

## Toward Humanistic Bias: Social Concerns

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### ABSTRACT

The topic 'Toward Humanistic Bias' reflects this, interest in human beings, their problems, and their possible solutions. Humanistic bias, also reflects, this concern in humans and their well being, an interest which goes a little farther than a mere study of behaviour, the subject matter of psychology. The main aim of this paper is to examining the contemporary scene in psychological science.

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### The contemporary scene in psychological science

Every student of psychology knows that it was by a tacit agreement that the study of 'psyche (soul) was abandoned early and the 'mind, as distinct from brain. also discarded in favour of psychology as a study of 'experience and behaviour However, by a process of semantic somersault, 'experience was subsumed under behaviour For, it was, argued that experience after all was one form of behaviour and so the modern textbooks, carries, that definition. Accordingly, the books, treat topics like perceiving, learning motivation, memory, thinking and the like processes and round up with a chapter on personality, Further the term behaviour is used in such a broad sense that it may mean just any kind of individual or group behaviour. Psychology has indeed developed into a leviathan swallowing, almost every form of behaviour, since any activity of a living system could be called Behaviour say almost anything from eating ice cream to group dynamics.

The basic question, however, that psychology seeks to answer is Why people behave the way they do? And the usual answers put forth are that they are genetically, so structured, or they are so wired, to use the computer metaphor or they are so conditioned through learning, But it ignores the simple answer possible at the behavioural level without recourse to neuro-physiological reductionism, evolutionary and biological reductionism or Mentalistic (e.g. psycho-analytic), physical (e.g. computer/cognitive science) or socio-cultural constructions. It is rather unfortunate that the elementary fact, namely, that we behave the way we do, because we experience the environment in a particular way, has been ignored and escape routes to heredity, unconscious, learning and social conditioning favoured. Wolfgang Kohler had put forth this almost irrefutable argument in the opening pages of his Gestalt Psychology. It is, therefore, surprising that psychologist as an empirical scientist overlooked this elementary fact.

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Looked at from a different angle, the history of psychology is the story of a series of protests, as the graduate student knows, against the prevailing zeitgeist. Behaviourism revolted against structuralism for its lack of objectivity, the gestaltists protested against atomism in both structuralism and behaviourism. The humanistic psychologists disliked mechanistic determinism in all three of them. And the depth psychologists, say the psychoanalyst, considered such approaches superficial, for their limiting their investigations to what was available to the conscious mind and for ignoring the unconscious roots of behaviour. Those groomed in other social sciences like anthropology and sociology in particular were critical of the neglect of the social and cultural forces assailing the individual and restricting themselves to the physical and biological science models. Lately, this tribe of socially oriented psychologists has increased several fold, so much that the psychologist has ventured into other social science disciplines and poaching into fields like political science, economics, anthropology, sociology, business and industry, irrespective of the fact whether there are any takers. Of course, sometimes there is mutual back patting as well when talking of such problems as leadership, utility, cross-cultural issues, national character, organizational effectiveness and the like. Psychologists have ventured into fields where the discipline specialist has feared to tread in. Since the demise of the so-called 'schools' of psychology the socio-cultural explanation of behaviour of almost any kind, even the most intimate and Personal, can be offered because of the broad scope of social and cultural elements in a society. Most psychologists find it both attractive and convenient to become its votaries. Only a minority of the purists still cling to a study of the mental processes.

A cleavage, thus, took place around the middle of the present century among psychologists in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Harvard, for instance, split into the departments of psychology and of social relations. Anthropologists, sociologists, historians, social psychologists lined up on one side of the fence and experimental psychologist on the other, often refusing to talk to each other. A small group remained interested in investigating into the 'workings of the mind', exploring the processes and stages in the flow of information from sensory inputs to the ensuing behaviour. This approach concerning the knowledge of the mind contrasts sharply with the other approach, namely a study of the mind itself, that is, the mentality of an individual (person) or of a group of people, such as the mind of a crowd, a committee or of a people (national character). The third type, the philosophically-oriented psychologist busied himself with the ontological, epistemological (methodological) and axiological (value) issues of fundamental nature and in understanding the nature of the 'authentic' personality/existence, whatever that may mean. That is one reason why most introductory psychology texts betray an eclectic diplomacy by first treating cognitive, mnemonic, motivational, learning and problem solving processes and rounding off with a chapter on personality, as if to sum up the whole set of processes. Or, they proceed in the reverse order by first treating the nature of personality and its deviations followed by a discussion of cognitive, affective and conative processes.

