evolution through own self-development.

When it is expressed in terms of *creativity*, transpersonal purpose is a matter of allowing the expression of insights and inspirations which stem from a reservoir of knowledge or wisdom which transcends the individual mind. Many creative artists have described this sense of ‘channeling’ insights or ideas from an unconscious (or superconscious) source, to the point that they feel that *they themselves* are not the source of their creativity, and that they have little conscious control over it. Mozart described how his musical ideas ‘flow best and most abundantly’ when he was alone ‘traveling in a carriage or walking after a good meal, or during the night when I cannot sleep... Whence and how they come, I know not, nor can I force them’ (in Holmes, 2009, pp. 317). Tchaikovsky described how his ideas for compositions usually came ‘suddenly and unexpectedly... It takes root with extraordinary force and rapidity, shoots up through the earth, puts forth branches and leaves, and finally blossoms’ (in Pope, 2005, p. 256).

Many writers and poets have spoken similarly of a ‘muse’ beyond the conscious mind which provides them with inspiration. The author D.H. Lawrence spoke of a mysterious ‘daimon’ which he felt was the source of his creativity. As his friend Aldous Huxley wrote, ‘The *daimon* which possessed him was, he felt, a divine thing... This loyalty to his own self, or rather to his gift, to the strange and powerful *numen* which, he felt, used him as its tabernacle’ (1962, p. 1252). Lawrence himself expressed his feeling that he was the channel of a superconscious creative force in his poem ‘The Song of a Man who Has Come through’:

*Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!...*

*Oh, for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,  
I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,  
Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression... (Lawrence, 1993, p. 250)*

(Incidentally, Lawrence is also an excellent example of how a powerful sense of purpose can enable an individual to transcend massive personal difficulties. His loyalty to his transpersonal ‘daimon’ enabled him to produce 45 books and hundreds of paintings during his short life, including some of the most profound and inspiring literary works of the 20th century. He did this in the face of almost constant poverty and poor health and the hostility of most of his peers. One of Lawrence’s aims was to write about sex openly, and as a result some of his books were banned, and exhibitions of his paintings were closed down. Many readers and critics did not understand his

works – he was frequently ridiculed, and some of his books only sold a few hundred copies each. He had very little success, critically or financially. However, although he occasionally felt frustrated and angry, Lawrence never let these difficulties discourage him. The creative force which flowed through him was so powerful that he felt had no choice but to give himself up to it. His difficulties appeared incidental, compared to his invigorating sense of being carried forward by this force, and of serving as a channel for its expression.)

Finally, when it is expressed through *idealism and altruism*, transpersonal purpose may manifest itself as a selfless impulse to alleviate suffering and encourage the development of human beings, or to improve their predicament by alleviating oppression and injustice. Individuals who express transpersonal purpose in this way may feel a sense of mission and a duty to follow overarching moral principles, even if this makes life difficult for them personally. They are willing to practice self-sacrifice, even sometimes to the point of actually sacrificing their own lives. Because their sense of purpose is transpersonal, their *personal* existence is less important than the purpose that flows through them, and the principles it is based on.

This type of transpersonal purpose stems from the sense of connection and oneness that is experienced at transpersonal levels of development. The individual's sense of identity is no longer restricted to their own mind or body, but extends outwards, into other human beings, and other living beings. There is a powerful sense of empathy and compassion. The individual is able to 'enter into' the mind-space of other living beings, and sense what they are experiencing. A person can sense the sufferings of others, which gives rise to a powerful altruistic urge to alleviate this suffering. Their own personal desires and ambitions recede in importance, in comparison with the needs of others. At the same time, at this level of development, there is an over-arching global perspective which transcends group identity, and generates an impulse to help human beings indiscriminately, or to further the development of the human race *as a whole*.

