

# H

## Humanistic Perspective



Andrew M. Bland<sup>1</sup> and Eugene M. DeRobertis<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Millersville University, Millersville, PA, USA

<sup>2</sup>Brookdale College, Lincroft, NJ, USA

<sup>3</sup>Rutgers University, Newark, NJ, USA

### Synonyms

[Constructivist](#); [Existential](#); [Holistic](#); [Humanistic psychology](#); [Person-centered](#); [Phenomenological](#); [Self-actualization](#); [Third Force](#); [Transpersonal](#)

### Introduction

The humanistic perspective on personality emphasizes the individualized qualities of optimal well-being and the use of creative potential to benefit others, as well as the relational conditions that promote those qualities as the outcomes of healthy development. The humanistic perspective serves as an alternative to mechanistic and/or reductionistic explanations of personality based on isolated, static elements of observable behavior (e.g., quantifiable traits) or self-concept. Humanistic psychologists contend that personality formation is an ongoing process motivated by the need for relative integration, guided by intentionality, choice, the hierarchical ordering of values, and an ever-expanding conscious awareness. Humanistic

psychologists employ an intersubjective, empathic approach in their therapeutic and research practices to understand the lived experiences of individuals as active participants in the *life-world* – i.e., situated in sociocultural and eco-psycho-spiritual contexts.

From its inception, humanistic psychology has been “a diverse amalgam of secular, theistic, individualistic, and communalistic strands” (Schneider et al. 2015, pp. xviii–xix) in both its range of influences and its proponents. It is best understood as a broad-based yet theoretically-delineated movement rather than a highly specialized school. Humanistic psychologists share a vision of psychology as a holistic, phenomenological exploration of the processes that organically promote psychological health and growth in accordance with people’s innate potentials. Such an intentionally non-exclusive approach has been preferred in order “to keep things open and flexible” (Bühler 1971, p. 378), with the deliberate goal of continuous revision and elaboration in order to “establish itself anew for each generation” (Criswell 2003, p. 43). Contemporary humanistic psychology is a “concerted brew” of three ontologies:

- *Existential psychology* – which emphasizes situated freedom, experiential reflection (including phenomenology), and responsibility.
- *Transpersonal psychology* – which stresses spirituality, transcendence, and compassionate social action.

- *Constructivist psychology* – which accents culture, political consciousness, and personal meaning. (Schneider et al. 2015, p. xviii/xxiii)

Taken together, these provide the foundation for a human science and clinical outlook that values the whole person in context and that, by its methods, serves to reconcile the dualities of objective/subjective, individual/species, dispositional/situational, nature/nurture, art/science, science/spiritual, mind/body, Eastern/Western, aesthetic/pragmatic, etc.

Rather than view the healthy personality as the absence of pathology and/or the achievement of “happiness” as understood on an egoic basis, humanistic psychologists highlight maturity and the roles of meaning-making and of values – e.g., autonomy and commitment, freedom and responsibility, personal decision and worldly adaptability, and self-awareness and the awareness of others. Humanistic personality theory emphasizes individuals’ motivation to continually progress toward higher levels of interactive functioning and their present capacities for growth and change irrespective of past limitations and future uncertainties.

Humanistic psychologists also contend that theory or method should not univocally precede subject matter. They believe that the technocratic assumptions and practices of the natural science approach conventionally adopted by psychologists in the interest of prediction, manipulation, and control of behavior are insufficient to appropriately capture and contextualize the nuances of human experience, of which behavior is a by-product. They question the placement of the observer and the observed in passive roles in the interest of certainty and generalizability at the expense of contextually-situated perspectives gleaned from meaningful empathic interaction. Likewise, at the clinical level, the employment of monolithic theories and the preoccupation with technique in psychotherapy are considered inadequate to appropriately understand and address human suffering. Rather, a more flexible, process-oriented, descriptive approach is favored to promote individuals’ self-awareness and self-regulation and to

explore how different values/belief systems influence commonalities and diversity in individuals’ lived experience.

Thus, humanistic psychologists “pose two overarching challenges to the study of conscious and nonconscious processes: (1) what does it mean to be [a] fully experiencing human and (2) how does that understanding illuminate the fulfilled or vital life?” (Schneider et al. 2015, p. xvii). Humanistic psychologists believe that focusing on life stories or narratives – sometimes in conjunction with objective data – is the ideal means of understanding where individuals have been and who they are becoming. In addition, humanistic psychologists address societal/ecological conditions that promote or impede the development of social intimacy and personal identity within a community as principal components of healthy personality development.

Taking these assumptions together, the humanistic perspective is summarized by five basic postulates that lead off each issue of the peer-reviewed *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. Human beings:

- As human, supersede the sum of their parts. They cannot be reduced to components.
- Have their existence in a uniquely human context, as well as in a cosmic ecology.
- Are aware and are aware of being aware – i.e., they are conscious. Human consciousness always includes an awareness of oneself in the context of other people.
- Have the ability to make choices and, with that, responsibility.
- Are intentional, aim at goals, are aware that they cause future events, and seek meaning, value, and creativity.

The “common denominator of these concepts,” said Bühler (1971), “is that all humanistic psychologists see the goal of life as using [one’s] life to accomplish something [one] believes in” and to create something that outlives oneself (p. 381).

Following is a brief overview of the evolution of the humanistic perspective on personality. It begins with an assessment of the historical context

in which the humanistic perspective arose as the Third Force in American psychology, followed by a summary of the influences that inspired the humanistic movement. It then provides a brief outline of the progression of the humanistic perspective on personality from its Third Force conceptualization through three subsequent interrelated movements – existential, transpersonal, and constructivist. Note that the eras during which each ontology gained prominence greatly overlapped; thus, the outline is more thematic than chronological. Finally, examples are given of how these movements coalesced into contemporary humanistic constructs and of the interdependence between developments in humanistic and conventional positivistic psychologies. Schneider et al.'s (2015) *Handbook of Humanistic Psychology* is recommended for additional perspective on contemporary conceptualization in and practical applications of humanistic psychology in therapy, research, and society and for a listing of current participants in the humanistic movement. In addition, Bland and DeRobertis (2018) provide a comprehensive annotated bibliography of classic and contemporary readings and other resources in humanistic psychology.

### **Historical Account of Theoretical/Philosophical Foundations and Key Principles**

Humanistic psychology began as a revolution within the field in response to a concern that prior to the mid-twentieth century “none of the available psychological theories did justice to the ‘healthy human being’s functioning’ and ‘modes of living’ or to the healthy human being’s ‘goals of life’” (Bühler 1971, p. 378). The founding humanistic psychologists believed that experimentalism/behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalysis, the disparately prevailing schools in American psychology at that time, had each marginalized consciousness and reduced the fuller range of human nature and its creative and spiritual achievements to the study of conditioned responses in laboratory rats and of neurotic patients’ unconscious drives and conflicts.

Humanistic psychologists believed that the prevailing schools served to uphold a societal status quo characterized by mechanization, materialism, bureaucratization, authoritarianism, conformity, compartmentalization of experience, and disempowerment of the individual in society (Arons 1999; Wertz 1998). They cautioned that the “limited and limiting images” (Frick 1971, p. 10) propagated by “low-ceiling psychology” (Maslow, quoted in DeCarvalho 1991) would seep into the greater culture and lower ordinary people’s expectations of themselves and their potential. At best, the prevailing schools offered images of personality that were comparable to “pages torn from a book, only parts that contribute to a greater whole” (Frick 1971, p. 10).