Thus, excluding the philosophically-oriented approach, two kinds of psychologies dominate the scene, one represented principally by the cognitive scientists and the other which treats the person as a whole a shift from the molecular to molar. The former employ either the computer model, or the conditioning and learning paradigm, taking excursions into neuro-physiology, Neuro-psychology and even neuro-philosophy. Attempts are made to link brain with mind, as the gestaltists had attempted in their theory of isomorphism most daringly by Koffka by regarding the mental processes to be the gestalt quality of the cortical processes themselves. The situation is rather pathetic; the neuro-physiologist pre-occupied with cortical processes would have nothing to do with the mind and the psychologist had little

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access to the functioning of the nervous system. As the celebrated neuro-physiologist Hughlings Jackson summed it: There is no physiology of the mind any more than there is a psychology of the nervous system. Others shy of the mentalistic concepts and trying to pry into the 'black box' regard mind as a supercomputer, making use of the information model and take even to the mathematical modelling of behaviour. Still another group of psychologists, the psychophysicists leave the mediating nervous system alone and seek to ascertain as to how mind organizes the data of experience. Instead of relating neural activity to psychological processes, they directly seek to relate the physical and psychological continua. They go further and in trying to understand the organizational activity of mind, they freeze mental functioning into 'factors' of the mind.

The socio-culturally oriented psychologists whose number is legion operate at molar level and generally make use of the conditioning paradigm, but shy of acknowledging Pavlov and Bechterev, call it social conditioning or preferably social learning almost as a concession. A person's behaviour is learned in the family climate, governed by social norms and within the orbit of cultural practices and its general ethos. Behaviour is seen as a collective function of historic-cultural processes. Those who wish to appear comprehensive spell out the operation of the genetic, developmental, historical, political and economic forces. Here one relatively recent development is the emergence of cross-cultural psychology which either looks for trans cultural commonalities across cultures, or looks for differences characterizing behaviour in differing cultures, searching for meaningful explanation for differences in behavioural and institutional practices in terms of a particular cultural ethos. While some good work has resulted from such studies, one ought not to forget the underlying assumptions relating to Judeo-Christian notions of divinity and the nature of the human self, the epistemological issues involved, and the western notions of progress, development and rationality, based on yardsticks patently western, a neglect of phenomenology and subjectivity, and a kind of new scholasticism of reason to the exclusion of other sources of knowing. Some critics have gone so far as to say that such research seeks validation of racism, as early arthropoda-psychological studies were. It may be, some feel a matter of imperialist self-congratulation for the developed, industrialized western societies, as they claim to be more rational, creative and peaceful than the developing ones. It would, however, be impolite to laugh at these assumptions because history speaks otherwise. (Pandian, Sarukkal, Srinivas, Joravsky).

From the theoretical point of view, the assumptions underlying the above approaches are those of naturalism, realism and positivism, namely, that behaviour follows 'rules' and they are to be 'discovered' Methodologically they follow the natural science methods of observation, categorization and theory construction, using the hypothetico-deductive method, seeking causal relation among events From the point of view of philosophy of science one is searching for a kind of monism, a new kind of scholasticism of reason, a fearful confinement of reason, using it on one type of experience. There is almost a wilful refusal to examine other ways of knowing and other types of experiences. Many a of these issues have been raised by Popper, Feyerabend, Hugo Dingler and recently by post-modern deconstructionists like Levinas and Derrida

An alternative approach broached, namely that of Understanding Psychology (*Psychologische verstehen*) was advocated by Dilthey, Jaspers and Spranger which has re-emerged in the new garb of hermeneutics. *Verstehen*, as Spranger conceived it as a mental activity that grasps events as fraught with meaning in relation to totality Much is made of the meaning significance and value of behaviour, affirming a kind of teleology. This kind of

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thinking is not confined to Psychology, it has penetrated even psychiatry (Laing and Frankl). Humanistic psychology shares some of its concerns with the mode of thinking

To sum up the contemporary scene in psychology, there appear to be psychologies and not a psychology science. The choice of a particular approach or bias depends upon the assumptions one makes and the methodology one prefers, the subject matter under behaviour one seeks to study, namely the basic mental processes as the cognitive scientist does, or one studies persons as individuals or as collectives. In other words, whether one tries to gain knowledge of mentality or mentality itself, the philosophically oriented, like the existentialists, look for authentic personality whose essence is rationality and creativity

The ideologically oriented regards persons as a collective function of social relations. Whether one espouses the Marxian ideology or the Anglo-Saxon (including American) capitalist/Calvanist Weberian, or a little less fashionable one, namely the aesthetic which seeks to understand people through an analysis of human expressions embodied in language (drama, novel etc.) and forms of artistic creations (painting, sculpture, dance, music), wherein mind is seen as a creator of human meaning. This form has been extended to psychopathology as well. It would be appreciated that the underlying premises of the several approaches are in real conflict and to survive from the present ruin in psychological science one has to be bold enough to espouse some basic assumptions and opt for a consonant methodology according to one's preferences.