There is perhaps an evolutionary aspect to this type of transpersonal purpose too. Individuals who experience idealistic or altruistic purpose at a transpersonal level can be seen as instruments of evolution, and of cultural and moral progress, in that they express a movement towards increasing connection and unity. In Wilber's moral framework, they represent a movement beyond the egocentric and socio-centric perspectives, towards a worldcentric perspective (Wilber, 1995). They represent a movement beyond prejudice and moral exclusion, towards an all-embracing empathy, and a determination to remove oppression and obstacles which deny the sanctity of individuals and create suffering in their lives. More fundamentally, they represent a movement beyond separation, towards increasing empathy and compassion.

There are many well known figures who might be seen as exemplifying this type of 'transpersonal purpose', such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela - individuals who lived as instruments of their idealism, and sacrificed their own personal goals and well-being in the effort to live out these ideals. This spirit of self-sacrifice is clearly expressed in these lines from Martin Luther King's famous 'I have a Dream' speech, in which discusses the possible danger to his life: 'I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will' (King, 2015).

One lesser known example is Father Kolbe, the Polish priest who sheltered thousands of Jews during the Second World War, and sacrificed his own life to save another concentration camp inmate. Another is Lewis Gompertz, the 19th century animal rights activist who co-founded the *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* - later the RSPCA - and spent his working life as an inventor, attempting to devise machines to take over tasks which were at that time performed by animals.

Another notable example is Florence Nightingale, who devoted her life to alleviating human suffering by revolutionising medical treatments, and effectively creating the profession of modern nursing. Already at a young age, Nightingale's awareness of his sense of purpose was so strong that she made a conscious decision to remain unmarried, as she knew that this would restrict her. Against intense cultural pressure, and in the face of the anger of her mother and sister, she rebelled against the role of a wife and mother she was expected to fulfil, so that she could devote herself to a



live a life of service to others. (This also meant struggling to gain an education, at a time when very few women had access to one.)

Although Nightingale's achievements in medicine and nursing are famous, it is less well known that she was a highly spiritually developed individual, who wrote many texts on Western mysticism. The scholar of mysticism, Evelyn Underhill, referred to her as 'one of the greatest and most balanced contemplatives of the nineteenth century' (in Dossey, p.2010, p.10). As Nightingale wrote, 'Heaven is neither a place nor a time. There might be a Heaven not only here but now. Where shall I find God? In myself. That is the true Mystical Doctrine' (ibid., p.11).

Even during her life, Nightingale was famous for her unusual energy and determination, which became known as 'Nightingale power.' And it seems reasonable to suggest that this energy had a transpersonal source, and that the reason why she was able to accomplish so much was because her accomplishments were not the result of conscious effort, but of the purpose which was flowing through her. Nightingale has a great deal in common with the 15<sup>th</sup> century Christian mystic St. Catherine of Genoa, who also lived a life of dynamic activity and transpersonal altruism, tending the sick and poor of Genoa and becoming the manager and treasurer of the city's hospital.

Most of the individuals I have mentioned as examples of altruistic/idealistic transpersonal purpose were intensely religious individuals, but clearly in a spiritual rather than a dogmatic sense (Taylor, 2012). Both Gandhi and Martin Luther King were highly ecumenical, with a great respect for religious and spiritual traditions beyond those they felt most affiliated with. Similarly, partly due to her deep respect for other spiritual traditions, one of Florence Nightingale's many adopted causes was to oppose discrimination against other religions, as well as other Christian denominations.

In relation to this, it is important to make a distinction between religious fundamentalists and terrorists who are prepared to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their cause. Although this might appear to be an act of transpersonal idealism, these individuals are not actually operating from a trans-egoic perspective, but from a group-egoic one. They are an example of group-accumulative purpose as described earlier. Their own identity has been completely subsumed into their group, so that they effectively have no will of their own. The group is an extension of their own ego, and they have taken on the groups' ideals and goals as their own. Without a transpersonal perspective, they only empathise with other members of their group; their compassion and altruism are strictly confined to their own group. Strictly speaking, they are not sacrificing their own lives, because they have no life outside of their group, and the group will continue without them. Their purpose is not express universal principles or to alleviate suffering, but merely to extend the power of their group.