Several of the psychologists who affiliated themselves with the humanistic movement had been trained as experimentalists/behaviorists and/or psychoanalysts, and many had developed respected reputations in the field during the 1930s and 1940s. However, by the 1950s, their own experiences as both people and professionals prompted them to question the conventional thinking in psychology and to note its limitations. It should be clarified that humanistic psychologists did not deny the contributions of behaviorism and psychoanalysis. They incorporated the insights of the existing schools into a broader phenomenological orientation that emphasized the validity of human experience and meaning. Humanistic psychologists thus referred to themselves as the *Third Force* – i.e., a third option – in psychology that sought to consolidate the best of the prevailing schools while also drawing from additional traditions both within and outside of psychology.

Humanistic psychologists incorporated these traditions with the intent of exploring areas of human experience that otherwise had been either ignored by the field (due to the attitude that they were not easily operationalized and measured) or corrupted by incomplete theories and/or myopically limited observational techniques (Allport 1955; Arons 1999; May 1983). They believed that “a complete psychology should include issues of freedom and creativity, choice and responsibility, and values and fulfillment” (Resnick et al. 2001, p. 79), as they had noted that these themes

were common among individuals whom both they and the larger culture/society deemed healthy personalities. They called for studying these themes from a more viable and comprehensive vantage point for psychology insofar as “the conscious experience of creative, healthy persons should be at the center of psychological investigation” (Resnick et al. 2001, p. 79).

### The Roots of the Humanistic Perspective

To restore a fuller vision of human experience and potential, rekindle the greater possibilities of psychological science, and promote the science of healthy personality, humanistic psychologists drew from an array of sources both within and outside of psychology for inspiration:

#### The Humanities

In response to the problems of psychology in the modern era – which values certainty and progress, is skeptical of the past, and often strives to conquer and transform nature rather than understand and accommodate itself to it (May 1983) – several of the founders of humanistic psychology intentionally revived concepts from the humanities to introduce relevant human problems and questions that had been ignored or distorted by the prevailing schools. For example, Greek dramatists had created images of human life as a quest and of the person as a hero struggling powerfully against fates during a journey of psycho-spiritual integration. Greek philosophers valued dialogue as a means of seeking deeper truths from everyday situations: knowledge as prophylaxis against wrongdoing and self-examination, self-discipline, self-determination, and self-challenging as tools for living. (Thus the Greeks influenced the third, fourth, and fifth postulates of humanistic psychology – see above.) Humanistic psychologists also drew from literature (e.g., Dostoyevsky, Goethe, Hesse, Kafka, Shakespeare, Steinbeck, Tolstoy, etc.) as a means of providing familiar narratives to support their principles.

#### European Existential and Phenomenological Philosophies

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century existential philosophers (e.g., Camus, de Beauvoir,

Heidegger, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, Marcel, Nietzsche, Tillich, etc.) were critical of societal norms that promoted the fragmentation and compartmentalization of experience and/or complacency via a false sense of security. They emphasized the empowerment of each individual via transformation of values that affirm existence and that encourage openness and flexible responsiveness to the world of which the individual is considered part (and therefore part-author of). Similarly, the early twentieth-century phenomenological philosophy/psychology (e.g., Dilthey, Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, Spranger, etc.) emphasized the intentionality of human mental activity and the roles of the relationship between consciousness and objects of perception in experiencing phenomena and of situational context in understanding the structure of behavior (the third and fourth postulates).

#### Eastern Wisdom Traditions

The founding humanistic psychologists referred to Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism in their writings. For example, May (1983) noted the similarities between existential and Zen philosophies in their focus on ontology and their emphasis that Western desire for power over nature had resulted not only in individuals’ estrangement from nature but also from themselves. Later, transpersonal psychologists (e.g., Wilber 2000) more openly embraced and adopted Eastern ways of knowing in their conceptualizations of psycho-spiritual development and processes (the second postulate) – more below. Mindfulness-based practices have been part of the humanistic therapeutic repertoire since its beginning.

#### Holistic Philosophy in the Natural and Applied Social Sciences (Including Systems Theory, Gestalt Psychology, and Organismic Psychology)

Biologist/neurologist-philosophers Coghill, Jackson, Meyer, and Smuts proposed holistic, evolutionary conceptualizations of the nervous system, memory, consciousness, and behavior. Frick (1971) summarized their contributions to humanistic thinking, as well as the process and functional views of applied philosophers Dewey and Whitehead, the open systems theory of von

Bertalanffy, and the focus on irreducible, interrelated patterns and the uniqueness of the ongoing interaction between organism and environment by Gestalt psychologists like Lewin. Taken together, these influences “vigorously fought artificiality, oversimplification, and the unnecessary abridgment of human nature” in favor of models that prized “the essential nature and integrity of the organism found in [people’s] capacity for unity, organization, and integration” (Frick 1971, p. 135) (the first and third postulates).

Goldstein, an organismic psychologist, was also highly influential. His term *self-actualization* referenced the pattern of resilient reorganization of a person’s capacities following an injury. It was adapted by humanistic psychologists to describe the process of living resiliently despite one’s personal, environmental, and historical shortcomings and of overcoming obstacles (real and perceived) notwithstanding inherent risks (the first and fifth postulates).

#### William James

James regarded personality as integrally related to both environment and consciousness (i.e., the self) as a result of pure embodied experience in continuous formation (the first, second, and third postulates). As both psychologist and philosopher of science, James viewed subjective reality as essential to understanding human possibility, and he discouraged psychologists from limiting the field to “quantification of data restricted to the senses” (Taylor 1991, p. 59). James thus assumed the proto-phenomenological position of *radical empiricism*, in which experience is favored as a starting point over a priori theories, thereby facilitating the assumption that nothing within the realm of experience could be de facto excluded from the domain of scientific psychology.

Maslow’s interest in a humanistic approach to psychology was sparked in the 1940s as he compiled notes for a textbook designed to explore psychology’s developments in the half-century since James’ seminal *Principles of Psychology*. Maslow noted that while remarkable discoveries had been made in some areas (e.g., animal behavior, learning theory, testing), others (e.g., aesthetics, altruism, religious experience) had

mostly been passed over. He thus decided to abandon the James project and devote his career to filling in what he referred to as psychology’s “huge big gaping hole.”

#### Personality Psychology

“Historically, humanistic psychology was closer to personality theory than to any other current in psychology” (DeCarvalho 1991, p. 76). Personality psychologists including Allport, Kelly, Murphy, and Murray aligned themselves with humanistic psychology when it formalized during the early 1960s. Allport focused on functionally-autonomous, intentional, teleological dispositions of personality that involve continuous maturation/transformation and that include attributes like interpersonal warmth, realistic perceptions of one’s environment, proactive behavior, work and responsibility as meaningful, and conscience and values as essential to a unifying philosophy of life (the fourth and fifth postulates). Kelly’s personal construct theory focused on meaning-making, dialectically exploring how events are construed (vs. focusing on the events themselves), and developing the courage to step out of the security of one’s present world into the unknown (the fourth and fifth postulates). Murphy emphasized how curiosity, social feeling, openness to experience, and commitment to an experiential orientation to life all stimulate heightened identification with the cosmos (the second postulate). Murray provided a taxonomy of human needs, stressed the primacy of emotion, criticized the problems of differentiating between scientific facts and human values, and cautioned that focusing on superficialities both stunts the creative imagination and impedes healthy personality development (the fourth and fifth postulates).

