

# The Legacy of Maslow and Rogers by Mike Arons

This discussion on the future of humanistic psychology is timely. So much so that I have thematized my own contribution to the debate largely in the dimension of time. To move wisely into our future we'd do best to start understanding our legacy.

While we peer out at the future, we are all sitting here now in this Division 32 sponsored program because we have a coherent past. Now, that past is variously characterized in most history of psychology texts. Yet it is not at all certain for me that the task of knowing ourselves in the future is more difficult than understanding ourselves in the past. In fact, unless we can contextualize and embrace our past we will flail about blindly into our future.

Humanistic psychology has had a particularly difficult time relating itself to time. At its historical roots in European existentialism and at its currently flowering branches in transpersonal psychology, there was - and is - only NOW. Speaking historically, the existential NOW was largely a reaction against the arrogance of a rationalism - such as that of Hegel - which claimed for the mind that capability of grasping all meaning - past, present, and future. The eternal now - that Divine perspective from the God within us, and which extends far beyond the mind's capacity to grasp - is that supremely valued by transpersonal psychologists. In between the existential and transpersonal NOW - in that domain called American Humanistic Psychology - there is a muddle of time.

Maslow wrote "Only science can progress" even as he exposed the sterility of his scientific colleagues and glorified the insights of poets, artists, philosophers, and the so-called "pre-scientific" humanities. But, for Maslow and all of humanistic psychology, it was not only science which could progress. It was within each person to progress, to actualize their fullest personal and human potentials. The self-actualizer achieved a NOW or Taoist perception, but by this evolved psychologically and spiritually towards the best of his or her potentials.

What is even more striking about American humanistic psychology's tie with time is that it came to lean more firmly on the past for inspiration and support as it progressed towards the eternal Now. While the existentialists often contextualized their writings in the historical thought they were reacting against, their reaction itself was largely original in the West. Maslow, however, fully acknowledges his dialogue with the great Western thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, or Jefferson, or with Freud and the neo-psychoanalytic school such as Rank, Adler, or Homey. As his latter writings evolved he discovered Lao Tzu and the great past Oriental thinkers. No dimension of the humanistic movement has leaned more heavily on the past - East and West - than the progressively advanced transpersonal psychology. From Taoist writings to those of the Hassidics, the Sufis, the Cathare, or to the uncovering of Shamanist practices, in the excavation job performed by transpersonal psychologists, no ancient esoteric secret has been left unturned.

Tell the student of humanistic or transpersonal psychology that these uncoverings of the deep past are less progressive than a definitive study on some aspect of reinforcement theory or even of the unlocking of the double helix by Crick and Watson or ask such a student if he or she would prefer to study at the feet of Lao Tzu or the greatest living scientist and you'll see how uncertain

is the term progress these days. Humanistic psychology has helped to create this confusion and is also a principle victim of it.

The temporal confusion, I suggest, sits at the heart of our current quandary about our future and has several bases which if understood can aid us in a wiser discernment of our future. In trying to understand these, allow me the license to switch back and forth and all over the place which I've called the time dimension.

Right now, in 1988, humanistic psychology is emerging from its own long dark night. After the glory years of the '60s and early '70s, we and the human potentials movement were victims of "The Big Chill." Many of us feel the socio-historical climate is now becoming conducive to a thaw, to be followed by the big melt and then the big flow. Like a Rip Van Winkle, we look about the world of the '80s and ask who and where we are, what hit us? Just as we helped change everything so radically in the sixties, the eighties plucked us, shoved us in the freezer and turned to a radically different diet. Unless we count Ronald Reagan, the Aquarian, as the fulfillment of Aquarian age, there is not much in the current landscape which humanistic psychologists or the human potentials movement would recognize or endorse.

At first glance we see that cognitive psychology, not our vision, became psychology's new center of gravity. In some recent history of psychology texts we are but an asterisk. Membership in Division 32 has been stagnant for years. The Association for Humanistic Psychology is beset by problems not least of which is an overabundance of supply-side commercialism. Transpersonal psychology thrives in the ether and clings, for its grounding, to quantum physics – which, like psychology, tends to reject its advances. Meanwhile, we needn't strain our eyes to see the distorted ends of our glorious past everywhere in the society of greed and mean centeredness. "Self help" became a new version of the Protestant-capitalistic ethic, ostensibly grounded in the biblical "God helps those who help themselves." I say ostensibly because according to one of my students, a scholar of comparative religions, those words come from the Koran. Could the Protestant work ethic be based on the Koran?

How much of this shock we experience as we prepare for our second coming out party, is due to the way we've treated history? This has been the complaint of our European colleagues. The existentialists, mostly Europeans, rejected history but not the sources of history and culture which they found in creatively bringing these back to life through the power of meaning. They wrote under the lashes of history and from the heart of the humanities. They destroyed in order to recover and rediscover the fullest meaning of life. Like Camus, they gave new meaning to the ancient Myth of Sisyphus. They knew their place in history and culture - as does Rollo May, when he asks "What contributions like the Sistine Chapel or Florence will humanistic psychology leave to its time and culture?"