## **Purpose and Will and Needs**

Spiritual traditions describe transpersonal purpose as a characteristic of the 'awakened' or 'enlightened' state, in which the individual no longer has a will of their own, but is the expression of the will of the divine. In the Christian mystical tradition, phrases such as 'self-annihilation' and 'self-naughting' are used in a similar way. The mystic empties himself (or herself) in order to allow God to emerge and express Himself through them (Underhill, 1960). Similarly, in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a great deal of emphasis is placed on 'unattached action' - acting without being concerned about results, simply doing what is right and appropriate. While in Sufism, the 'awakened' state is referred as *Baqa*, and one of its characteristics is that the person has no will of their own, but lives in and through God, in a state of ecstasy. They no longer have a sense of planning their own life, or making things happen. Life unfolds naturally and spontaneously through them, by virtue of divine power (Spenser, 1963).

The unification of the human will with divine will is also an essential aspect of spiritual development as envisaged by the Jewish mystical tradition of the Kabbalah. The human will is 'raised' until it becomes one with *En Sof*, the divine principle (or God) which paradoxically both pervades the world but is at the same transcendent. According to the Kabbalistic text, *The Zohar*, the central aim of prayer and concentrative practice is 'to raise the will higher and higher as far as

*En Sof*. And not to let the will stray from all the levels and limbs, but to let the will ascend with them all to make them join to each other, so that all shall be one bond with *En Sof*. This is the practice of unification.’ (In Lancaster, 206, p.190). And when we align our personal will with God’s will, we become agents of that divine will. A powerful, transformational energy begins to flow through us, with which we can help to heal the world (Kaplan, 1990).

In the Daoist tradition, the individual who has realised their true nature as Dao follows the *wu-wei chih-Tao*, ‘the non-striving Way of Transcendence,’ in which the Dao flows through them. They live in a state of ‘actionless activity’ (*wu-wei*) (Spenser, 1963). The concept of purpose relates to the Daoist concept of the ‘Three Treasures.’ These are three forms of energy, beginning with *xing*, the essential energy of our being, usually associated with sexuality. The second is *qi*, or vital energy; the third is *shen*, or spirit. In Daoism, development - or cultivation - is conceived as an ‘inner alchemy’, through which *xing* is transmuted into the ‘higher’ and more suitable energies of *qi* and then *shen*. And one of the effects of the transmutation of *xing* into *qi* is the discovering of one’s authentic path, as determined by Dao. In other words, this is the point where the Dao begins to flow through us, and our lives become its manifestation. At this stage, there is a great increase in vitality, and in De Souza’s words, ‘One gains the sense that life is worth living since it has an authentic purpose - given by Dao through destiny and carried hidden in the *jing*’ (2011, p. 208). And when the next stage of alchemical process takes place - *qi* transmuting into *shen* - this sense of purpose becomes even purer and more powerful, revealing ‘one’s real inherent nature...empowering one to live according to this true identity in spite of external antagonist forces’ (Willmont, 2001, p. 147). At this point, we become a powerful force in the world, with an intuitive sense of our path to self-realisation, living an authentic and fulfilling life.

Within transpersonal Psychology itself, the closest concept to transpersonal purpose is Assagioli’s (1994) concept of the ‘transpersonal will.’ This is where individual will becomes allied with the person’s higher or transpersonal self. The person discovers their essential ‘I’ and their actions and activities flow from this higher self. At the highest level of the transpersonal will, the will of the individual becomes a manifestation of the ‘universal will’, the universal impulse to move towards increasing complexity and transcendence. And as with the concept of transpersonal purpose, or *wu wei*, here actions and activities are filled with a sense of ease and spontaneity rather than effort. As Assagioli puts it, ‘the willer is so identified...with the Universal Will, that his activities are accomplished with free spontaneity, a state in which he feels himself to be a willing channel into and through which powerful energies flow’ (1994, p.21).

