

Syllabus, ITP 273, Basic Parapsychology - Professor Tart

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Spring 2001, Tuesday afternoons, 4:15-6:15pm

This is an example of the syllabus I use when teaching my basic Parapsychology course at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. It is posted here as an example of the kind of teaching carried out at the Institute and to illustrate some of the components of a scientific overview of the area of parapsychology.

It is, of course, subject to change in the future.

Charles T. Tart

Every culture and every person within a culture is a “philosopher,” a “scientist,” a “theorist,” in that she has a worldview, a set of (somewhat integrated) beliefs as to what the world is like. The world includes the physical world, their own selves, other people, and “otherworldly” aspects of reality. Your personal and cultural worldview automatically and habitually affects/constructs your thinking (and perception) in important ways. Some actions or ideas are not even seriously thought about, e.g., as they are “obviously” impossible. And if “impossible” events happen, considerable conflict may be experienced.

Transpersonal psychology was created partially as a reaction to the dominant worldview of our times, *scientific materialism*. This view, that affects all of us in many ways *even when we think we don't believe it* or think we are in rebellion to it, sees human consciousness as *nothing but* the resultant of electrical and chemical interactions within the brain and nervous system. So consciousness is not only exclusively controlled by the brain and physical environment, it perishes absolutely when the brain dies. *From the dominant view of scientific materialism, most of the ideas and experiences of concern to transpersonal psychologists are pre-scientific nonsense*, primitive beliefs, based

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This statement is not intended to restrict the sharing of class notes among students who are currently enrolled in ITP #273 at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology.

on fear of injury and death, outmoded and nonsensical beliefs about “souls” and “spirits” and “energy” and similar things that any “rational” person dismisses.

One of the reasons for creating transpersonal psychology was the psychological observation that a completely materialistic worldview is not very satisfying to the human “spirit:” indeed many seem to sicken when they are caught within the materialistic world view. But in being transpersonal psychologists, are we desperately hanging on to superstition and nonsense just to make ourselves feel better? Good feelings first, to hell with truth? A modern, (transpersonal) “opiate of the masses,” as Marx characterized religion? Rejecting the truths of modern science? These are important questions each of us must personally answer, as well as deal with as transpersonally oriented professionals.

The central contentions of this course will be that, [a] using the best kind of rigorous science (*scientific* parapsychology, which **must** be distinguished from the vast mass of sloppy beliefs popularly put under the “parapsychology” and “New Age” labels), a total reduction of all human functioning to nothing but material brain function is *factually wrong*; that [b] no genuinely scientific theory that claims to be comprehensive can ignore facts it can’t account for; and [c] high quality scientific data gives support to a scientific view of consciousness that points in the direction of “spiritual” or transpersonal realities. **But**, and this is a very important “but,” simply believing either in a materialistic or transpersonal worldview because of habit or feelings is common - and unscientific and a disservice to the world and our profession. Much of what is labeled by such terms as “psychic,” or “spiritual” is indeed factually nonsensical and wrong, but there are vital realities mixed in. Learning how to discriminate and how to wisely use what we know is essential. No one should be a fuzzy philosopher who doesn’t think clearly and rigorously, a sloppy scientist who doesn’t actually test her beliefs, or a slipshod theorist about reality who doesn’t recognize and deal with difficulties and contradictions.

Two primary texts will be used as well as possible occasional assigned readings, viz. Broughton’s *Parapsychology: The Controversial Science* and Radin’s *The Conscious Universe: The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena*. Both authors are leading parapsychologists. The course will consist of various micro-lectures by the instructor, extensive reading in the two textbooks, and class discussions based on the readings and students’ knowledge and experience. Because of the large amount of material we need to survey to get an adequate conceptual and scientific overview, there will be little, if any, experiential work in class. The reading and paper assignments are given below. Further, multiple readings of student papers in a collegial way will increase the intensity of the learning experience.

Paper Assignments: A 2-page, double-spaced, *typed* paper dealing with the reading materials for the day and/or the previous class discussion is due at each class, beginning with the second class. **Four copies** of each paper should be brought to class, one for the instructor and three others to be distributed to fellow students. Thus three of your fellow students will write comments on your papers each week and you will write comments on three of your fellow students’ papers. They will return them to you at the next class. This brings a broader range of knowledge to bear on the ideas expressed in each paper, as well as providing training for a future role as an instructor.

Attendance: Our class meetings are carefully sequenced for optimal learning, and the experiences and discussions in class are an important part of that learning and integration process, so please attend all classes. Life does interfere at times, though, so if you should miss a class, please study and reflect on the assigned readings and keep up with the regular writing assignments. You can miss one class each quarter with no problem as long as your regular writing assignments are completed in a reasonably timely way, but if you miss more than one class, you should write an extra paper in addition to the one due for that class, commenting on the readings assigned for that class, for each class you miss. Please indicate at the top of this paper that it's a makeup for (which one?) a particular class you missed. If more than two classes are missed and not satisfactorily made up, ITP policy is that you cannot receive credit for the class.

Makeup Classes: Note that the instructor may occasionally miss a class to present papers at professional conferences. When this happens, a makeup class will be given from 7:15 to 9:15 on a Tuesday evening. Such makeup classes, if any, are noted in the syllabus.

Professor Tart's office hours will be Tuesdays, about 2:00 to 4:00 pm (you can sign up to reserve a half hour slot at the signup sheet on my office door) and by appointment. Phone consultation is usually available on Wednesdays during the day at 510 526-2591, between roughly 9-11:30 in the mornings, 1:30-4:00 in the afternoon. Please try to call just during these hours so his writing schedule won't be interrupted. Faxes can be sent to him at 630 604-3279.

