

Problems of Development & Learning

Psychology & Social Issues

5.1 Introduction of Humanistic Psychology and Social Issues

Although social transformation may not have been the primary focus in the past, a large percentage of contemporary humanistic psychologists currently investigate pressing social, cultural, and gender issues. Even the earliest writers who were associated with and inspired psychological humanism explored topics as diverse as the political nature of "normal" and everyday experience (RD Laing), the disintegration of the capacity to love in modern consumerist society (Erich Fromm), the growing technological dominance over human life (Medard Boss), and the question of evil (Rollo May-Carl Rogers debate). In addition, Maureen O'Hara, who worked with both Carl Rogers and Paolo Freire, has pointed to a convergence between the two thinkers given their distinct but mutually related focus on developing critical consciousness of situations which oppress and dehumanize.

Criticism - Critics of the field point out that it tends to ignore social change research. Isaac Prilleltensky, a self-described radical who champions community and feminist psychology, has argued for years that humanistic psychology inadvertently contributes to systemic injustice. Further, it has been argued that the early incarnations of humanistic psychology lacked a cumulative empirical base, and the architects of the movement endorsed an "unembarrassed denial of human reciprocity and community." However, according to contemporary humanistic thinkers, humanistic psychology need not be understood to promote such ideas as narcissism, egotism, or selfishness.

The association of humanistic discourse with narcissistic and overly optimistic worldviews is a misreading of humanistic theory. In their response to Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000), Bohart and Greening (2001) note that along with pieces on self-actualization and individual fulfillment, humanistic psychologists have also published papers on a wide range of social issues and topics, such as the promotion of international peace and understanding, awareness of the holocaust, the reduction of violence, and the promotion of social welfare and justice for all.

Criticisms that humanistic psychology lacks an “empirical base” have tended to rely on allegedly "restricted views" of what constitutes “empirical,” an uncritical adoption of natural science methods (as opposed to human science methods), and an outright neglect of Rogers’ own empirical work. To the contrary, humanistic psychology has a long history of empirical research, including but not limited to the work of Maslow, Amedeo Giorgi and David Elkins. In fact, humanistic psychology research traces its origins all the way back to American psychology pioneer William James’ masterpiece, “Varieties of Religious Experience”.

5.2 Criticisms And Limitations Of Humanistic Psychology

One of the things we are often accused of is being too self-indulgent and narcissistic. One critic said that the AHP really stood for the Association for Hedonistic Pursuits (hedonism is the philosophy of personal pleasure). It is an accusation which I believe deserves an answer. It really can give offence to serious people when they see courses advertised at 150 a time on “Turning Inward”, or “Loving your Body”, or “Integrative Holistic Macro-synthesis”. The first step is obviously to get clear what we are talking about. There seem to be six things that are worth distinguishing: self-esteem; egotism; selfishness (exclusive); selfishness (inclusive); and self-actualization:

- 1) **SELF-ESTEEM** - This is a general feeling of being convinced of one’s own worth. It is also often called self-love, self-respect or having a good self-image or self-concept. This seems to me a healthy thing, and most people in the helping professions would be only too pleased if their clients had more of it. What is often called love is a kind of addiction, or what is nowadays called co-dependency, and this is quite unhealthy. But if people can give more love to themselves, they are better able to give it to others and to accept it from others in a genuine way.
- 2) **EGOTISM** - This is a general feeling of being convinced of one’s own pre-eminence. It has a lot to do with pride, with an inflated self-image, with a kind of self- importance. Ego-boosting leads to this. Egotism always sees things in terms of better and worse, so it is always having to prove something. This is not something which anyone I know is trying to foster.
- 3) **SELFISHNESS (*Exclusive*)** This is looking after one’s self-interest with blinkers on. This kind of selfishness can only see what is straight in front of it. It is a kind of tunnel vision. It is as if the rest of the world somehow did

not exist. It is impulsive – if I want something, I have to have it now. This is not something which anyone I know wishes to encourage.