The term ‘will’ can be seen as linked to purpose in the sense that will is the *active short-term* expression of purpose. Purpose represents a long term goal which a person is moving towards, or expressing, while will is the driving force which propels a person along that path. Purpose is the motivating force of will.

There is a similar close relationship between needs and purpose - or indeed, between will and needs. Needs often manifest themselves as purpose. A need may be the source of a purpose - that is, a need may provide the original impulse that gives rise to a purpose, so that a person’s purpose is to satisfy a particular need. This is clearly the case with needs such as survival, safety and security, belonging and self-esteem. In this respect, the hierarchy of needs fits well with the more fundamental levels of purpose.

However, with more rarified levels of purpose, the connection becomes weaker. For example, it is not clear how altruism and idealism are rooted in need. Is it a fundamental need to be altruistic, or is altruism the expression of an *impulse* rather than a need - an impulse that stems from a sense of empathy with other human beings? Is it a fundamental human need to be creative, or is creativity simply a phenomenon which occurs when one has a trans-egoic connection to higher and deeper levels of consciousness? The concept of need suggests a lack, but at this level, purpose is not driven by lack, but by impulse. It is simply a natural phenomenon which results from a particular state of being. So purpose may be generated by need, but the two are not necessarily related, particularly at the transpersonal levels.

## Our Preliminary Research

In order to test the model outlined above, a questionnaire was developed, containing three items relating to each of the six different types of purpose, and also three items relating to 'no purpose.' (See Appendix 1). Questions relating to self-reported happiness were also included, together with a short "qualitative" section where participants were asked to describe the nature of their sense of purpose. (This was to add extra validity, enabling us to check this description against responses to the questionnaire.) With the help of my colleague at Leeds Beckett University, Dr. Jim Morgan, we piloted the questionnaire with two groups (n=83, n=72). Items were adjusted or eliminated to produce an internally consistent final questionnaire with a satisfactory Cronbach's Alpha value for each group of questions relating to each type of purpose. This questionnaire was completed by a further sample (n=88). Responses were then analysed using SSPS.

Responses showed that individuals can be mainly oriented around one or more types of purpose, and that the different varieties of purpose are related to each other. For example, individuals who scored highly for an altruistic/idealistic sense of purpose also tended to score highly for a self-expansive purpose (.512). There was a similar relationship between 'no purpose' and 'survival purpose' (.540). Conversely, individuals who were oriented around a self-accumulative purpose scored low for transpersonal purpose (-.280) but higher for self-expansive purpose (.252).

The questionnaire also tested for self-reported happiness, using Fordyce's 'Happiness Measures' (1988), finding that different varieties of purpose correlated with different levels of self-reported happiness. There were strong negative correlations between self-reported happiness and both 'no purpose' (-.586) and 'survival purpose' (-.653). A self-expansive purpose correlated positively with self-reported happiness (.265), as did transpersonal purpose (.439). There was no correlation shown between 'religious purpose' and self-reported happiness, or between personal-accumulative purpose and self-reported happiness. Scores of personal-accumulative purpose correlated negatively with increasing age (-.505).

This research is in its preliminary stages – at the time of writing, the questionnaire is being tested with a much larger sample. However, the research does seem to suggest that purpose can be validly 'broken down' into different types which have different effects, and different correlations with factors such as well-being and age.

## Purpose in the Present

With some types of purpose, particular the personal-accumulative, there is the possibility of becoming too future-focused, and losing our orientation in the present. The individual might become so focused on their goals, and so determined to reach them, that the present loses significance to them, becoming just a means of reaching the future. They might spend so much time looking forward that they forget to look *around*. But this certainly does not have to be the case. So long as a person is not too rigidly focused on their destination, they can still live in the present at the same as moving with the flow of their purpose, in the same way that a person on a train journey can enjoy the experience of the journey. A sense of direction and purpose can actually enhance the journey, by giving one a greater sense of connection and appreciation. And at the transpersonal level, there is little focus on the future at all, just a surrender to the creative or spiritual force which is flowing through. There is little sense of a destination, just an awareness of an invigorating journey.