Abbreviations: Radin=*Conscious Universe, The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena*; and CS=Broughton, *Parapsychology: The Controversial Science*

Wk	Date	Turn In	Topic	Chapters to Read
1	Mar 27		Introduction to parapsychology as a science; <i>Western Creed</i> exercise	
2	Apr 3		(Instructor at Esalen Conference on Survival after Death Research) Video: Nova special documentary on Parapsychology	
3	Apr 10 #1	1st paper	History, psychical research, parapsychology	<i>CS</i> -Intro; What is psychic experience?; Mapping territory; Origins of the science <i>Radin</i> -What is psi?; Experience; Replication
	Apr 10 #2	2nd paper	Extrasensory Perception (ESP)	<i>CS</i> -Contemporary ESP Research

			7:15-9:15 MAKEUP CLASS	<i>Radin</i> -Meta-analysis; Telepathy; Perception at a distance
4	Apr 17	3rd paper	Precognition	<i>Radin</i> -Perception through time
5	Apr 24	4th paper	Psychokinesis (PK)	<i>CS</i> -Contemporary PK Research <i>Radin</i> -Mind-matter interaction
	May 1		SPRING BREAK THIS WEEK	
Wk	Date	Turn In	Topic	Chapters to Read
6	May 8	5th paper	Healing	<i>Radin</i> -Mental interactions with living organisms
7	May 15	6th paper	Ghosts, hauntings, poltergeists	<i>CS</i> -Real ghost busting
8	May 22	7th paper	Survival of death?	<i>CS</i> -Life after death? <i>Radin</i> -Field consciousness; Seeing psi; Metaphysics
9	May 29	8th paper	Applied psi	<i>CS</i> -Are we ready for applied psi? <i>Radin</i> -Psi in the casino; Applications
10	Jun 5	9th paper	Tying up loose ends	<i>CS</i> -Adding it all up; Why controversy continue? <i>Radin</i> -Theory; Implications

Clarifications: What my Parapsychology Course Is and Isn't

Charles T. Tart

In a school with a recognition that learning and growth involves emotional, bodily and spiritual, as well as intellectual, creative and community processes, there is sometimes confusion over what is expected and appropriate in a particular course. This note is to clarify this matter for my course on Basic Parapsychology, in the hope of maximizing learning and minimizing misunderstandings and inappropriate expectations.

Basic Parapsychology is a course that is almost exclusively intellectual in terms of readings and classroom lecture and discussion, although most students bring their own personal previous experiences of psi to bear on their understanding of the material.

Students are not required to experience any parapsychological phenomena as part of the course work, and any suggestions about what might be interesting in this regard should be evaluated by you in terms of your personal needs, understanding, and boundaries.

The course work contains some exciting ideas for personal growth, but the course is not intended to be or represented as a form of therapy, spiritual growth, or emotional process work, although I certainly hope that the intellectual content of the course may sometimes contribute to your personal growth. I state these limitations here because, among other things, I am a scientist and educator, not a psychotherapist, psychic, or spiritual teacher.

I do not intend to denigrate nor disregard individual experiential, emotional or spiritual knowledge, resources, growth challenges or problems. I respect and honor your personal process! Indeed when your individual knowledge of this sort is relevant to expanding or clarifying the conceptual or experiential material we discuss, it is welcome and enriching, both in class discussions and papers.

I also ask you to consider and honor the following points, adapted from standards of personal responsibility used by Professor Jill Mellick in her classes at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. While they are phrased for courses deliberately involving fairly powerful emotional and growth work, they are relevant in the context of all ITP courses.

♠ ***Be aware of the context in which you are experiencing your own growth, both personal and intellectual.*** This is a class; while I hope it will be beneficial to you personally as well as academically, the class is not individual or group therapy.

♠ ***Please set clear protective boundaries for yourself.*** Some of the topics or exercises in this class may evoke personal issues with which you need/want to deal. You are welcome to clarify these issues in your papers or class discussion if they are relevant to the class, and you might reach new understandings through doing so. *But remember that the class is not an appropriate context in which to actually work through your personal issues.* Such issues are best worked through with a qualified psychotherapist or spiritual teacher.

♠ ***Please respect your own material and the limitations of your peers.*** In class discussions and experiential exercises you are often including your personal history, implicitly if not explicitly. In the case of conflictual, emotional, unresolved material, respect yourself by sharing only material which is reasonably well resolved or which you are comfortable *not* having resolved. A statement that an area under discussion is very difficult for you may be a useful contribution, but don't bring it up if it's too difficult for you to handle in the intellectual context of the class.

♠ ***Please respect your own privacy and the overall purpose of the class.*** Share only material you are willing to have become part of current and later class discussions. Note too that in spite of the following point, privacy of your discussion contributions cannot be guaranteed.

♠ ***Please respect your peers' privacy.*** If a classmate shares important personal material, please do not talk about it to anyone outside the class unless (a) it is intellectually or compassionately useful to do so AND (b) you can disguise the identity of the person sufficiently so that they cannot be recognized. If in doubt about your ability to adequately disguise the identity of the person from others who may know them, don't mention the material. To put it another way, avoid gossip or story telling that may hurt someone else. Of course if you think a classmate is at serious risk and is not receiving professional help outside the classroom (such as being in therapy), do notify appropriate administrative authorities who may be able to help.

♠ ***Please recognize and respect your own and others' capacities.*** If a certain part of the discussion or an experiential exercise looks as if it will be too difficult for you emotionally, please inform me (no explanation is needed) that you don't want to take part in that part of the discussion or participate in that exercise. If much of the class causes this kind of problem, of course, we should discuss whether you should be in the course.

This note is meant to create an atmosphere conducive to learning, not the final word on human life, so please take it in that spirit. Class discussion of these considerations is appropriate.

ADD APA STYLE SHEET