- a. **SELFISHNESS (*Inclusive*)** This is looking after one's own self-interest without blinkers, letting in everything from inside and outside. It means going after what I really want, but with complete openness to experience. At my best, I am in touch with all my relevant feelings and all my relevant values and all the relevant information, and I can then act spontaneously in whatever situation I find myself. This kind of spontaneity is the most rational action of which I am capable. The world would be a better place if there were more of this open and all-embracing selfishness around, and the word "empowerment" is often used today to indicate that we are aiming at this particular goal.
- 4) **SELF-IMPROVEMENT** - This is about the attainment of long-range goals. It has to do with good self-management. This is a tricky area, because it can lead to a kind of self-separation, where one part of me is trying to improve another part of me – leading possibly to a kind of self-oppression. But if this can be avoided, self-improvement obviously makes sense. One thing needs to be watched: if someone improves as a slave-driver, that would be a bad thing in my book.
- 5) **SELF-ACTUALIZATION** - This is being all I have it in me to be – being that self which I truly am. As we have seen in earlier sections of this booklet, this is the main aim of humanistic psychology as a whole. We get hints of what this is like in peak experiences, which have been well described by Maslow and others. Obviously there are dangers here: as Maslow himself pointed out, we can start to go after peak experiences in a programmed way which is basically deficiency-oriented, and also basically self-defeating.

To sum up, then, the things we are positively interested in as proponents of humanistic psychology are not self-indulgent or narcissistic, but socially defensible and politically desirable.

5.3 Humanistic Heresies

Let us turn our attention now to another area – the question of the way in which humanistic psychology can go wrong when one of its elements is blown up and exaggerated out of proportion. I have called these the humanistic heresies, and I think there are at least nine of them. Here they are:

- a) **Instrumentalism** - This is where people use the methods developed within humanistic psychology to oppress others in new and more effective ways. Techniques can be useful when a person wants to do something, but genuinely doesn't know how to do it. Instrumentalism loves technique for the power it gives to the practitioner. Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments and War under Hitler, ran his ministry in accordance with the best principles of humanistic management. Many organizations today which are less than admirable teach social skills in ways taken from humanistic psychology.

This can also happen in education: is telling children to reveal their dreams any better than telling them to copy the sums off the blackboard? The content is different, but the form is the same – the teacher is the provider and the student is the consumer. The point is that humanistic psychology is always about the realization of potential, not about its guidance into some groove laid down by someone else.

We stand for real freedom and real communication, and systems which allow and encourage this. Feelings are important to recognize and do justice to, and humanistic psychology is noted for its attention to feelings. But sometimes this can get exaggerated, so that people are expected to express feelings all the time, or even to express certain approved feelings all the time. This is a distortion and is quite undesirable. Feelings are in reality no more important or central than sensing, thinking, intuiting, imagining, desiring, willing and so forth. All these things can be connected to the centre or disconnected from it. For good communication and real intimacy between people, not only feelings need to be cultivated, but also honesty, freed energy, clear demands and other human qualities.

We're trying all the time to encourage the real person to come out, and this means the whole person. We are encouraging the person to put her or his whole self behind life and action. One-sidedly feeling people would be monsters, just as much as one-sidedly thinking (sensing, intuiting, imagining, desiring) people would be. What we are aiming at is integration, not feelings.

- b) **Autonomy-ism** - One of the key things about humanistic psychology is the way in which it emphasizes taking responsibility for oneself, and on creating one's own world. As a therapeutic stance, and taken in a first-person way, this can be extremely valuable. It is the classic empowering move for people who have defined themselves as victims hitherto. But taken in a third-person way this becomes oppressive and punitive, a denial of solidarity and fellow

feeling. The point is that “You alone can do it, but you don’t have to do it alone”. Both sides of the statement are true, and they must not be separated from each other. Autonomy is important, but love and mutual support and nourishment are important too. The sequence goes: dependence, counterdependence, independence, interdependence; it is important not to stop at independence. Autonomy as a total ideal is for hermits.

- c) **Peace-and-love-ism** - This is the way in which group leaders and others aim at warmth, trust and openness in a way which says that if you are not being warm, trusting and open you are not getting it right. This is just as harmful as any other attempt to tell people what to think and what to feel. We are not in the peace and love game, we are in the reality game. If we attend closely to reality and do justice to what is present, what is there, my experience is that peace and love do ultimately ensue, but if they do, they too are real.

