

A Brief Comment on Humanistic Psychology and Education

Prelude....

In this short paper I am raising certain questions about Humanistic Psychology - both in theory and application (especially application to selected educational topics such as counselling, learning, personal development, educational goals and the functions of education in present-day society). My purpose in writing this paper is to stimulate discussion and reaction, [within Division 32] and, possibly, to provoke a more detailed project on one or several of the issues I outline in the following paragraphs. I am not pretending to offer a systematic, coherent "position" of my own; I do intend to provoke discussion.

A certain dissatisfaction....

For some years I have been attracted to, and influenced by, humanistic ideas. I frankly admit that my own formal education was incredibly deficient in this respect so that I have found it necessary to do quite a lot of self-study. Several years ago I published an article entitled "Educating the Educators" in the Canadian Journal of Education. The main ideas in the article were drawn from Jung, Heidegger and Assagioli. However, the response to it from colleagues was something less than exhilarating.

In the meantime I have continued my own self-education, attempting to fill in the rather vast gaps in my own understanding, especially so far as humanistic psychology and related humanistic disciplines are concerned. As I have continued my research, I have experienced a persistent dissatisfaction which I will now try to express.

First, I have discovered that psychology is only one of several "social science" disciplines within which can be found the "humanistic"

impulse. In addition to humanistic psychology, there is also humanistic sociology, humanistic geography, humanistic anthropology, and, possibly, humanistic economics (e.g., "small is beautiful" economics).

However, what I have not discovered in my search is a work (or works) which enables one to grasp the compelling values (virtues) of a humanistic orientation [by orientation I mean historical account, epistemology, research methods and examples of applications, in detail] to psychological (and social) phenomena in general; nor with reference to educational topics specifically.

I have unearthed a large conglomeration of writings from the extremely esoteric [Being and Time, for example] to the unbelievable exoteric [I'll mention no titles but here I refer to the vast flood of "Far out, man! Let your energy flow! Get laid back and feel your way to heaven, right now!" literature which is upon us like a tidal wave.

Some possible projects....

I suspect that hidden amongst the burgeoning pile of humanistic psychology writings which range along the eso-exoteric dimension [tending to heap up at the two extremes] there is sufficient reasoning, evidence and "creative deviance" to ground rather substantial discussions on topics such as those outlined below:

1. A well-documented and fairly detailed account of the intellectual precursors to contemporary humanistic psychology: thinkers and their ideas under such subtopics as:
 - a. Broad outlines of humanistic scholarship - Erasmus to the present
 - b. Existential thought - Pascal to the present
 - c. Phenomenology - Hegel to the present
 - d. Depth psychology
 - e. Emancipatory Thinkers - Frankfurt School, especially Habermas; also Wilhelm Reich
 - f. Outstanding recent contributors: Horney, Buhler, Allport, Maslow, Jourard, etc.
 - g. Current contributors: Rogers, May, Rychlak, M.B. Smith (?), etc.

2. An elucidation of the similarities and differences between humanistic psychology and other main contemporary humanistic disciplines such as:
 - a. Liberal humanism represented by such thinkers as Anatole France, John Dewey, Charles Beard, Thomas Mann and Margaret Mead.
 - b. Marxian humanism: Hegel, Marx, G. Novack, Paci, and dialectical psychology (late K. Riegel)
 - c. Religious humanism: P. Blanshard, J.H. Randall and such societies as Unitarian - Universalist denomination, American Humanist Association and Ethical Culture Societies.
 - d. Humanistic Social Science:
 - i. Association for Humanistic Sociology: C.P.C. Flynn, A. Mc. Lee [Humanity and Society]
 - ii. Society on Anthropology and Humanism
 - iii. Humanistic Geography
 - e. Literary Humanism: the list of thinkers here is, of course, enormous, but two good contemporary examples are Lewis Mumford and the late Lionel Trilling - for example, his study: Sincerity and Authenticity.

To summarize the above listing, I believe that Humanistic Psychology is in need of a concise yet detailed intellectual stock-taking which would serve as a substantial framework from which individuals interested in a wide variety of applied topics such as learning, counselling, psychotherapy, etc., could research and theorize.

3. Research methods and examples. There is a literature on "humanistically" oriented research methods in both psychology and sociology. It is my impression that qualitative methods have been more extensively applied in sociology (ethnomethodology, existential sociology, phenomenological sociology, humanistic sociology, etc.) and, to my knowledge, the most detailed text on qualitative methods to appear so far is that of Bogden, R. and S. Taylor, Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods, Wiley, 1973. (Also Douglas, J. Investigative Social Research, Sage, 1976).

More specifically keyed to educational topics is the work of Paul Colaizzi; for example, his chapters, "Psychological Research as the Phenomenologist Sees It", and "Learning and Existence" in Valle, R. and

M. King, Existential - Phenominological Alternatives for Psychology, Oxford, 1978 are useful examples and provide guidelines for the researcher attempting to employ a phenomenological method.

The writings and research of academic phenomenologists are generally so abstruse and esoteric as to quickly discourage all but the most dedicated reader. While existential thought has provided an immensely important resistance to the nihilistic onslaught of physical science methods applied to human life, they have either neglected or disdained to develop research projects appropriate to an existential orientation.

Perhaps then, it would be helpful at this point to carefully review the "humanistic" (qualitative) research methods (with concrete examples of application) which are in use in:

- a. Sociology,
- b. anthropology,
- c. phenomenology,
- d. humanistic psychology,
- e. education,

and then prepare a summarization and explication of those methods and procedures which are most applicable to various "educational" topics such as learning, interpersonal influence, negotiation, the function of conversation in education, when is "helping", "helpful", etc. Of great importance, I believe, is the collection and presentation of completed research projects complete with theoretical and practical discussion and critique. I believe that there is a significant number of researchers in several areas of psychology as well as education, who would experiment with humanistic research approaches given appropriate stimulation and instruction in such approaches.

Further, there are various researchers who are combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Two such examples (and I'm sure there must be many more) are the Britisher Lian Hudson and Ian Mitroff (The Subjective Side of Science).

As a concluding note. I hasten to add that numerous works (both articles and books) in humanistic psychology have addressed issues which I have outlined in this paper. For example, Buhler and Allen in their Introduction to Humanistic Psychology have briefly touched on the topic of intellectual precursors to humanistic psychology. Also, Rychlak has developed a tabulation of 100 recognized thinkers in Western History with reference to the type of explanatory [cause] constructs they advocated. While his The psychology of rigorous humanism certainly has many admirable features, it does not meet the need I believe we have for an intellectual stock-taking in humanistic psychology.

So far as humanistic psychology and education are concerned, there are a number of worthwhile books [for example, L.E. Simpson's Humanistic education: an interpretation] yet a substantial grounding in humanistic discipline remains to be done. Also the promotion of humanistic research methods applied to education together with specific detailed examples might stimulate more publishable projects. I believe that what is needed are expanded and more detailed presentations on these and other humanistic psychology/education topics. How can we proceed?