An Ambiguous Case for Humanistic Psychology

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For the most part, American psychology has stood squarely, if a little self-consciously, on the grounds of objective science. Recently, however, a dissident minority has become increasingly vocal. Under the banner of *humanistic psychology* (a journal so designated was established in 1961), a number of psychologists—mostly students of personality to whom participation in the psychotherapeutic relationship with its seeming human immediacy has given a privileged, perhaps seductive perspective on experiential data—have been challenging the customary framework of investigation and conceptualization as inadequate to the facts of human experience. Many of them have been influenced by European existentialist thinking. A prominent participant in this trend is Abraham H. Maslow, who offers something of a manifesto in a misleadingly entitled book, **The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance** (Harper and Row, New York, 1966. 190 pp., $4.50), expanded from a John Dewey Society Lecture. Outsiders to these developments may gain from the book some notion of what the fuss is all about. Unfortunately, they will find more confusion than clarity. The already convinced may gain ammunition, but the recalcitrant and tough-minded will not be persuaded, and careful readers to whom the issues are unfamiliar will very likely be alienated. John Dewey, always dogged if not always successful in the pursuit of clarity, would have been disappointed.

As a respected innovator in personality psychology who has also served his stint in the older modes of experimental investigation, Maslow is nobody's fool. A reviewer who comes to such an unfavorable judgment about his book had better explain himself, especially when he feels, as I do, that there is much warrant for the humanistic case. What, then, is wrong?

First, the small matter of the title, which makes a claim that is expanded on the dust jacket. The book simply is not a critical or responsible reconnaissance of "the psychology of science," a large and important topic. Major attention throughout the book is on the justifiably parochial concerns of psychologists—subspecies *personality psychologist* at that. Broader issues of the psychology of the scientist and of philosophy of science are touched on mainly to sketch part of the case for a humanistic—as contrasted with a mechanistic—psychology.

Some valid, but hardly novel, points are made. As Koestler (*1*) has recently emphasized, creativity in science has much in common with creativity in the arts. Maslow stresses the importance of the scientist's openness to preconscious thought processes and of his commitment to and loving concern for the phenomena—without ever drawing clearly the essential distinction between the contexts of discovery and of justification. He stresses what no one since William James would deny—though the topic may deserve more attention than it gets: how the personality of the scientist affects the scientist's choices of method and strategy. He suggests, rightly I think, that the dogmatism and methodological fetishism that characterize much psychological research may result from a basically defensive posture that is inimical to creativity and discovery. The good scientist has a push toward clarity without the intolerance of ambiguity that would lead him to premature closure. Maslow correctly notes that adequacy of scientific knowledge is a matter of degree, with different standards being appropriate in newly opened areas and in well-worked ones. And his general objective, to humanize psychological science, not to reject it, is laudable. He writes (p. xvi),

> Just as dangerous [as the compulsive method-ridden scientist] are some of the critics of orthodox science who find it too skeptical, too cool and nonhuman, and then reject it altogether as a danger to human values. . . . This is a real danger among some psychotherapists and clinical psychologists, among artists, among some seriously religious people, among some of the people who are interested in Zen, in Taoism, in existentialism, "experientialism," and the like. Their alternative to science is often sheer freakishness and cultism, uncritical and selfish exaltation of mere personal experiencing, over-reliance on impulsivity (which they confuse with spontaneity), arbitrary whimsicality and emotionality, unskeptical enthusiasm, and finally navel-watching and solipsism.

But Maslow would extend the boundaries of his reconstructed holistic, humanistic science so as to include the Taoists, existentialists, and so forth, on much their own terms, as bedfellows of the "orthodox" and "mechanistic" seekers of a firmer truth. As a consequence, *science* tends to lose its distinctive meaning. It is well to avoid ruling topics and methods out of court peremptorily because they do not accord nicely with an a priori conception, but one should not lose sight, as Maslow often seems to, of the important distinctiveness of science as a cultural invention of strategies and institutions that promote cumulative gain in knowledge in a context of free communication, criticism, and replicable observation by qualified members of a scientific community.

For Maslow, the trend toward abstraction and conceptualization is only one pole toward which science can develop; equally valid is a direction "toward comprehensiveness, allness, and the acceptance of all concrete experience, all suchness, all esthetic savoring of the full richness of everything without needing to abstract" (p. 75). Maslow contrasts "simpleward" (= reductionist, conceptual) science with "comprehensive" science, and asserts, *ex cathedra*, that "If there is any primary rule of science, it is, in my opinion, acceptance of the obligation to acknowledge and describe all of reality, all that exists, everything that is the case" (p. 72). Science, for Maslow, should make place for "suchness" in the artist's sense in which "something experienced is its own explanation. What is the meaning of a leaf, a fugue, a sunset, a flower, a person? They 'mean' themselves, explain themselves,

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and prove themselves" (p. 89). Artistic experience may be a datum of science; scientists may at times think and feel like artists, and perhaps it would be better if they did so more often; but as a social enterprise, science has its own agenda that is different from that of the arts.