#### Post-Freudian Psychodynamic Psychology

Founding humanistic psychologists (e.g., Jourard 1974; Maslow 1999) openly acknowledged the influence of dynamic psychologists and considered them part of the humanistic movement. Adler emphasized that human behavior is purposeful and goal-oriented, that humans are socially embedded, and that *social interest* and dialogue both are crucial for human development (the third

and fifth postulates). Jung explored the narrative role of myths and symbols in the process of psycho-spiritual development (the second and fifth postulates). Rank regarded human life as a process of self-creation and distinguished between neurotic tranquilizing/people-pleasing and heroic living wherein individuals courageously reach for unfamiliar horizons (the fourth and fifth postulates). Erikson proposed a dialectical process of forging an autonomous identity in order to love and to make a contribution to one's greater community (the third and fifth postulates). Reich explored the physical embodiment of character defenses against unacceptable feelings and impulses (the first postulate). Horney and Fromm emphasized self-realization and aspiration toward and fulfillment of goals as an alternative to Freud's focus on homeostasis as the objective of human life (the fifth postulate). They, like Jung, also differentiated between self and ego/persona in their conceptualizations of developmental maturation.

### The First Wave of Humanistic Psychology (1940s to 1960s): The Third Force

As noted above, American psychology during the early twentieth century had departed from James' call for psychology to "address the problems of everyday experience in terms of [individuals'] potential for growth" (Taylor 1991, p. 69) and instead rigidly adhered to the natural science approach which eliminated mind, consciousness, and agency from both its theory and its clinical and research methods. Beginning with Allport, who introduced the phrase *humanistic psychology* to the study of personality during the 1930s, the founders of humanistic psychology – including Bugental, Bühler, Combs, Frankl, Fromm, Gendlin, Goodman, Jourard, Kelly, Klee, Laing, Maslow, May, Moustakas, Murphy, Murray, Rogers, Snygg, Sutich, etc. – shared in common the goal of reintroducing the *self* into psychology's purview during the mid-twentieth century (see DeCarvalho's (1991) account of the rich history of the humanistic movement's development as psychology's Third Force).

The Third Force founders sought to bypass notions of self as a fixed, static, impermeable

structure inside the human organism (e.g., the psychoanalytic ego or cognitivists' notion of mind as homunculus executor) or merely as *self-concept*. Instead, they emphasized *self* as an *I am* experience of *being* in the process of *becoming* (Allport 1955); an embodied pattern of ongoing gradual movement toward optimal functioning, wisdom, and fulfillment relative to one's current identity and circumstances (Maslow 1999; Rogers 1961/1995); and the integrative character of the whole developing individual embedded within a life-world context (i.e., *being-in-the-world-with-others*, May 1983). Personality development is assumed to be an ongoing process and the outcome of healthy growth, not a functionalistic goal or moral injunction: "It should be supposed that total fulfillment is never reached" (Combs 1999, p. 164). Taken together, humanistic personality theory emphasizes:

- The dialectical relationship between *process* (the personality is always in flux, evolving toward higher levels of consciousness) and *organization* (the personality seeks to create self-consistency and to bring completion to incomplete structure) – i.e., transcending and including (Wilber 2000) and chaos and form (Frankl 1978).
- *Sovereign motivation* (the personality is guided, energized, and integrated by the motive of self-realization/self-actualization in relation with one's culture/environment).
- *Potentiality* (conceptual focus on healthy personality rather than pathology). (Frick 1971)

Key constructs, terminology, and foci vary from one humanistic personality theorist to another. However, they share several common tenets with regard to the outcomes of healthy personality development, as summarized by Jourard (1974):

- Able to gratify basic needs through acceptable behavior and relative absence of anxious self-consciousness. Freedom to attentively participate in the world outside oneself. Lively



interest in and pursuit of goals beyond one's own needs for security, love, status, or recognition.

- Efficient contact with reality (perception and cognition not distorted by emotion and unfulfilled needs).
- Capacity for aesthetic cognition (perception and thinking that is receptive, contemplative, free to play/enjoy versus selectively choosing experiences based on their relevance to one's immediate personal needs).
- Freedom to experience the full range of feelings. Appropriate emotional responses to situations and capacity to control their expression versus repression or uncontrollable outbursts.
- Valid knowledge about the structure, functions, and limits of the body. Healthy acceptance of one's body and control over its functions and movement. Doing one's best to foster optimum bodily functioning.
- Self-structure is fairly congruent with the *real self* (i.e., the process/flow of spontaneous experience) versus self-alienation (driven by pride, impulses, hyper-conscience, external authority, others' wishes). Behavior reflects responsible *real self*-direction versus defensive responses to threats (actual or perceived) to one's ideal/public self or façades/social roles.
- Conscience fosters the individual's fullest development (vs. blind obedience or compulsive rebellion) and permits guilt-free gratification of various personal needs.
- Interpersonal behavior is compatible with one's conscience and the demands of the social/cultural system. One can enact a variety of interpersonal roles in ways that are acceptable to others.
- The power to give and receive love. Interpersonal relationships are characterized by concern for the other's happiness and growth, respect for the other's autonomy and individuality, having an accurate concept of the other's idiosyncrasies, self-disclosure, and having realistic and feasible demands and expectations of the other.
- Meaningful work balanced with absorbing leisure pursuits.

- The abilities to live decisively and to face death with courage; to produce happiness for oneself and others despite some degree of tragedy, failure, and suffering; and to have peace of mind despite adversity because one is not plagued by doubt/conflict over what he/she should be doing.

In sum, "healthy personality is a way for [people] to act, guided by intelligence and respect for life, so that [their] needs are satisfied and [they] will grow in awareness, competence, and capacity for love" (Jourard 1974, p. 28).

When conditions are appropriately conducive to healthy personality development, individuals are more capable of becoming *fully functioning* – "[making] choices that express [their] authentic values and [having] available the undistorted full range of [their] life possibilities" (Polkinghorne 2015, p. 90). They gradually become more accepting of themselves, as well as increasingly open to experience, more appreciative of ambiguity and complexity, and more appropriately trusting of themselves and others. In addition, they become better able to shake off others' destructive or inhibiting expectations, to view themselves more positively, and to assume a greater sense of autonomy, striving to create and act on healthy challenges for themselves and to take healthy risks (vs. remaining homeostatically fixated in their comfort zones) that result in further growth/development. They become more capable of self-reflection, spontaneity, creativity, self-determination, and a greater sense of fulfillment. Furthermore, there is a greater sense of oneness and identification with humanity and therefore compassion and altruism akin to Adler's notion of *social interest* – i.e., individuals are able to devote themselves to socially-relevant concerns beyond their own self-interest and/or need gratification.

While such terms had not yet been popularized in the mid-twentieth-century psychology, the founders of humanistic psychology believed that a secure attachment relationship, authoritative parenting, and other attributes of a supportive, accepting, and enriching but also appropriately

challenging family, school, and community environment are requisite for the likelihood of the creative self-expansion to occur. Otherwise, “the press of social conformity produces self-concepts that distort and hide aspects of people’s true selves . . . [and people become] directed by socially presented distortions of who they are” (Polkinghorne 2015, p. 91).