However, there needs to be a note of caution the other way too. I have seen people dismiss certain workshops on love as “peace-and-love-ism” when in fact what the leader was doing was to use “total love” exercises to explore the scope and limits of love. The test is simple: what happens when hate, lust, fear or anger comes out instead of love? If the leader welcomes them and works with them and helps the person work through such feelings, that is fine: but if they are ignored or shunted aside, or wished away, then we are faced with peace-and-love-ism.

- d) **Peakism** - Here people get hold of the bit about peak experiences being important, and turn it into something to strive for. Instead of the emphasis being on opening oneself up so that peak experiences have a chance to get in, all the emphasis goes on pushing oneself to greater and greater heights. The recent craze for fire-walking is a good example of this. But a deficiency-oriented search for private peaks can become very narrow and nasty.
- e) **Spiritual-wism** - An inelegant word to describe an all-too-elegant reality. This is where one gets so very spiritual that one loses touch with the ground altogether. It has been said that New Age music is like the peak of a pyramid suspended in mid-air, and this expresses well the ungrounded nature of this diversion. When people get into this state they often seem to confuse smiling with insight. There is a lot of talk about losing the ego, but I don’t think we ever really lose our ego. What we lose are false images of the ego, false

boundaries to the ego. But the ego does not really die, it just has to change. I have never met anyone who seemed to me to have lost his ego, have you?

- f) **Expertism** - Humanistic psychology is essentially anti-mystification. It is noticeable how the most central figures in humanistic psychology (Maslow, Rogers, May, Mahrer, Bugental) are also those who use jargon least. So to use vast numbers of technical terms and highly specialized vocabularies may make one feel more like an expert and one who knows, but they are not really much to do with humanistic psychology.

- g) **Sexism** - Sexism is the oppression of women and all that is feminine. It usually involves reducing women to the rigid roles which represent the only proper ways of being female in a patriarchal society – almost always service roles of one kind or another, but also idealized moralistic roles. Humanistic psychology is dedicated to questioning all rigid roles whatsoever, because they represent one of the main ways in which potential is limited, by self or others. But it is all too easy for patriarchal patterns to creep back into the practice of humanistic psychology, because they are so all-pervasive.

So most groups have male leaders, most of the most famous and highest-paid leaders are male, and most of the participants are female. In many groups, the heterosexual couple relationship is emphasized and underwritten. In some groups, the women are treated differently from the men. Child care is very often not taken care of as an issue in weekend groups. Women may find it exhausting to keep on fighting these patterns all the time, and there is no excuse for the men in humanistic psychology to avoid awareness of these issues.

Similarly with racism, it is important to be aware how easy it is for racism to creep in. There are very few black faces in humanistic groups or gatherings, even though it is one of the aims of humanistic psychology to work for the recognition of difference and the welcoming of diversity.

- h) **Eclectic Mish-mash-ism** - One of the strengths of our general approach is its adventurousness – the way in which we are prepared to try things out and see whether they work or not. But pushed to a one-sided extreme, this becomes a nervous search for novelty and fads. If we put disparate things together and try to make them fit without really integrating them properly, the work of forging new theories and new unities of theory and practice is

avoided and side-tracked. This is not what humanistic psychology is about. If we want to steer clear of these heresies, diversions and aberrations we have to keep open and keep on learning. We have to use our vulnerability to let in reality, and sometimes the hard lessons which society and history teach us. We cannot learn much when all our defenses are up. It is the horror, and the shame, of the world we live in that so often we seem driven to defend ourselves, forced to raise our barriers. It takes real inner strength, and staunch allies, to keep on going for a better world. Humanistic psychology stands for this unafraid look at the personal, the social and the spiritual.

5.4 The Association For Humanistic Psychology In Britain: AHP(B)

Initially formed over the years 1961-64 in the United States, the Association for Humanistic Psychology has grown into a network of affiliated centres and associations throughout the world. The AHP in Britain began in 1969 and operates with a central committee in London and regional groups in some areas. It is a registered charity, No. 290548.

