

BA-II (H) Paper-IV: Systems in Psychology

Chapter 7: Topic: Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology is a perspective that emphasizes looking at the whole individual and stresses concepts such as free will, self-efficacy, and self-actualization. Rather than concentrating on dysfunction, humanistic psychology strives to help people fulfill their potential and maximize their well-being.

Humanistic psychology, also often referred to as humanism emerged during the 1960s as a reaction to the psychoanalysis and behaviorism that dominated psychology at the time. Psychoanalysis was focused on understanding the unconscious motivations that drive behavior while behaviorism studied the conditioning processes that produce behavior.

Humanist thinkers felt that both psychoanalysis and behaviorism were too pessimistic, either focusing on the most tragic of emotions or failing to take into account the role of personal choice.

However, it is not necessary to think of these three schools of thought as competing elements. Each branch of psychology has contributed to our understanding of the human mind and behavior. Humanistic psychology added yet another dimension that takes a more holistic view of the individual.

Major Focus:

As it developed, humanistic psychology focused on each individual's potential and stressed the importance of growth and self-actualization. The fundamental belief of humanistic psychology is that people are innately good and that mental and social problems result from deviations from this natural tendency.

Humanism also suggests that people possess personal agency and that they are motivated to use this free will to pursue things that will help them achieve their full potential as human beings. This need for fulfillment and personal growth is a key motivator of all behavior.

People are continually looking for new ways to grow, to become better, to learn new things, and to experience psychological growth and self-actualization.

Brief History

The early development of humanistic psychology was heavily influenced by the works of a few key theorists, especially Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Other prominent humanist thinkers included Rollo May and Erich Fromm.

In 1943, Maslow described his hierarchy of needs in "A Theory of Human Motivation" published in *Psychological Review*.¹ Later during the late 1950s, Abraham Maslow, and other psychologists held meetings to discuss developing a professional organization devoted to a more humanist approach to psychology. They agreed that topics such as self-actualization, creativity, individuality, and related topics were the central themes of this new approach.

In 1951, Carl Rogers published *Client-Centered Therapy*, which described his humanistic, client-directed approach to therapy. In 1961, the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* was established. It was also in 1961 that the American Association for Humanistic Psychology was formed and by 1971, humanistic psychology became an APA division.

In 1962, Maslow published *Toward a Psychology of Being*, in which he described humanistic psychology as the "third force" in psychology. The first and second forces were behaviorism and psychoanalysis respectively.

Impact

The humanist movement had an enormous influence on the course of psychology and contributed new ways of thinking about mental health. It offered a new approach to understanding human behaviors and motivations and led to developing new techniques and approaches to psychotherapy.

Some of the major ideas and concepts that emerged as a result of the humanist movement include an emphasis on things such as:

- Self-concept
- Hierarchy of needs

- Unconditional positive regard
- Free will
- Client-centered therapy
- Self-actualization
- Fully functioning person
- Peak experiences

Strengths and Criticisms

One of the major strengths of humanistic psychology is that it emphasizes the role of the individual. This school of psychology gives people more credit in controlling and determining their state of mental health.

It also takes environmental influences into account. Rather than focusing solely on our internal thoughts and desires, humanistic psychology also credits the environment's influence on our experiences.

Humanistic psychology helped remove some of the stigma attached to therapy and made it more acceptable for normal, healthy individuals to explore their abilities and potential through therapy.

While humanistic psychology continues to influence therapy, education, healthcare, and other areas, it has not been without some criticism.

Humanistic psychology is often seen as too subjective; the importance of individual experience makes it difficult to objectively study and measure humanistic phenomena. How can we objectively tell if someone is self-actualized? The answer, of course, is that we cannot. We can only rely upon the individual's own assessment of their experience.

Another major criticism is that observations are unverifiable; there is no accurate way to measure or quantify these qualities.

Conclusions:

Today, the concepts central to humanistic psychology can be seen in many disciplines including other branches of psychology, education, therapy, political movements, and other

areas. For example, transpersonal psychology and positive psychology both draw heavily on humanist influences.

The goals of humanistic psychology remain as relevant today as they were in the 1940s and 1950s. Humanistic psychology strives to empower individuals, enhance well-being, push people toward fulfilling their potential and improve communities all over the world.

Source : Psychology by Baron