Rogers (1961/1995) referred to these distortions and denials of certain experiences (and therefore parts of the self and their humanity) as the result of internalized *conditions of worth*. Individuals assume façades/social roles that they believe they must enact based on the problematic learning from their formative experiences/environments. The corresponding incongruence with the real self and void of personally meaningful existence forms the core of psychological suffering. Efforts to evade the freedom and responsibility of independent thinking and action lead to rigidity; fear of uncertainty and the future; resistance to change and clinging to outmoded, ineffective behaviors/beliefs; need for approval; and guilt/regret when facing the discrepancy between one’s self-concept and the ideal of who one wants to be. Thus, humanistic psychology accounts for psychopathology and problematic behavior as the result of social conditioning away from one’s inherent self which results in the frustration of human needs for security, love/belonging, and self-esteem as prerequisite for self-actualizing (Maslow 1987).

Humanistic psychologists believe that individuals have the freedom to change and to create/recreate aspects of their personality as they learn new information about themselves based on life experiences and social encounters, especially those which challenge their ordinary ways of thinking, being, and relating and which liberate and integrate their intellect, emotions, and body. This paves the way for both *self-transcendence* and *transcendence of one’s environment*. They become better able to regard healthy challenges as opportunities for growth (vs. threats) and also to intentionally rise above the “imperfections of [their] culture with greater or lesser effort at improving it” (Maslow 1999, p. 201) by living according to an intrinsic sense of ethics.

### **The Second Wave (Late 1960s–1970s to 1980s–1990s): Beyond the Third Force – Existential-Phenomenological and Transpersonal Psychologies**

Seemingly as a pendulum swing away from the mechanization of the experimentalists/behaviorists and the pessimism of Freud, many of the Third Force psychologists tended to focus most on the constructive aspects of human nature, regarding them as a biological disposition toward fulfillment. In addition, in the spirit of their American worldview steeped in expansiveness and unlimited horizons (Yalom 1980), they explored the farther reaches of human possibility as an alternative to the reductionism of the extant models espoused in the field. In contrast, existential psychologists like Binswanger, Boss, Frankl, May, Yalom, etc. suggested that personality is better understood as founded upon diverse potentials for worldly involvement in the form of general growth parameters rather than a sovereign instinct-like tendency toward self-actualization. Drawing more directly from European existential-phenomenological traditions, which emphasized human limitations and the tragic aspects of human nature over a preordained pattern of goodness, they proposed that human nature is both constructive and destructive and that the conscious, active process of grappling with and integrating these potentials within oneself results in creative expression and growth. For instance, Yalom (1980) proposed that the ongoing negotiation of four dialectics – death/existence, freedom/destiny, isolation/connectedness, and meaning/meaninglessness – is essential for healthy personality. The influence of existential-phenomenological psychology served to deepen the humanistic perspective, and the Third Force psychologists (e.g., Maslow 1987) revised their theories to better account for the psychology of evil.

At the same time that existential psychologists deepened the focus of humanistic psychology, the transpersonal psychology movement “[emerged] as a reaction to the de-sacralization of everyday life in modern Western technological society and to despiritualized religion” (Arons 1999, p. 191). It served to widen the map of human potential



beyond the ego structures ordinarily assumed to be the personality by conventional Western psychology – including the greater conceptualization of self as proposed by the Third Force – to also include humans’ psycho-spiritual dimensions, particularly those espoused by wisdom traditions including Buddhism, Sufism, Christian and Jewish mysticism, etc. For transpersonal psychologists, the self is “more of a witness (active voice) than an entity” (Hoffman et al. 2015, p. 124). As such, transpersonal psychologists explored states of awareness that transcend self-actualization and emphasized that ordinary human suffering is not overcome until the illusion of separate selfhood is realized. The transpersonal (or Fourth Force movement, as Maslow termed it) began as an extension of the Third Force and was extrapolated by the likes of Assagioli, Frager, Walsh, Washburn, Welwood, Wilber, etc. The transpersonalists were influential in having spiritual crises added as a category of clinical concern in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*.

### **The Third Wave (1970s to Early 2000s): The Relationship Between Postmodernism/Constructivism and Humanistic Psychology**

By the last quarter of the twentieth century, some humanistic psychologists turned to postmodern philosophy as its next ontology. This was partly out of concern that implementation of the Third Force, existentialist, and transpersonal views promoted the continuation of an individualistic Western worldview and its problematic implications – i.e., colonialism and endangerment of indigenous worldviews – in a globalizing society. Postmodern philosophy had emerged in the humanities and social sciences during the 1970s–1980s out of disillusionment with the failure of modern positivist science to deliver on its promises of utopia built on natural order as an alternative to blind religious faith. Accordingly, the postmodern worldview shifted focus from “what we believe to how we believe” (Hoffman et al. 2015, p. 109), employing deconstruction of narratives (a) as a coup against the tendency within positivist science to assume natural lawfulness as its object of discovery and (b) as a means

of revealing inherent political/power structures that underlie the language employed by scientists in their quest for objective truth.

With regard to personality, postmodern psychologists like Gergen, O’Hara, etc. questioned the humanistic idea of a permanent, autonomous self conceived as a fictional creation of Western grammar and cognitive schemes which do not inhere cross-culturally. Instead, postmodern psychologists insisted upon the possibility of multiple truths and the supposition that reality is socially constructed. They suggested that “personal essence is based on social context, and a multiplicity of relationships means that the self is under constant construction and reconstruction without opportunity for introspection” (Hoffman et al. 2015, p. 114). As such, postmodern psychologists argued that there is “no universal ground for ethics” insofar as “all is subject to context” and “language, culture, and [history] predispose meanings which precede [individuals] and inescapably guide and limit [their] individual meanings and values” (Arons 1999, pp. 198–199). Hence, postmodern psychologists attempted to place subjective experience within the context of ongoing relations among people, meaning in people’s efforts to coordinate action within various communities, and responsibility within a culture – all in the interest of deconstructing the problems of individualism and of promoting new forms of interdependent discourse.

While postmodernists questioned the singularity of truth and ushered in the possibility of multiple truths in psychology, its “heyday of relativistic skepticism is drawing to a close”; in lieu of continuing to dichotomize between *certain truth* and *no truth*, post-postmodernists have “turned to the idea of ‘good enough’ knowledge” (Polkinghorne 2015, p. 94). Accordingly, humanistic psychologists have begun reexamining the role of the self in human existence insofar as “the myth of self sustains many people, helping them survive what otherwise would be an unlivable life” (Hoffman et al. 2015, p. 125). Polkinghorne’s (2015) review of contemporary self-theorizing and narrative-based therapeutic modalities summarizes many contributions from Third Force and existential founders as well as

their phenomenological influences while assessing advances in cognition, consciousness, and mind/body science within a vision of “a more holistic, complex, nuanced, and adaptive self that is actively engaged in the world” (Hoffman et al. 2015, p. 111).

#### **The Fourth Wave (2000s to Present): Revisiting and Reconciling the Roots of Humanistic Psychology and Dialoguing with Conventional Psychology**

Despite their nuances, the Third Force, existential, transpersonal, and constructivist movements share a post-positivist critique of the limitations of the natural science model in psychology and a propensity for a phenomenological alternative. Since the new millennium, humanistic psychologists have called for rethinking their purpose and priorities to meet the needs and pressing concerns of a new era which “inhibits freedom” in its “prizing sensationalism over sustained and reflective inquiry, easy answers – be they military, religious, or commercial – over discernment and struggle, and certitude over mindfulness and wonder” (Schneider 2015, p. 74). Some (e.g., Criswell 2003; Taylor 1991; the current authors) have advocated for a return to the roots of humanistic psychology in the phenomenological tradition of James and the personality psychologists like Allport, Murphy, and Murray. This has inspired updated constructs that reflect the Third Force founders’ basic ideas in conjunction with subsequent elaborations upon their principles by the existential, transpersonal, and constructivist movements.