The aims of the AHP include publishing and spreading the knowledge developed in humanistic psychology, encouraging basic theory and research, supporting the work of its practitioner members, and acting as a contact point for people involved in humanistic psychology. Activities of the AHP have included lectures, workshops, an alternative disco, an annual celebratory gathering and occasional special events, all of which are open to non-members but can be attended by members at concessionary rates. Members can receive the Journal "Self & Society" at a reduced rate.

An Annual General Meeting is held early in the year at which the accounts are presented, reports are received, the policies of the Association are reviewed and a new Committee is formed. The Chairperson, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and Honorary Secretary are elected, and others who join the Committee may take on responsibility for events and certain other functions. Additional members may be co-opted.

Currently there is some interest in the formation of networks within the Association for those involved in specific areas such as health, psychotherapy, education, management, social work, the arts, etc. There have been contacts with AHP branches in other countries, and in 1991 some of us went to Russia to confer with the AHP which has been set up there.

Members have said that they value receiving (and being included in) lists of therapy centres, training courses, events, books, etc., as they are published; being kept up to date with new techniques, new ideas and new approaches on a world-wide basis; hearing of other people's personal achievements and successes in applying humanistic psychology in their fields, and getting encouragement in their own struggles and difficulties, being in touch with other members locally and feeling part of a global movement for personal and social change.

Membership of AHP is open to anyone involved or interested in humanistic psychology. It is not restricted to any particular profession or group of professions. In recent years there has been an opening up of the theory and practice of humanistic psychology. Some people have held to the Maslow/Rogers view that human beings are naturally developing up a kind of escalator, and only have to give in to the process to become self-actualized or fully functioning.

Others have tended more towards the May/Mahrer view that existential choice is all there is, and there is no particular progress inherent in the nature of things: in fact, growing up as we do in a culture much of which is quite negative, we are just as likely to move downwards or sideways as onward and ever upward. Others again have moved more towards the Anderson/O'Hara view that reality is constructed by our efforts, rather than being an objective structure out there somewhere: on this understanding, again there is no goal to which we are all tending, but only the goals which we make for ourselves.

Others have been influenced by the view of Ken Wilber that the Maslow levels need to be added to and explored still further, into the realms of spirituality. Still others have been seduced away from humanistic psychology by the New Age idea that we are responsible for whatever happens to us, which in the field of medicine becomes a kind of "wellness macho" and a kind of omnipotence.

5.5 The UK Association Of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners:(UKAHPP)

Since 1980 there has existed a professional group associated with the Association for Humanistic Psychology in Britain. The object is to raise and maintain high standards in all the areas of humanistic practice – personal growth, counseling, psychotherapy, education, management training, organization development, research and so on. Individuals are accredited in a specific area of practice for five years only, after which they come before a Review Board for re-assessment.

This is the place to come if you or your organization want a practitioner or consultant yourself for any reason. Members of this group have to satisfy strict

criteria of training and experience, and since education is seen as a life-long process, they are required to continue their own professional and personal development while they are members. They must subscribe to a code of ethical conduct and professional practice, which means that any dissatisfied client has recourse to a complaints procedure which has ultimate powers of expulsion.

This means that clients who come to members of the UKAHPP can be sure that any practitioners they choose have the required training and experience to do what they do, and if for any reason they feel badly treated, exploited or otherwise offended, they do have someone to complain to who can set matters to rights.

The UKAHPP runs conferences and workshops to keep members up to date and to encourage them to develop. These are often stimulating affairs where people can meet the people they may have heard of but never seen, in an informal way, as well as getting the latest information about theory and practice.

The UKAHPP produces a list of members with a description of what each one does, and how they can be contacted, where relevant professionals or members of the public can see immediately who does what, and can contact the relevant person direct. This membership directory also includes thumbnail descriptions of each form of therapy, so that the reader can understand the entries against each person more easily. It includes details of the ethical principles, the code of conduct and the complaints procedure.

