

The Concise Corsini  
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ical health, as the mere absence of symptoms, as evidenced by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

Reflecting a dissatisfaction with pathology-based clinical and mental health classifications, some researchers are developing and empirically investigating models of positive health, including non-Western models. These investigations suggest that elimination of pathology may give us the concept of the “average” or “normal” rather than a concept of true positive or “optimal” psychological health.

### Five Views of Human Nature and Psychological Health

This section presents five views of human nature and their respective views of psychological health—the goal of therapy (Table 1).

#### *Biomedical Approach*

*View of Human Nature.* The biomedical paradigm, which guides modern medicine and psychiatry, views human nature as determined in large part by our biological/physiological processes. An example is the biomedical approach to depression. Assessment leads to a precise diagnosis for which an organic cause is identified (e.g., lack of serotonin), then a treatment specific to the pathology is prescribed (e.g., SSRI—serotonin specific reuptake inhibitor).

*Goal of Therapy.* The goal of therapy is to alleviate undesired symptoms via medication, restore biochemical homeostatis, and thereby achieve “psychological health.”

#### *Psychodynamic Approach*

*View of Human Nature.* Psychodynamic psychology views behavior as a product of competing instincts, needs, and impulses. Although there are many schools, all subscribe to the same basic premise, namely that man is, in Freud’s terms, “lived by unknown and controlled forces” which originate in the amoral id. Since these mental forces are unconscious, a person is not fully aware of how they are manifested, and the result of this conflict is neurosis, or “mental illness.”

*Goal of Therapy.* From a psychodynamic view of human nature, psychological health is achieved by uncovering the repressed facts of the self—“to make the unconscious conscious”—and bringing these repressed desires, fears, and depressions into consciousness: “Where id was, ego shall be.”

#### *Behavioral/Cognitive Approach*

*View of Human Nature.* The cognitive-behavioral approach views human nature as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate. The individual is motivated by environmental stimuli and social interactions (or cognitive representations of the two). Therefore, psychological maladjustment is likely to result

## PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

All psychotherapeutic systems have a view of human nature, a concept of disease etiology, and a vision of psychological health. The intention of therapy is to work toward the vision of psychological health as defined by each particular orientation. The vision of psychological health as defined by each approach is predicated upon and consistent with its view of human nature. These views can be understood as paradigms, or “world hypotheses” that professionals operate from in pursuing their work. While such paradigms are necessary to make sense out of our lives and work, they can also be limiting. For example, psychology has traditionally been pathology based, viewing psycholog-

Table 1. Comparison and Contrast of Five Schools of Psychotherapy

Subject	Biomedical	Psychodynamic	Cognitive-Behavioral	Humanistic-Existential	Transpersonal
View of human nature	Primarily biological/physiological processes.	Ruled by unconscious, amoral id.	Blank slate. Determined by environmental stimuli, or cognitive representations of stimuli.	Innately self-actualizing (H). Existence precedes essence (E).	Interconnected. Capable of going beyond ego identity.
Goal of Psychotherapy	Normalize chemical imbalances.	To make the unconscious conscious, "where id was, ego shall be."	Competently respond to environment. Reinterpret illogical cognitions.	Foster self-actualization (H). "Choices" create authentic self (E).	Go beyond identification with limited ego. See interconnection with others and world.

from maladaptive learning, reinforcement patterns, and/or cognitive distortions.

*Goal of Therapy.* A cognitive-behavioral approach teaches clients to identify and reinterpret the illogical notions that underline their distressing symptoms. Psychological health is achieved when maladaptive patterns (cognitive and behavioral) are recognized and changed, consequently alleviating undesired symptoms.

### **Humanistic/Existential Approach**

*View of Human Nature.* The humanistic/existential approach views the individual as neither controlled by a "genetic" amoral id nor by external stimuli. The humanistic approach instead views the individual as constantly changing or "becoming," with an innate self-actualizing nature. The existential approach argues there is no innate self-actualizing nature—existence precedes essence—and therefore a person must "create his/her authentic self." The unhealthy person, from a humanistic/existential perspective, is one who restricts the task of openly discovering and making sense of his or her existence, turns away from the responsibility of creating choices, and fails to relate to others and the world authentically in the present moment.

*Goal of Therapy.* The goal of humanistic/existential therapy is to foster self-actualization, allowing the client to assume full responsibility for developing his/her identity. Ultimately, this entails authentically encountering the human environment, facing the inevitability of isolation and mortality, and realizing that if I cannot choose my fate, I can nevertheless choose my attitude toward it.

### **Transpersonal Approach**

*View of Human Nature.* The transpersonal approach views human nature as having an interconnected "essence" and an innate motivation toward values that transcend the self.

*Goal of Therapy.* Within the transpersonal tradition, the goal of therapy is to extend the identity or sense of self beyond the "narrow self" so that individuals realize their in-

terconnection with others and the world. The qualities of the healthy person include realizing the limits of ego identity, developing compassion, opening oneself up to peak experiences, being aware of unitive consciousness, and embracing ultimate values.

### **Toward a More Systemic Approach to Psychological Health**

Each of the above traditions has a view of human nature and an understanding of psychological health based on its own paradigmatic view. A more complete view of psychological health may need to integrate the unique perspective offered by each tradition in order to maximize health on the physical, mental, social, and spiritual levels.

Such a multilevel systemic view of psychological health is complementary, rather than exclusive, addressing issues and pathologies at various developmental levels. For example, a comprehensive treatment plan for depression, depending upon the client, may include addressing biochemical imbalances (biomedical), learning coping strategies to handle environmental stressors and behavioral repertoire deficits (behavioral), interpreting cognitive distortions (cognitive), overcoming lack of trust in oneself (humanistic), examining unconscious psychodynamic and intrapsychic conflicts (psychodynamic), and exploring meaning and ultimate spiritual questions (existential/transpersonal).

Thus, a more comprehensive view of psychological health may best be achieved by honoring the strengths of each tradition, from the biomedical through the transpersonal. It would include the traditional measures such as positive affect, life satisfaction, positive sense of control, self-determination, and self-acceptance. It would also extend the criteria to include sensitivity to the body and its needs (e.g., physical well-being), increased depths of relationship (interpersonal well-being), purpose in life, personal growth, self-actuality, and realizing the limits of ego identity (e.g., existential, spiritual well-being). Clearly, more research is needed to help evolve a systemic, multi-level, and integrative definition of psychological health.

Such knowledge has the potential to considerably augment both clinical practice and even society as a whole.

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**See also: Cognitive Therapy; Control Therapy**