For instance, Schneider (2015) proposed a model that builds upon the narrative conceptualization of self as espoused by Third Force and existential paradigms (as an alternative to simplistic reductionism as a defense against complexity and mystery in life) while also acknowledging and incorporating the psycho-spiritual aspects of transpersonal psychology and socially constructed aspects of postmodern/constructivist psychology. Schneider suggested that the healthy personality embraces *paradox* and *awe* by negotiating and creatively integrating the *fluid center* (i.e., dialectic) between constriction (focusing, limiting,

yielding) and expansion (seeing possibility, incorporating, asserting) by coming to terms with and developing faith in the creative energies of the cosmos and within oneself despite the inherent uncertainty. In addition, the contemporary personality construct of *hardiness* (Maddi et al. 2011) is a composite of the interrelated attitudes of commitment, control/coping, and challenge that together provide the courage needed to resiliently transform ongoing stressors from potential disasters into growth opportunities and therefore to construct meaning rather than cling to preconceived, familiar ways of knowing and understanding life.

During the new millennium, humanistic psychologists also have embraced recently-emerged parallel constructs from conventional psychology and psychiatry that demonstrate the validity of humanistic principles. For example, the humanistic emphasis on authenticity and autonomy contributed to the expansion of the five-factor model of personality to include an additional first factor of *honesty-humility* that encompasses truthfulness, positive values, honesty, sincerity, and reciprocal altruism (Maltby et al. 2012). In addition, it inspired Cloninger et al.’s (1993) seven-factor model of personality, which involves the interdependent relationships among dimensions of temperament (novelty seeking, harm avoidance, reward dependence, persistence) and character (self-directedness, cooperativeness, self-transcendence) in the development of self-identification both as autonomous and as an integral part of humanity, society, and the universe/unity of all things.

Furthermore, the recently-emerged positive psychology provides operationalization and quantitative support that temporarily receded from humanistic psychology during a litigious era. For example, Patterson and Joseph (2007) suggested that research based on self-determination theory supports Rogers’ ideas on the organismic valuing process and self-concordant goals, autonomy versus impersonal orientation, conditional regard from significant others leading to introjected conditions of worth, increased congruence/openness to experience and reduced defensiveness as outcomes of therapy, and deeper relationships marked by sensitivity to and acceptance of others

as common among fully functioning people. Also, humanistic and positive psychologists share in common interests like authenticity as a foundation for ethics, mindfulness, and self-awareness (Patterson and Joseph 2007; Resnick et al. 2001). However, whereas humanistic psychology is inherently (though not exclusively) phenomenological, positive psychology as a movement continues to cling dogmatically to the strictures of positivism. Accordingly, humanistic psychology offers a broader range of epistemologies and methodologies from which positive psychologists can draw to deepen their conceptualizations to not only focus on virtue, optimism, and positive self-appraisals but also on the constructive value of transforming struggle (Resnick et al. 2001; Schneider 2015).

### Applications: Therapy

The founders of humanistic psychology believed that, while it is possible for personality development to occur in most interpersonal contexts, it is likely to occur most directly by way of a therapeutic encounter. Humanistic therapy is a phenomenologically-oriented approach intended to assist clients in living authentically in accordance with their values, aspirations, and limitations and in assuming an active role in their growth.

### Therapeutic Principles

Humanistic therapy assumes that clients are holistic/irreducible (i.e., not determined by their past or conditioning, capable of agentic change) and that they are experts on their own experiences, their potentials within themselves, and the social, community, and cultural contexts within which they forge their identities and senses of control, responsibility, and teleological purpose. Thus, clients are granted an autonomous role in the therapy process, with therapists respecting their freedom and potential to make choices about whether and how to change.

Contemporary humanistic psychotherapies share several therapeutic evidence-based principles of practice, many of which are rooted in Rogers' (1961/1995) *person-centered therapy*:

- An authentic therapeutic relationship is central to effective practice. Therapists attempt to enter empathetically into clients' subjective experience – deemed an essential aspect of their humanity – in a way that provides them with a new, emotionally-validating interpersonal experience.
- Tacit experiencing is an important guide to conscious adaptive experience. An attuned, supportive therapeutic relationship serves to help clients develop comfort looking inward and therefore to render emotional pain more bearable.
- Therapists' responses/interventions are intended to stimulate and deepen the process of clients' immediate experiencing and ongoing awareness throughout the course of therapy. This includes clients' perceiving, sensing, feeling, thinking, and wanting/intending.
- Emphasis is given to clients' integrative, formative tendencies toward survival, growth, personal agency, and the creation of meaning through symbolization. The collaborative nature of the therapeutic relationship is key to the unfolding process of therapy and to clients' disclosure of narratives/personal stories which further develops/maintains a shared understanding and trust.
- Clients are seen as unique individuals with complex arrays of emotions, behaviors, stories, and capacities that can, at times, be viewed as representative of a particular clinical diagnostic category but never reduced to one. Instead of viewing clients through the lens of pathology/deficits, humanistic therapists understand them from the stance of thwarted potential and truncated development and emphasize their strengths. (Angus et al. 2014)

### Transformation Versus Tension Reduction

Rather than focus on first-order change processes (i.e., symptom reduction and adjustment) that offer temporary relief to clients but leave underlying/root problems relatively unaddressed and prone to eventual return, humanistic therapists focus on second-order (transformative) change processes. These involve a deep restructuring of self that results in long-term, core-level shifts in

and expansions of clients' perspectives of their presenting concerns, of their world, and of themselves, as they create and maintain new ways of being. Humanistic therapists rely less on prescriptive techniques that uphold their role as expert and instead employ their presence and reflexive capacities as instruments for understanding clients' unique patterns of lived experience.

### Forging a New Self-Narrative

Humanistic therapists attend to clients' narratives, metaphors, nonverbal behaviors, responses to feedback, and other interaction patterns in order to help them explore how these may point toward attachment histories and other relational patterns that contribute to defensive interpersonal/behavior patterns in an effort to uphold a false sense of self. Therapists "reflect back aspects that are evident but unnoticed – in effect, holding a mirror up to the client" (Schneider and Krug 2010, p. 2/37). Accordingly, clients' resistance to growth becomes exposed and challenged to promote disidentification – i.e., surrendering the need to defend their current position, having confused it for their greater self-identity. Rather than cling to past knowledge and expectations of themselves, others, and situations, clients become better able to realize and act on a sense of personal meaning in all their experience. The therapeutic relationship offers a safe emergency that stimulates neural plasticity and therefore new learning. When the process goes well, "clients reclaim and re-own their lives" (Schneider and Krug 2010, p. 1), developing a worldview and behavior that authentically express their core values.

The therapeutic encounter serves to present clients with the choice between (a) becoming consumed by suffering to the point that they attempt to evade it (*experiential avoidance*) and thereby create even more suffering for themselves or others and (b) *suffering well* – i.e., accepting the aspects of their lives over which they have no control and committing their attention and energy to those which they do. This sense of *intentionality* enables a person to set goals and move forward instead of becoming mired in the face of adversity. Accordingly, therapists employ role play, rehearsal, visualization, mindfulness-based

techniques, etc. to help clients try out new experiences in the interest of incorporating them outside the therapy relationship and thereby maintaining their progress.