American humanistic psychology was something different. It began in a psychology which had proudly divorced itself from philosophy and the humanities a century earlier. Though our European friends and allies kept trying to remind us of the long humanistic tradition throughout the West, we acted, for the most part, as if we were taking off from scratch, operating in a vacuum, and solely and uniquely discovering what it meant to be human. The American humanistic movement was very American. So much so that AHP sent groups to Iceland - land of the great mythical and mystical poets - to reveal the word of Abe Maslow and Carl Rogers. And we could not recognize in our hubris of innocence the look of appreciation in the eyes of our

good hosts - that Americans were finally opening the door, a crack, to the best of our common humanness.

In America, where life itself is equated with progress, the tendency to keep moving farther out, as Maslow put it, to the Farther Reaches of Human Nature, was irresistible. But this set up a dichotomy between process and result and created internal conflicts within the larger historical movement. Just as humanistic psychology had done with existentialism, transpersonal psychology as a movement saw itself as a step, stage, or dimension beyond - or farther out than - a person-centered humanistic psychology. This, despite the fact that Jung, coiner of the term "transpersonal," viewed it all as individuating Self. In some cases the transpersonal psychology movement saw itself in an antagonistic relationship with existentialism. Just as Rollo May was rejecting the transcendent stress in transpersonal psychology. This rupture, although virtually all Eastern philosophies start with recognition of the existential "absurd" and end with the "cosmic joke."

Here, in developing our Third and Fourth Forces, we borrowed from the progressive model of science and technology and in this progressive process to transcend polarities and become more holistic, became all the more caught up in newer polarities and newer splits between means and ends.

Which of the West's or East's great thinkers was ever "cognitive" and not "affective," "intellectual" and not "experiential," purely "mechanistic" and not "spiritual," and as Barron put it, "adamantly sane" and not "occasionally crazy"? Yet in our flash of insight we have stumbled from dichotomy to dichotomy of these sorts.

This tendency to fall into dichotomies - which in principle we reject as artificially dualistic - and to embrace humanistic techniques while reacting against technology, points to the way humanistic psychology has been straddling and yet living out the idioms of the extreme oppositions of our Western tradition: Science and Faith.

Without understanding the historical relationship in the West of religion to science we flip-flop from the worldviews of one to the worldviews of the other, or apply these in an inappropriate mixture. Why has humanistic and transpersonal psychology been so technique-oriented when its initial reaction was against the abuses of technology? Here we have a reaction against science-tech while playing into its idiom of "indirect salvation." The insight is transformed into a technique which we then have a specialist apply to us, usually at a good fee. Our values are revealed when we pay the technician much more than the author of the insight. Most places outside America, the author, more than the technician, is revered. Religion - at least most versions of Christianity - is different. Its model is "direct salvation." You don't have to defer your salvation until the technology is in place. The experience is a direct and deeply intimate one. Yet as different as are their models for salvation and, also because of this, Western Religion and Science are the most intimate kin and are mutually dependant on each other. Christianity is blind faith centered and handles reason and practical knowledge of the world rather poorly. Science does a fine job of the latter but in its particular mission, plays dumb to all experience which can't be measured. And so, between the extremes, we live in a void guided by authorities of the blind and the dumb.

Enter the unique historical role of the humanities in the West. These speak to the center of our humanness - to the kinship and conflict between religion and science, between our God and Man

sides, between - as the Renaissance humanists put it - spirit and nature. This is exactly the kinship conflict that the existentialists revealed, put into terms of freedom and determinism. It is a conflict which the creative process reveals put, as Barron does, in terms of the contradictory tendencies of the Genius or as Maslow does in terms of the dichotomies dealt with by his "self actualizing subjects."

Was Gabriel Marcel an existentialist, humanistic psychologist, or a transpersonal psychologist? Was Blaise Pascal right or left hemisphere? Long before this current distinction, he spoke of the two minds which guided his life - *l'esprit de geometrie* and *l'esprit de finesse* - one that disposed him towards science, the other toward the poetic. The very word mind - or *esprit* in French, *Geist* in German - speaks beyond something measurable by an I.Q. test. So the 1950s American studies on creativity which helped to get humanistic psychology off the ground were themselves largely a local reaction against a human mind reduced to a test score and a simplistic array of determinisms and reductionisms in which our adoration of science, in the name of its form of progress, had imprisoned us.