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It is against this background of mess in psychological science that one may examine the bias toward humanistic psychology as would have been noted already, there has been a quantum jump from a study of mental processes to person as a whole, that is the living organism in its totality, the term behaviour having so much inflated as to call for a revision of the definition of psychology. Humanistic psychology focuses its attention on person. It rejects all analytical, atomistic, mechanistic and deterministic approaches to person. It stands in opposition to approaches looking for unconscious causation of behaviour. It shares platform with the socially oriented approaches and is oriented to teleological explanation of behaviour. It postulates a phenomenal self in the individual, which it feels, provides the best vantage point for understanding him. It believes that a person contains within him potentialities for healthy and creative growth, he can realize his potentialities and rise above the mundane existence. This viewpoint strikes a note of optimism, unlike the fear of dark forces of the psychoanalyst's unconscious, because behaviour is seen as conscious and willed. This should suffice to indicate the standpoint of humanistic approach.

Professional competence comes from a knowledge of the history of a science said Edwin Boring, the Intellectual grandson of Wundt. Despite the fact that Wundt is regarded by many to be the father of modern psychology, the paternity of psychology remains disputed the other claimants are Brentano and Fechner. Brentano regarded psychology to be an empirical science, but he was critical of Wundt because the latter had primarily limited himself to experimental method, although Wundt did write on *vokipsychologie* as well. Brentano wanted psychologists to focus on how we experience the world around us, because that determines how we behave. Mind, he said, was characterized by intentional activity (intentionality to be distinguished from motivation, teleology or the common connotation Intention or purpose) and immanent objectivity, such as sensing, judging and feeling. He felt that empirical study may take the form of experiment, but that there were other modes of observation like intuitive introspection etc. For him, psychical phenomena possess

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immanent objectivity when they refer to a content, because they are directed upon an object and have their object “Inexisting intentionally” within them. When one sees a colour, the colour itself is not mental. It is the seeing that is mental. There is however no meaning to seeing unless something is seen. The act underlies an object. The colour as content of the act seeing, thus inexists by intention within the act. A psychical act, therefore is not self-contained, but contains its object within itself intentionally. This is immanent objectivity. Physical phenomena, on the other hand are self-contained, they do not extrinsically refer to objects. Superficially the difference between psychology and physics seems to be that between act and object. Physical phenomena are intrinsically complete; psychical phenomena are characterized by the possession of intention.

Stumpf coming under the Influence of Brentano set about making a classification of experience of the immediately given the subject matter of phenomenology: (1) phenomena such as tones, colours and images; (ii) the psychical functions, like perceiving, grouping, conceiving, desiring, willing, (iii) relational elements (Einstellung, Bewusstseinslage of the Marburg school). Stumpf, thus brought phenomenology into psychology, legitimizing it for study. This paved way for the beginning of experimental phenomenology which flourished under his students Wertheimer (Phi). Kohler (insight, FAE) and Koffka (pragnanz, closure, grouping, etc.), Katz (surface and film colours), Egon Brunswick (constancies)

On the philosophical side, Brentano and Stumpf's brilliant student Husserl turned towards the things themselves, towards the world as experienced in it felt immediacy. The world of our direct and spontaneous experience is assumed to be derived from an Impersonal objective dimension of 'pure facts that we glimpse through our instruments and equations but it is really the *Leben welt*, the world of our immediately lived experience which is to be grasped. As Merleau-Ponty following Heidegger puts it science is only a second-order expression, a construction from the data of experience. Phenomenology does not try to explain the world; it describes it as it makes itself evident in awareness. Phenomenology, thus, highlights the importance of subjective experience which constitutes one of the basic foundations of humanistic thinking. To escape solipsism, Husserl speaks of Inter subjectivity, that is experiencing of phenomena by a multiplicity of sensing objects. Objective reality is an unwarranted idealization of inter subjective experience. No external criteria for validity of experience are required as inter subjectivity guarantees the validity of experience. Your experience of boredom in listening to this talk validates the feeling of boredom in your friend sitting next to you, without the requirement of an external criterion. One can, therefore, see the imprint of phenomenology on humanistic thought in phrases like 'the first person's point of view', the experienced or the phenomenal world of the client in psychotherapy or in the transaction list's concept of 'reality world' (Cantril).