### Outcomes of Therapy

The humanistic approach to therapy – specifically Rogers' (1961/1995) *facilitative conditions* in conjunction with the principles espoused by other founding humanistic therapists (e.g., Frankl 1978; May 1983) – anticipated the contemporary outcome literature on common relational/experiential factors which account for the most substantial sustainable change (as opposed to isolated techniques). Moreover, Angus et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis of empirical studies conducted during the last quarter century suggests that humanistic approaches to therapy result in large effects in pre-post client change and longitudinal maintenance (suggesting that clients continue to develop on their own after termination), as well as in demonstrated effectiveness in addressing interpersonal/relational issues, depression, psychosis, and chronic medical issues.

### Influence

The humanistic approach stimulated a relationally-oriented revision of psychoanalysis and the advent of applied behavior analysis as an extension of behavior modification with increased focus on individualized interventions that address the underlying functions of behavior (vs. mere behaviors). In addition, humanistic approaches to therapy have been influential in the development of third-wave cognitive-behavioral (CBT) approaches (e.g., acceptance and commitment therapy and dialectical behavior therapy with their emphases on mindfulness and developing openness to experience), motivational interviewing (with its emphasis on promoting agency), and narrative therapies (with their emphasis on meaning-making).

### Applications: Research

As discussed, during the mid-twentieth century, humanistic psychologists became increasingly concerned that while modern science had

attempted to explain the material structures and mechanisms of psychological phenomena (in the case of personality, usually traits and pathological behavior patterns), it was unable to describe the natural dynamic interactions and interdependent structural relationships of meaning within and between phenomena. They argued that the detached attitude of science – which intentionally excluded individual subjectivity – lent itself to a precarious scientific ethic. The tendency within natural scientific psychology to treat phenomena as disconnected and compartmentalized lent itself to the capacity for destructiveness insofar as it served to control and conquer – instead of to understand and cooperate with – nature in the interest of prudent and efficacious scientific progress.

Applied to personality assessment, this meant that psychologists were given power to employ positivistic concepts to measure, screen, classify, and sometimes confine individuals based on pre-defined constructs (e.g., those that undergird the MMPI) without adequate reference to the context behind their dispositions and/or situational behavior. As aforementioned, humanistic psychologists questioned psychology's conventional scientific values of prediction, manipulation, and control of behavior at the expense of adequate perspectives, interpersonal relationships, cultural phenomena, creativity, and the complex nuances of developmental processes as they pertain to understanding personality. They believed that psychology needed to account for the whole person in context; otherwise, "exclusively explanatory psychology leads to skepticism, superficiality, sterile empiricism, and an increasing separation of knowledge from life" (Wertz 1998, p. 51).

### **Toward a Human Science Approach**

Humanistic psychologists believed that if psychology was to be a complete and relevant human science, it was necessary to revisit its philosophy of science. In the spirit of James, humanistic psychologists (e.g., Giorgi 1970; Maslow 1987; Rogers 1961/1995) argued that psychological science must remain an open process and not arbitrarily exclude anything of potential interest and relevance to the greater human

species. They criticized psychologists' disingenuous claim that they were value-free, as well as their desire to limit themselves to generalizations based on spectator knowledge and technical methods that benefited privileged groups or institutions. They argued that psychology can and should be a human science, which employs a "personal attitude" (Giorgi 1970, p. 317) and a way of seeing the world as it is valid for everyday people. They called for the development and incorporation of both experiential and meaning-oriented ways of knowing and chose existential-phenomenological philosophy as the basis for a renewed human science approach. With its foundational assumption that individuals are subjective selves inextricably related to the world, the humanistic approach to research provides an alternative to probabilistic cause-and-effect explanations, specifically in its focus on the nuanced understanding of human experience via the reflective attitude, which treats perceptions, memories, emotions, etc. as moments within a continual process (i.e., the self as *being in becoming*) as opposed to isolated, static elements (e.g., personality traits).

### **Phenomenology and Other Qualitative Research Methods**

The humanistic approach broadens the concepts of both science and objectivity and supplements the range of available methods. For example, the phenomenological method discerns the essential features and structures of psychological phenomena by asking *what are its most revelatory, invariant meanings?* The method involves *thick description* drawn from direct observations and/or reported events as primary data to arrive at an intersubjective perspective. Researchers are expected to be mindful of their own experience and interactional processes as they inquire into the experiences of others. With its focus on phenomena that are not readily conducive to operational definitions and measurement but nonetheless assume a role in conscious human experiencing and are verifiable via intersubjective agreement, such a perspective provides an objective platform for appropriately understanding subjectively co-constituted meanings in human experience.



The method thus remains rigorously empirical insofar as its fidelity to its topics of inquiry is arguably more comprehensive than that afforded by traditional positivistic empiricism.

In addition to phenomenology, humanistic psychologists have developed and/or adapted a host of additional qualitative methods for psychology including, to name only a few: hermeneutics, grounded theory, discourse and narrative analyses, and intuitive methods of inquiry (see Barrell et al. 1987; Wertz et al. 2011) that bridge the subjective and objective in the experiencing person to honor and adequately address the richness of human experience in its manifold levels: individual, group, social, political, physiological, cognitive, affective, imaginal, artistic, spiritual, etc. (Resnick et al. 2001). For an illustration as applied to personality, Maslow's (1987) study on the characteristics of self-actualizing people entailed a qualitative analysis in which he extracted themes from interviews and biographies to develop a list of their common attributes.

### Not One-Sided

Although many humanistic psychologists gravitate toward qualitative methods, it should be noted that they do not eschew quantification and that they encourage competence in multiple methods of inquiry. To illustrate, Rogers' clinical research (see 1961/1995), the original empirically-supported treatment, drew from statistical analyses of observations of clients' movement toward self-congruence. Maslow's (1987) needs hierarchy was developed based on qualitative analysis of extant theory and empirical research in conjunction with quantitative studies he had conducted during his early career. It is crucial to note that both theories were developed as an outcome of research (not a priori to it), and Rogers and Maslow acknowledged the need for the theories to be further tested and revised as appropriate (see Frick 1971).

Thus, both qualitative and quantitative methods are considered necessary but incomplete on their own, and it is assumed as given among humanistic psychologists that phenomena and their associated research questions should drive the method. Quantitative methods are maximally

useful when there are clearly discernable categorical boundaries between phenomena and their context *and* when standardization is necessary; on the other hand, qualitative research is better suited to subtler and more complex phenomena and contexts that require description. The two also can complement each other in mixed-methods designs. Furthermore, this approach to research also underlies an individualized, humanistic approach to personality assessment – in which reported and observed life experiences are treated as primary data while test data, norms, and related research/theories are regarded as tools for collaborative dialogue and exploration.

### Influence

As a result of the efforts of humanistic psychologists, psychology has moved beyond being merely the science of behavior to also including the study of the meanings of personal experience and behavior. Qualitative inquiry has become increasingly legitimized in conventional psychology, with training in qualitative methods now included as a required component of graduate training and increasing numbers of qualitative studies presented at psychology conferences and published in its peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, the research division of the APA has expanded to include a subsection devoted to qualitative inquiry, and APA's policy on evidence-based clinical practice has been expanded to include the contributions of qualitative methods. Furthermore, research into creativity and consciousness has become embraced by conventional psychologists – with a division of APA devoted to the former – largely due to humanistic psychologists' emphasis on their place in the study of the healthy personality.

### Critiques and Counter-Critiques

This section provides an overview of the strengths and limitations of the humanistic perspective. The section begins with a summary of the critique of humanistic psychology typically provided by conventional psychologists, followed by a dialogue with that critique.



