Chapter 6

A HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY: CARL. R. ROGERS
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Frank Milhollan and Bill E. Forisha, the authors of “From Skinner to Rogers; Contrasting Approaches to Education” in this part presents an overview of the other school of thought and its major contributors. I am going to present here a bird’s eye view for overall understanding:

A tradition in psychology is always there either to study psychology (the study of human or his behavior) as a ‘Natural Science’ using the empirical principles of natural sciences, or as a ‘Human Science’ using the principles of one’s own subjective thinking processes.

- Supporters of psychology as ‘natural science’ remained dominant, and the other group is objectors, but they always have not formed a unified group. Maslow developed the notion of ‘Third Force’ in psychology: the concept that both schools of thought i.e. ‘Behaviorism’ and ‘Phenomenology’ or objective or subjective viewpoint of human study are of equal importance, and there should be integrated effort to properly studying human behavior.

- Carl R. Rogers is prominent figure among supporters of ‘Third Force’. To some in this group it is not rational to capture the essence of man through pure objective or scientific way; for science can only reach the ‘obvious’ visible and measurable behavior which is only ‘trivial’ or unimportant, thus leaving out his ‘uniqueness’, ‘complexity’, and ‘unpredictability’ which is the most important one.

- Rogers wants a different conception of science—either a new type of science or a broader one that could also take into account one’s life experiences, feelings, meanings, and humor; and the techniques and procedures required for this are not found in natural sciences.

HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND
Frank Milhollan and Bill E. Forisha, the authors of “From Skinner to Rogers; Contrasting Approaches to Education” in chapter six discuss the progression of one school of thought behaviorism to another one i.e. phenomenology in the historical context. Here is the summary and key understanding of the chapter:

The two philosophical approaches delineated in the modern world by Leibnitz and Locke—the ‘nativistic’ or subjective and the ‘empiristic’ or the objective study of human behavior (psychology)

Differentiation of the two approaches paved the way for the ‘Third Force’ in psychology, that is, the ‘Humanistic’ approach which involves and or studies humans on both ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ approaches (one is ‘subjective’, other is ‘objective’, and third is ‘humanistic’ approach)

Common-sense approach began as opposed to empiristic observation. It supported and demonstrated the unity and coherence of all mental life through introspection. They viewed an individual was an active entity.

German ‘Faculty Psychology’ emphasized upon the ‘ultimate modes of psychical functioning’; it ended in the formulations of Kant.

Under the French idealism, Maine de Biran developed truly dynamic psychology. His concern was to find the self consciousness in the development of the child. This was a reaction against mechanistic approaches. The self was here being described as an experiencing agent, rather than nothing more than a recorder capable of registering a series of sequential experiences.

De Biran believed that the self becomes conscious of its own existence whenever a baby first begins to make adjustments to its external environment. The very first part of this process is primarily mechanical i.e. crying and moving of the limbs etc.

Rollo May supported that our (human’s) existence is both a subject and an object; we are both the actor and acted upon. To him, the first exercise of the will be the human infant was the actual cause of the development of self-consciousness.
Blaise Pascal (1623-62) a colleague of Descartes in mathematics and physics claimed about understanding human nature: ‘It is dangerous to show man too often that he is equal to beasts without showing him his greatness. It is also dangerous to show him too frequently his greatness without his baseness. It is yet more dangerous to leave him ignorant of both. But, it is very desirable to show him the two together.’

To find a middle ground in this continuing controversy David Ausubel wrote more extremely: ‘…since an individual’s behavior does in fact vary every time the situational context is altered, it must therefore be determined by the latter variable alone. It is hardly necessary to point out, however, that the demonstration of behavioral change associated with variability in one factor does not necessarily preclude the possibility that other variables are simultaneously operative. In fact, by simply reversing the picture, i.e., keeping the situation constant and varying the individuals exposed to it, once could just as easily emerge with the equally one-sided conclusion that only personality factors determine behavioral change.’

The conflict then evolved as the loyalty either to the subject matter under investigation (phenomenology) or to the method of investigation (behaviorism). Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century psychology was either studied as branch of natural science (empiricism) or a separate human science. However, in 1879 Wundt founded first psychological laboratory in Leipzig, Germany.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) defined the distinctive character of a human science: “there is no reason why the one sphere of knowledge should not be as thoroughly studied by philosophers as the other”. Dilthey pointed instead to a position between the natural sciences and art the rightful orientation of this disciplined study. He believed that Psychology as human science must deal with human world of meaning and values active mind, and free will. Unlike quantitative data of natural sciences, such human phenomenon cannot be removed from their historical context as within this context human action by free will is taken and human are thus responsible being for the act within the context according to their consciousness, free will and get the consequences.
For Dilthey, psychology as a natural science had nothing to say in respect to creative imagination, self-consciousness, self-sacrifice, and a sense of obligation, love, devotion, and sympathy. He desired that it could take the wisdom and insights of the poets and give them precise expression and a rigorous, systematic grounding; and it is the true heir of empiricist tradition. Carl Rogers have done the same: “Are we willing for the model and the methods of our science to emerge naturally from the problems of our science? Can we build a psychological science, or a behavioral science which grows out of the problems encountered in the study of the whole man in his subjective and objective being?

Giorgi points out that American psychologist William James—the founder of both behaviorism and humanist psychology—never achieved a unified viewpoint precisely because he was torn between meeting the demands for a system of psychology of the natural sciences and yet refusing to abandon the investigation of those kinds of phenomena—stream of consciousness, will, experience—relevant to psychology as a human science. James—according to Giorgi—conceded that psychology was only ‘the hope of a science’.