The second major source of humanistic bias may be traced to the philosophy of personalism of W. Stern. His book *Psychology from the personalistic standpoint* makes a case for personalistic in psychology. Apart from giving the concept of I.Q. and research on child psychology. Stern stressed on the uniqueness of the individual, personality as 'the multiform dynamic entity', a patterned entity, a coordinating concept for psychological processes all to be found in the definition of personality in Gordon Allport. (Allport told me that he had spent several months after his doctorate and teaching experience with W Stern even living with him to learn psychology.) In Stern one can see a concern with the person as a whole. Further, Stern carried on researches on perception of space and time, for example on visual space (Gibson) and auditory space (localization) but rejected both. He extended Kant's treatment of space and time as 'forms of understanding and added that space and time are to

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be considered in terms of the perceivers subjective experience. Thus, was born the concept of subjective space and time. For instance, the person sitting next to you may be farther from your friend you are thinking of for tea in the afternoon, or this talk may appear interminable, while a fascinating movie may appear to finish earlier than the scheduled time. How close are the concepts of 'personal space' and 'comfort zone' on modern proxemics to these ideas. These notions were further elaborated by Koffka in his concept of 'behavioral environment' and by Kurt Lewin in 'life space' Stern rebelled against the positivistic approach of indiscriminate analysis in the interest of objectivity. Interestingly objectivity is itself a value-laden concept. It has no reference to the person experiencing which ex-hypothesis is untenable because it is the self which experiences and is the central focus of psychological inquiry. One can thus note the debt to Stern in humanistic bias.

The third source of humanistic thinking may be found in the philosophical movement of existentialism. Although there are various shades of existentialism associated with names like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers and philosopher novelists like Camus and Sartre and French Resistance movement people of World War II, they all treat of the problem of human existence. They felt that existence precedes essence, a viewpoint opposed to Platonic thinking. Humans have their existence by being-in-the-world. The questions, therefore, raised are what does being mean? Why one lives and what he feels, what he fears? Why does he want to be, and not commit suicide? Why exist in an incomprehensible world? Each one of us makes his own ego-world, one seeks meaning in his existing (Frankl). Here one may note a rejection of determinism and causation and an affirmation of purpose. As a consequence, one must then have freedom to choose; and in this lies the germs of his responsibility. Man can realize his potentiality of being by 'becoming' and man has authentic existence only when he is able to actualize his potentialities by being what he can become the humanistic psychologists borrowed the notions of becoming, actualizing meaning, appropriate striving, functional autonomy from existentialistic thinking

Yet another source of humanistic bias may be traced to verstehen psychology mentioned earlier. Appalled by the determinist's search for causal explanation after the physical science model, the understanding psychologists stressed on meaning, significance, purpose and value of any action or behaviour what a person seeks, strives for, the goals he seeks to achieve, the fears he harbours, the meaning things have for him and the values he cherishes. In its present form understanding psychology has re-emerged as hermeneutics, presently favoured by social psychologists.

One wonders whether humanistic thought is influenced by Judeo-Christian notions of divinity the nature of the human self and their relationships. Ideas relating to redemption (from sin), grace and efficacy of confession appear to find an echo in humanistic concepts of self-disclosure, self-awareness and in psychological counselling.

In passing it may be noted that some support to humanistic thinking comes from an unexpected quarter. Physical science obliterates the distinction between objects and humans, treating beings as yet another object in nature thereby objectifying humans as things. Modern deconstructionist philosophers like Levinas and Derrida articulate a distinction between objects and humans on philosophical grounds. They feel that objective rational epistemology is based upon a denial of any ethical relation between self and the other. However, in human intercourse one encounters the other being: he is 'provoked'; the mere presence of the other makes a 'demand' on him. That automatically raises the issue of ethical responsibility towards the other, though not in the sense of moral prescriptions

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Levinas situates his concern in the ethical space. This kind of thinking seems to suggest that psychology cannot afford to ignore value concerns altogether which should serve humanistic thinking well.

Finally, it is interesting to note that some of the notions of humanistic thinking orchestrate well with those in the classical Indian thought. These relate to the concept of self, human dignity, holism, ideographic approach and a challenge to the scholasticism of reason and an openness to other sources of knowledge found in classical Indian thought.

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, it seems that like other fads and fashions in psychology, in due course, the fascination with humanistic approach may also fade and wither away. However, some of its concepts like those of psychoanalysis are likely to endure and get incorporated in the psychological lexicon.

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