### Traditional Critique

A sampling of textbooks in introductory psychology, personality theory, and critical thinking in psychology generally suggests that the strengths of the humanistic perspective include its innovative approach which helped move psychology past the theoretical dogma of Freud and which provided research-based explanations of the therapy process and its outcomes (e.g., increased self-congruence and creativity) that have been successfully replicated. In addition, humanistic psychology has been acknowledged for its focus on prevention (vs. intervention), which influenced not only psychology but also the fields of education, parenting, and business management and for popularizing psychological principles in society at large.

With regard to its limitations, Schneider et al. (2015) have grouped the criticisms of the humanistic perspective into three principal categories of concern, all of which seem to stem from humanistic psychology's focus on the integrity of the individual. First, some academics – typically operating from a natural science perspective – regard humanistic psychology as undisciplined, impractical, and therefore worthy of obsolescence. They argue that, with its emphasis on subjectivity, the humanistic perspective provides only impressionistic descriptions without precision and specificity and that at the clinical level it does not offer standardized, stepwise techniques/procedures. At the research level, it is seen as overly philosophical with ambiguous constructs not conducive to scientific verifiability via falsification.

Second, others believe that humanistic psychology's focus on what is distinctively human and fulfilling is shortsighted and indulgent. Humanistic psychology's deliberate "openness to everything" (Arons 1999, p. 196) has left it vulnerable to stereotypes that associate it with sloppy eclecticism and with the excesses of the 1960s–1970s counterculture and therefore to being criticized as promoting narcissism; as being simplistic, naïve, and overly optimistic; and, at best, as more relevant for therapy than for hardnosed psychological research.

Third, still others contend that humanistic psychology's individualism is oppressive in a multicultural, global society insofar as humanity has come to be conceptualized as a social construction and fulfillment as a relative value – thus rendering the notion of global transcendence of self and environment impossible. Humanistic psychology has been criticized as not having an explicit construct against selfishness (i.e., although social interest is included in the definition of *self-actualization*, it is not explicitly referred to as such; consequently, it remains biased toward a Western worldview). This leads to criticisms of moral relativism and even of elitism and colonialism.

### Responses

Humanistic psychologists have responded that many of these criticisms are based on "negative stereotypes and misinformation" (Elkins 2009, p. 268). Indeed, many of the criticisms are generally unfounded insofar as they reflect either (a) reliance on secondary sources (which are prone to the problems of an academic "telephone game") without appropriately consulting the original writings of humanistic psychologists; (b) incomplete readings of the original primary texts without accounting for the progress/evolution in humanistic theorizing since the mid-1960s; or (c) focus on popular writings by humanistic psychologists but bypassing their more substantial theoretical and research scholarship (Patterson and Joseph 2007).

More specifically, the criticism that humanistic psychology is unscientific tends to overlook (a) the traditional natural scientific work of founding humanistic psychologists like Maslow and Rogers and (b) the commitment of humanistic psychologists to developing phenomenological methods out of a passion to be not less but "more empirical – that is, more respectful of actual human phenomena" (May 1983, p. 127). Thus, the criticisms arguably reflect the *pre/trans fallacy* (Wilber 2000), the tendency to confuse post-rational thinking for pre-rational because both are transrational/transpersonal. Several of the founders of humanistic psychology have been described as ahead of their time, and their

contributions to psychology have subsequently become embraced and regarded as given within psychology. For example, humanistic psychology's emphasis on holistic, dialectical, and systemic thinking paved the way for developmental psychology's resolution of the nature/nurture debate and for principles that are now standard fare in lifespan development (e.g., attachment, parenting styles, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, Kohlberg's/Gilligan's moral development models) as well as the replacement of the categorical emphasis of the twentieth-century psychology with dimensional perspectives at the clinical level.

Next, regarding criticism of humanistic psychology based upon mistaking the problematic popular implementation of fragmentary principles of humanistic psychology for the greater intellectual contributions of its founders, it is worth noting that several of the founding humanistic psychologists (e.g., Maslow 1987) expressed concern that their concepts had been misunderstood and inappropriately reified by the counterculture's shortsightedness. That said, the accusations of humanistic perspective promoting narcissism overlook the founders' emphasis on social interest and self-sacrifice as aspects of self-actualization as well as humanistic psychologists' focus on social justice (Schneider et al. 2015). Meantime, the accusations of naivety and over-optimism overlook the revisions of the humanistic perspective based on the existentialists' input in order to better account for the psychology of evil and the social conditions that promote humans' destructive behavior. Finally, the criticism that humanistic psychology has more of a place in therapy than research ignores the rigor of Rogers' empirical studies, which not only demystified and legitimized the effectiveness of psychotherapy during the Eysenck era but also paved the way for today's evidence-based focus on the power of the therapeutic relationship as a common factor across theoretical traditions.

Finally, concerning the criticism of humanistic psychology as being oppressive, primary-source humanistic texts (e.g., Combs 1999; Maslow 1999) emphasize that individuals with healthy personalities perceive themselves as competent and effective in ways appropriate for their culture.

In addition, humanistic psychologists emphasize the often-unheeded adaptive qualities available within marginalized populations. Furthermore, this criticism overlooks the wealth of humanistic literature involving multiculturalism, cross-cultural studies, and gender studies (Schneider et al. 2015), which arose out of its constructivist focus.

Taking these arguments together, Wertz (1998) observed that conventional psychologists who present humanistic psychology as a revival of the humanities in psychology with a sophisticated alternative philosophy of science that integrates traditional psychological theory/research with new orientations/techniques for therapy and/or new methods/topics for research tend to be more receptive to its contributions. In addition, those who look beyond the seminal but ultimately incomplete contributions of Maslow and Rogers – i.e., also acknowledge the contributions of the existential, transpersonal, and constructivist movements as part of humanistic psychology – also tend to be more supportive. In contrast, those who associate humanistic psychology with the worst of the 1960s and with efforts to disrupt the status quo tend to be more antagonistic, minimizing humanistic psychology's greater contributions and emphasizing negative evaluations. In addition, they tend to critique humanistic theorizing as if it was a priori rather than appropriately treating it as phenomenological.

## Summary

The humanistic perspective began as an alternative to the limitations of and disparities between experimentalism/behaviorism and psychoanalysis. It both subsumed the strengths and transcended the limitations of those traditions by using intersubjective methods to develop a growth-/process-oriented conceptualization of personality that had been inadequately available in the field. It drew from classical and contemporary literature, existential-phenomenological philosophy, Eastern wisdom, systems theory, Gestalt psychology, Goldstein's organismic theory, James' radical empiricism, and personality and

post-Freudian psychodynamic psychologies to develop a predominantly phenomenological approach to the science of personality. Following its establishment as the Third Force in American psychology at the mid-twentieth century, it further evolved by way of elaborations on its principles by the existential, transpersonal, and constructivist movements in psychology. Today, the humanistic perspective has become further refined based on an integration of these ontologies in conjunction with dialogue with parallel constructs in conventional psychology.

The humanistic approach to therapy involves a collaborative relationship between therapist and client designed to promote transformative change by cutting through clients' defenses and helping them forge a new worldview and behaviors that authentically express their core values. This approach has been influential in its contribution of relational factors and experiential techniques that are now considered the core ingredients of effective and sustainable therapy and of principles of change and case conceptualization that have influenced other systems of therapy (e.g., relational psychoanalysis, applied behavior analysis, third-wave CBT, narrative therapy, etc.).