UKAHPP is a member of the UK Council for Psychotherapy, which aims at creating a fully-fledged profession of psychotherapy in this country. It has a federal structure, and UKAHPP is a member of the Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy Section. All the psychotherapist members of UKAHPP appear on the National Register of Psychotherapists maintained by the UKCP. In the near future, UKAHPP expects to be accepted for Affiliate Membership of the UKCP's new Psychotherapeutic Counseling Section which will enable counselors to apply for membership of UKCP for the first time.

UKAHPP also acts as a watchdog to see that humanistic approaches are not ignored, attacked or wrongly described by the media, when publishing articles or broadcasting programmes about mental health or other relevant matters. There are three types of membership: Associate Membership is for those in training who are working towards accreditation; or for people who are humanistic practitioners and those working in related fields such as education, medicine and social work who do not require accreditation; Affiliate Membership is for people who are already

accredited by other equivalent bodies, but who want to identify with the humanistic approach and meet like-minded practitioners; Full Membership is for people accredited by UKAHPP itself, and an application form gives full guidelines as to how to apply for this.

5.6 Conceptual Origins

Humanistic psychology is a psychological perspective which rose to prominence in the mid-20th century, drawing on the work of early pioneers like Carl Rogers and the philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology. It adopts a holistic approach to human existence through investigations of meaning, values, freedom, tragedy, personal responsibility, human potential, spirituality, and self-actualization.

The humanistic approach has its roots in phenomenological and existentialist thought. Eastern philosophy and psychology also play a central role in humanistic psychology, as well as Judao-Christian philosophies of personalism, as each shares similar concerns about the nature of human existence and consciousness.

It is also sometimes understood within the context of the three different forces of psychology: behaviorism, psychoanalysis and humanism. Behaviorism grew out of Ivan Pavlov's work with the conditioned reflex, and laid the foundations for academic psychology in the United States associated with the names of John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner. This school was later called the science of behavior. Abraham Maslow later gave behaviorism the name "the second force". The "first force" came out of Freud's research of psychoanalysis, and the psychologies of Alfred Adler, Erik Erikson, Carl Jung, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Otto Rank, Melanie Klein, Harry Stack Sullivan, and others.

These theorists and practitioners, although basing their observations on extensive clinical data, primarily focused on the depth or "unconscious" aspects of human existence. In the late 1950s, psychologists concerned with advancing a more holistic vision of psychology convened two meetings in Detroit, Michigan. These psychologists, including Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Clark Moustakas, were interested in founding a professional association dedicated to a psychology that focused on uniquely human issues, such as the self, self-actualization, health, hope, love, creativity, nature, being, becoming, individuality, and meaning—that is, a concrete understanding of human existence.

Counseling and therapy - Humanistic psychology includes several approaches to counseling and therapy. Among the earliest approaches we find the developmental theory of Abraham Maslow, emphasizing a hierarchy of needs and motivations; the existential psychology of Rollo May acknowledging human choice and the tragic aspects of human existence; and the person-centered or client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers, which is centered on the clients' capacity for self-direction and understanding of his/her own development.

Other approaches to humanistic counseling and therapy include Gestalt therapy, humanistic psychotherapy, depth therapy, holistic health, encounter groups, sensitivity training, marital and family therapies, body work, and the existential psychotherapy of Medard Boss. Existential-integrative psychotherapy, developed by Kirk Schneider (2008), is a relatively new development within humanistic and existential therapy.

Self-help is also included in humanistic psychology: Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison have described using some of the main humanistic approaches in self-help groups. Co-counseling, which is a purely self-help approach, is regarded as coming within humanistic psychology. Humanistic theory has had a strong influence on other forms of popular therapy, including Harvey Jackins' Re-evaluation Counselling and the work of Carl Rogers. Humanistic psychology tends to look beyond the medical model of psychology in order to open up a nonpathologizing view of the person. This usually implies that the therapist downplays the pathological aspects of a person's life in favour of the healthy aspects. A key ingredient in this approach is the meeting between therapist and client and the possibilities for dialogue. The aim of much humanistic therapy is to help the client approach a stronger and more healthy sense of self, also called self-actualization. All this is part of humanistic psychology's motivation to be a science of human experience, focusing on the actual lived experience of persons.