If Christianity at its moment of salvation is a-historical and science in its form of linear progress renders even its own history obsolescent, where in time are the humanities? By the model of sci-tech, TX-2 is a progressive advance over - i.e., renders obsolescent - TX-1 by virtue of precise criteria such as greater speed or shorter landing distance. This model of linear progress doesn't fit the humanities. We cannot say that Impressionism is better than cave drawing. But the humanities are characterized by another sort of progress which, I think, is much better suited to humanistic psychology. Impressionism is a new and different way of experiencing reality than cave drawing. One does not replace, but supplements the other as expanders of human consciousness. The humanities are horizontally progressive, opening all that it means to be human, including science and faith without being reduced to any. The process is one of deepening the human from within, of opening his or her personal and collective memories in the dual sense of cultural history and collective unconscious.

By the view I would like to propose, humanistic psychology has been a surrogate for a humanities undergoing a near death experience. Broadly, the humanities as a vital force were intimidated into subjugation by success-proffered meta-scientific thinkers such as Auguste Comte who tagged it a mere pre-science. The last nails were hammered into it by people like C.P. Snow in his *Two Culture* treatise.

Now we have entered into an age which - under the rubric "post-enlightenment" - recognizes the limits of science, just as this recognition at its popular level has helped to fill the fundamentalist churches. We can now see humanistic psychology as one of the intellectual forces which helped to bring about this period. What is this "post-enlightenment" period to be like? What fills the void left by our disillusionment with science or blind faith as the single answer to the human condition? This is what offers itself as the challenge to humanistic psychology in the '90s. Books like Alan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* encourage many at the universities to feel that a resurgence of the humanities is just around the corner. Together, existential-humanistic and transpersonal psychologies have much to offer in the way of leadership to this resurgence. We have brought the East and West together. We have shown that the past only lives and provides inspiration for the future when it is lived creatively and courageously. We can introduce the new humanities to a past it shunted, which Huxley and Wilber called the perennial

philosophy. We can bring poetry, art, and even science to life - like Florence and Venice - as a constant memory to be opened when anybody walks the streets of America. Leontiev and other Eastern European psychologists, inspired by Vygotsky, are showing us the path through the material incarnated creations of our culture to the trans-cultural and transpersonal we share at the heart of our humanness.

What of education and its perpetual crises? Teachers, like humanistic psychologists, have just passed through the long dark night and feel the pain of the humiliation - deserved or not - heaped upon them. This is where humanistic psychology can play a most worthy role, in helping the educator to dialogue between his or her mission and job which are now often in conflict.

There is a need right now for educator consciousness groups, like those which aided blacks and women to articulate the source of their pains. At what point did the educator choose that mission - which was noble in that it connected a personal touch of the good with what is historically and culturally recognized as good for humanity? What is the job doing to that mission and what are the symptoms of this conflict? And what of the students in a post-behavioristic world, who are now at least recognized by cognitive psychologists to have a built-in rather than scratched-on mind? How does the best of the teacher speak to the best of the student, through and beyond the mind? And what of the subject matter and curricula of school? What is the best of these to speak to the best of the student?

The field of Organizational Development has been one great success area for humanistic psychology, though highly prone to co-optment. Intuition is just now coming into its own in the business world as a recognition of its vital necessity in dealing with the incredible complexity pouring in upon us in the electronic age.

Therapy and counseling has been another humanistic success area. This is because without the restrictions of scientific contrivance, these therapies could speak - intimately and assuringly - to the best of the client's humanness. But this requires a therapist in touch with the best in him- or herself - or a relationship such as that fostered by Rogers - which encourages the best of both. Still, Rogers is not fully satisfying to the thinker. He ultimately came to encourage more use of phenomenology and hermeneutics, but he was no Merleau-Ponty or Paul Ricoeur. These are people who arrive at the best and most intimate within us through the rigors and imagination of the creative mind and who are capable of moving mountains with words and ideas. Here, psychology and psychologists need to lead yet also rejoin a resurgent humanities or risk drying up into superficiality or settling for a life of bought by "third party payments."

What of Academic psychology? We should not fear, but rather welcome the current dominance of Cognitive Psychology. At the minimum it is a step back to soul. But as we help it to open its own historical or microgenetic memory, it will discover there in the Platonic tradition, pre-cognition and in the Aristotelian one, extra-sensory perception. For the first always claimed a human potential which is greater than that given through the senses or reason. The second, Aristotle, always acknowledged that greater self but reminded Plato that the doorway to that greater self was through experience. Keats, as poets can do, related Plato and Aristotle more intimately when he wrote, "Truth is Beauty; Beauty, Truth."

We can, as Giorgi implores, bring a rigorous, logically reversible version of the humanities directly into psychology through the human sciences which include phenomenology and hermeneutics. But there is also great science which deals with the human from a natural

science approach. As in current physics, we must keep the science of psychology always moving towards that point where natural is not irrevocably distinguished from supernatural. Or, at least, keep ourselves centered where these - and not one or the other - define our humanness.