The humanistic approach to research draws from existential-phenomenological philosophy as its basis for descriptive qualitative methods that supplement the quantitative methods valued by the natural science model of psychology in order to broaden the foundation for psychology as a human science faithful to its subject matter. Humanistic psychology has been influential in introducing and legitimizing qualitative methods and the study of creativity and consciousness in psychology. This approach to research also forms the basis of a humanistic approach to personality assessment.

In general, the strengths of humanistic psychology include its innovativeness and its degree of influence on psychology and society. Its limitations involve its focus on individuality, which renders it incompatible with the natural science model valued by conventional psychologists as well as prone to associations with its problematic

popular implementation by the 1960s–1970s counterculture and to accusations of Western bias. However, these criticisms tend to reflect incomplete and/or inaccurate readings of primary humanistic texts as well as an antiquated view of the humanistic perspective.

The humanistic perspective emphasizes the individualized qualities of optimal well-being and the use of creative potential to benefit others, as well as the relational conditions that promote those qualities as the outcomes of healthy development. Rather than conceptualize personality as a fixed structure, set of quantifiable traits, or self-concept, it holistically/systemically portrays the person *qua* self as continually evolving and as uniquely situated in sociocultural and eco-psycho-spiritual contexts. It assumes that optimally functioning people are consciously aware, responsibly free to make choices in accordance with their values, goal-directed, meaning-making, and creative in relation to their experience.

## Conclusion

The principal contributions of the humanistic perspective on personality are its (a) holistic model for conceptualizing the person/self from the standpoint of a unique, contextually-situated dynamic process that transcends the limitations of static, normative, categorical constructs and their risk of overgeneralizations; (b) inclusiveness – not intended to replace existing systems and methods of psychology and their theories of personality but rather to complement and supplement them; (c) focus on conditions that are conducive to healthy personality (i.e., prevention) versus diagnosis and treatment of pathology (i.e., intervention); and (d) its aforementioned contributions both to psychology (e.g., therapy, development, research) and to society (e.g., focus on personalism in an era of standardization and technocracy, Schneider et al. 2015). Accentuation of humanistic psychology's connections with and contributions to personality psychology – with their shared conceptualizations of health and human

fulfillment – provides a comprehensive frame of reference and meta-perspective for psychology as a whole.

## Cross-References

### *First-Wave (Third Force) Humanistic Psychology*

- *Maslow:*
  - ▶ [B-Love](#)
  - ▶ [Hierarchy of Needs](#)
  - ▶ [Peak Experience](#)
  - ▶ [Self-Actualization](#)
  - ▶ [Self-Actualizing Creativity](#)
  - ▶ [Values](#)
- *Rogers:*
  - ▶ [Actual Self](#)
  - ▶ [Congruence/Incongruence](#)
  - ▶ [Fully Functioning Person](#)
  - ▶ [Person-Centered Therapy](#)
  - ▶ [Personal Growth](#)
  - ▶ [Self-Disclosure](#)
  - ▶ [Self-Discrepancies](#)

### *Second Wave (Existential)*

- ▶ [Existential Approaches to Personality](#)

## References

- Angus, L., Watson, J. C., Elliott, R., Schneider, K., & Timulak, L. (2014). Humanistic psychotherapy research 1990–2015: From methodological innovation to evidence-supported treatment outcomes and beyond. *Psychotherapy Research, 25*, 330–347. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2014.989290>.
- Arons, M. M. (1999). Self, multiple selves, and the illusion of separate selfhood. *The Humanistic Psychologist, 27*, 187–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873267.1999.9986904>.
- Bühler, C. (1971). Basic theoretical concepts of humanistic psychology. *American Psychologist, 26*, 378–386. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0032049>.
- Cloninger, C. R., Svrakic, D. M., & Przybeck, T. R. (1993). A psychobiological model of temperament and character. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 50*, 975–990. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.1993.01820240059008>.
- Criswell, E. (2003). A challenge to humanistic psychology in the 21st century. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 43*, 42–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167803043003004>.
- Elkins, D. N. (2009). Why humanistic psychology lost its power and influence in American psychology: Implications for advancing humanistic psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 49*, 267–291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167808323575>.
- Hoffman, L., Stewart, S., Warren, D. M., & Meek, L. (2015). Toward a sustainable myth of self: An existential response to the postmodern condition. In K. J. Schneider, J. F. Pierson, & J. F. T. Bugental (Eds.), *Handbook of humanistic psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 105–133). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Jourard, S. (1974). *Healthy personality: An approach from the view of humanistic psychology*. New York: Macmillan.
- Maddi, S. R., Khoshaba, D. M., Harvey, R. H., Fazel, M., & Resurreccion, N. (2011). The personality construct of hardiness, V: Relationships with the construction of existential meaning in life. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 51*, 369–388. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167810388941>.
- Maltby, J., Wood, A. M., Day, L., & Pinto, D. (2012). The position of authenticity within extant models of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences, 52*, 269–273. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.10.014>.
- Patterson, T. G., & Joseph, S. (2007). Person-centered personality theory: Support from self-determination theory and positive psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 47*, 117–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167806293008>.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2015). The self and humanistic psychology. In K. J. Schneider, J. F. Pierson, & J. F. T. Bugental (Eds.), *Handbook of humanistic psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 87–104). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Resnick, S., Warmoth, A., & Serlin, I. A. (2001). The humanistic psychology and positive psychology connection: Implications for psychotherapy. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 41*, 73–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167801411006>.
- Schneider, K. J. (2015). Rediscovering awe: A new front in humanistic psychology, psychotherapy, and society. In K. J. Schneider, J. F. Pierson, & J. F. T. Bugental (Eds.), *Handbook of humanistic psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 73–81). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Taylor, E. (1991). William James and the humanistic tradition. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 31*, 56–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167891311006>.
- Wertz, F. J. (1998). The role of the humanistic movement in the history of psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 38*, 42–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221678980381006>.

## Recommended Reading

- Allport, G. W. (1955). *Becoming: Basic considerations for a psychology of personality*. New Haven: Yale.
- Barrell, J. H., Aanstoos, A., Richards, A. C., & Arons, M. (1987). Human science research methods. *Journal of*

- Humanistic Psychology*, 27, 424–457. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167887274004>.
- Bland, A. M., & DeRobertis, E. M. (2018). Humanistic psychology. In D. S. Dunn (Ed.), *Oxford bibliographies in psychology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Combs, A. W. (1999). *Being and becoming: A field approach to psychology*. New York: Springer.
- DeCarvalho, R. J. (1991). *The founders of humanistic psychology*. New York: Praeger.
- Frankl, V. E. (1978). *The unheard cry for meaning: Psychotherapy and humanism*. New York: Washington Square.
- Frick, W. (1971). *Humanistic psychology: Interviews with Maslow, Murphy, and Rogers*. Columbus: Merrill.
- Giorgi, A. (1970). *Psychology as a human science: A phenomenologically based approach*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Maslow, A. H. (1987). *Motivation and personality* (3rd ed.). New York: HarperCollins.
- Maslow, A. H. (1999). *Toward a psychology of being* (3rd ed.). New York: Wiley.
- May, R. (1983). *The discovery of being*. New York: Norton.
- Rogers, C. R. (1995). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. (Original work published 1961).
- Schneider, K. J., & Krug, O. T. (2010). *Existential-humanistic therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Schneider, K. J., Pierson, J. F., & Bugental, J. F. T. (Eds.). (2015). *Handbook of humanistic psychology* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral psychology: Consciousness, spirit, psychology, therapy*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wertz, F. J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L. M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis*. New York: Guilford.
- Yalom, I. D. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. New York: Basic.