Humanistic psychologists such as Maslow, Carl Rogers and Viktor Frankl believed that human beings are naturally dynamic. They saw growth as an intrinsic part of human nature. In fact, this is true of life on earth in general, which has always been dynamic, moving towards increasing variety, as expressed through the process of evolution. So when the individual feels a sense of purpose - of any type - they effectively align themselves with this dynamic impulse, which is possibly why following a sense of purpose is so beneficial, and such an important aspect of well-

being. At the level of transpersonal purpose, this alignment is especially strong, and the dynamic impulse flows through us especially powerfully and directly. At this point, the individual no longer *has* a sense of purpose, but *is* a purpose. They no longer *feel* a sense of purpose, but *are* that purpose.

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### **Appendix 1: Varieties of Purpose Questionnaire, Version 1 (Taylor and Morgan, 2015)**

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?

Below is a list of statements. Give your responses to them based on the following options:

- |                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| strongly agree (definitely true) -    | SA |
| agree (pretty much true) -            | A  |
| don't know (neutral) -                | N  |
| disagree (not really true) -          | D  |
| strongly disagree (not at all true) - | SD |

3. I feel that I have no particular purpose in life.
4. I'm unsure of where I am going in my life.
5. When I look into the future, I don't have a clear picture about where I will be in a few years' time.
6. The main purpose of my life is simply to survive from day to day
7. It can be a struggle just to survive, so my main aim is to get through each day at a time.
8. My main purpose in life is to ensure basic things like food, shelter and security are always available for me and my family (if you have one).
9. My main purpose is to follow the guidelines and traditions of my religion.
10. I live my life through the framework of my religion.
11. My religious beliefs give me a strong sense of what I should be doing in my life, and where I am heading.
12. My main aim is to become more successful in my life, and achieve as much as I can.
13. One day I hope to be admired or to become famous as a result of my career and my achievements.
14. As time goes by, it's important for me to feel that I am achieving and accumulating more, and moving closer to success.
15. My main aim in life is to help - e.g. to make a contribution to society or the world.
16. I feel a strong impulse to alleviate other people's suffering.
17. I need to feel that my job and my life are useful and helpful to the wider world.
18. My main purpose is to develop in my life.
19. My main aim is to keep growing and to fulfil my potential.
20. For me, life is about bettering and expanding myself by gaining new knowledge and experience.
21. I feel as if something is unfolding through me, and my task is to allow it to flow through.
22. I often feel that life is taking me to where I'm supposed to be, even if I'm not exactly sure where I'm going.
23. I don't so much have a purpose, but I feel that I'm part of something bigger than myself.

24. In general, how happy or unhappy do you usually feel? Click on the drop-down list below and select the ONE statement that best describes your average happiness.

- Extremely unhappy (utterly depressed, completely down)
- Very unhappy (depressed, spirits very low)
- Pretty unhappy (somewhat “blue”, spirits down)
- Mildly unhappy (just a bit low)
- Slightly unhappy (just a bit below neutral)
- Neutral (not particularly happy or unhappy)
- Slightly happy (just a bit above neutral)
- Mildly happy (feeling fairly good and somewhat cheerful)
- Pretty happy (spirits high, feeling good)
- Very happy (feeling really good, elated!)
- Extremely happy (feeling ecstatic, joyous, fantastic!)

25. Consider your emotions. What percentage of the time do you feel happy?

26. What percentage of the time do you feel unhappy?

27. What percentage of the time do you feel neutral (neither unhappy or happy)?

(note: your answers to this and the last two question should add up to 100)

28. In a few sentences, please describe what you see as the main goals and purposes of your life.