A basic premise of Gestalt theory is that the manner in which any particular object is perceived is a function of the total configuration or field in which the object is set. A perceptual field is more than just its specific parts, rather is the perception of relationships that make up the experience of an individual at any given moment—a modern version of pre-Socratic principle which denies the possibility of explaining wholes by a study of their constituent parts. Gestaltist Max Wertheimer in 1912 experimented: Light was thrown through a small slit arranged vertically. A moment later light through a second slit inclined some degrees to the right thrown. No actual movement of light was involved. But from the observer’s point of view light was perceived as having “fallen” from one position to another, or the movement of light falling was perceived.

Wertheimer was in protest against the general modern scientific movement form parts to whole, from elements to structures, from below to above. He used the term “Pragnanz”—the quality of self-fulfillment which is intrinsic in all structured totals.
This includes the cognitive and affective capacities of living systems as well. Total perception is never possible thus it is not pure objective but relative to objective reality.

A younger colleague of Wertheimer, Wolfgang Kohler experimented with apes and concluded that solutions to problems are found by a process of integration or insight, in which not a number of separate elements of the problem taken in series, but an integrated system of elements or clues, is responded to all at once. In America Gestalt psychology provided interesting insights and a direction for further research, whereas in German it was thought as a final or complete theoretical formulation. Nevertheless, Kurt Lewin’s ‘Field Theory’ included historical tracing of humanistic psychology (borrowed from physical sciences) involve:

1) A field is considered to be the totality of coexisting facts—external and internal—which are conceived of as mutually interdependent.

2) Behavior is a function of this field or ‘life space’ which exists at the moment behavior occurs (like Rogerian phenomenology).

3) Analysis begins with the situation as a whole (experience as it is given). The word phenomenal defined as that which perceived in contrast with that which is real.

Carl Rogers tends to define mental health as the congruence of the two. Psychological science is significant to explaining a given behavior which is perceived or experienced as orderly and meaningful at any given moment as opposed to objective reality. Behavior is determined thus by the inner experience of the organism. Therefore, phenomenology must be a science of person.

Rollo May, a contemporary of Rogers in humanist movement maintains that we can never have a science of man without considering such subjective categories as man’s inner being, its expression in action, and the meaning derived from action. May quotes Michael Polanyi, a professor in chemistry, medicine, and social sciences: “In the days when an idea could be silenced by showing that it was contrary to religion, theology was the greatest single source of fallacies. Today, when any human thought can
be discredited by branding it as unscientific, the power previously exercised by theology has passed over to science; hence science has become in its turn the greatest single source of error.”

For Sartre, man is a being of whom no essence can be finally affirmed, for such an essence would imply a permanent structure, contradictory to man’s power of transforming himself indefinitely—the human freedom and potentiality. He supports both Locke’s and Lebnitzian stand point. In ‘Existential Psychoanalysis’, Sartre maintains that man cannot be understood at all if we see in him only what our study of animal life permits us to see, or if we reduce him to naturalistic or mechanical determinisms. This is also the case if we reduce and separate him into instincts or sets of stimuli and responses, or in any other way consider the subject of our study apart from what constitutes his humanness—his ultimate freedom and responsibility.

- First, Sartre, like Dilthey and other phenomenologist, insists on understanding and describing as opposed to explaining.

- Second, he sees human existence as purposive. Human reality identifies and defines itself by the ends which it pursues, not by hypothetical causes in the past. Neither is it possible to live without purpose—to live simply to live. He insists that such purpose and meaning is derived not from any universal reality but from the concrete, particular realities of those situations called into existence by individual choice. The way of man is unique for each particular man because each man is unique and each is in a unique situation. German existentialist, Fredrich Nietzsche’s dialogue from ‘Thus Spake Zarathustra’: ‘This—is now my way—where is yours? Says Zarathustra. “Thus did I answer those who asked me ‘the way’. For ‘the way—it doth not exist!” Martin Heidegger, a contemporary German existentialist, also interprets Nietzsche’s famous proclamation, “God is dead!” in precisely these terms that there is no world of ideal essences and there should be focus on the world of the here and now.

- Finally, we should specifically emphasize the concept of ontology—the study of being and becoming. For him ‘psychology’ should aim at the rediscovery of the
original mode of existence in which an individual had chosen his being through examination of present and concrete situations. The subjective choice by which each person makes himself a person must be brought to light in a strictly objective form. (essence). Sartre agrees with the phenomenological position of the Gestaltists concerning wholes and their parts.

- His most famous statement, “I am my choices,” sums up what he means by this totality—an essence which entails both freedom and responsibility, both actuality and potentiality.

Existentialism goes back to Descartes, the view of human thought and behavior as having essentially an internal origin. In a symposium on existential psychology Abraham Maslow’s concerns were summed up by his colleague Gordon Allport stated: “Existentialism deepens the concerns that define the human condition. In so doing, it prepares the way for the first time for a psychology of mankind.”

Maslow and Allport, along with Rollow May have extensively written on existential psychology. They and Rogers worked as core group opposed behaviorism as the only true psychology and worked for humanistic approach of psychology.

According to Rogers, voices are saying: “the tunnel vision of behavior is not adequate to the whole range of human phenomena… and human behavior is in some significant ways, something more than the behavior of our laboratory animals.” He and his group had not turned aside from empirical research, rather they only desired a science which considers the whole person and which elevates this prerequisite over any particular concern for method.

Rogers—the supporter of ‘Third Force’ in psychology—described by his cohort, Rollo May, as being one of the two psychologists “who are widely known as the representatives of the two horns of this dilemma,”—the human dilemma, man as subject or man as object, B. F. Skinner, of course, being the other representative.