The unconceptualized evocation of "suchness"—of unique, concrete experience—is surely the home ground of the arts; to claim it for science too is to promote confusion rather than holism. The lessons of past successes and failures in science surely indicate that, desirable as good communication between the sciences and the arts may be, differentiation of their roles is essential. The time for such fusions as Goethe's *Naturphilosophie* is past. In the limited but humanly important agenda of science, exhortatory and evocative statements like the following would seem to be out of bounds: ". . . It looks probable that the full, ultimate 'Truth' is finally definable, only and altogether, by all the other ultimate values. That is, truth is ultimately beautiful, good, simple, comprehensive, perfect, unifying, alive, unique, necessary, final, just, orderly, effortless, self-sufficient, and amusing" (p. 123). Here we would seem to be leaping from science *and* art squarely into theology.

In personality psychology, where his primary concerns lie, Maslow calls in effect for more emphasis on what Gordon Allport termed an *idiographic* approach of faithful phenomenological description, in contrast with the *nomothetic* one that seeks abstracted and lawful generalizations. Allport's exposition of this distinction (*2*)—drawn from the German philosophers of the *Geisteswissenschaften*—is more cautious and sophisticated; Maslow cites but does not discuss Allport's views, and he pays no heed to the extensive critical discussion—as, for example, by R. R. Holt (*3*)—that they have received.

In his preface, Maslow notes that the discursive style appropriate to a lecture gave him leeway to be casual and personal; he disclaims "any systematic effort to document my theses," to " 'cover the subject,' or to be scholarly in a comprehensive or systematic way" (p. xvi). That is honest, but the fact that he has used this license is too bad. The issues deserve more responsible treatment. There is a rising tide of concern, in the Congress and elsewhere, about the pretensions and methods of a science that is aimed at the prediction and control of human behavior and often deals manipulatively with the subjects of its investigations. There is serious question whether prevalent methods of personological and social research pay sufficient regard to human dignity and integrity; whether prevalent theories provide an adequate framework for conceptualizing the experiencing person and the responsible citizen; and whether in the difficult and sensitive realm of human behavior the forms and rituals of science may not too often have taken priority over its spirit.

A strong case can be made that a more collaborative, less manipulative approach to the study of people is needed; and that a desirably humanized science of personality and social behavior might result. Toward such ends, effective spokesmen for a humanized psychology are needed in the arena of scientific controversy. My complaint about Maslow's book is that it is too unclear about the location of the arena and about the rules of the game to get taken seriously by those who are committed to a science of man.

References

1. A. Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (Macmillan, New York, 1964).
2. G. W. Allport, *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation* (Holt, New York, 1937).
3. R. R. Holt, "Individuality and generalization in the psychology of personality," *J. Personality* **30**, 377 (1962).

Early Meteorology

A History of the Theories of Rain (Watts, New York, 1966. 231 pp. Illus. $5.95) is a well-written and fascinating account of the development of ideas about wind and weather from the earliest recorded times to the end of the 19th century. Its author, W. E. Knowles Middleton, is a distinguished research meteorologist and science administrator who has already proven his competence as a historian of science with a book on the history of the barometer. He utilizes original sources almost exclusively, he interprets keenly, and most of what he has written is original and therefore of interest to scientists and laymen equally.

The present book provides both more and less than is promised by the title. The subject is brought only to 1900, short of the point where it begins to assume greater interest and importance to present-day readers. Virtually all of modern cloud physics is omitted. On the other hand, the scope is considerably broader than may be implied by the phrase "theories of rain." It encompasses pressure change, winds, electrical and chemical effects, and water-vapor and phase changes, as well as clouds, dew, hail, frost, and the direct processes leading to rain.

Especially illuminating is Middleton's account of the interweaving of ideas about clouds and water vapor, both right and wrong, within the fabric of the scientific thought of the 18th and 19th centuries. We find that Dalton, Descartes, Boyle, Poisson, Kelvin, and others thought deeply about atmospheric problems and their relation to laboratory experiments, and that they engaged in spirited and long-continued debate with men who today are less well known: Jean André Deluc, Pieter van Musschenbroek, and Heinrich Wilhelm Dove, for example. We learn that the concepts of adiabatic temperature change and of the effect of turbulence on the vertical distribution of gases, so crucial to an understanding of cloud behavior, eluded the most acute minds for many years. And we learn that as early as the first half of the 19th century, a proposal for large-scale weather modification was presented to the federal government. This scheme, due to James Pollard Espy, was based on an exaggerated view of the importance of vertical convection. Espy proposed to burn each week in the western United States 40 acres for every 20 miles along a 600- to 700-mile line, thus initiating a large-scale storm which would sweep across the entire continent, presumably bringing great benefits to towns and farms along its path. Fortunately, it was never endorsed or implemented by Congress.

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Agronomy

The Growth of Cereals and Grasses (Proceedings of the Twelfth Easter School in Agricultural Science, University of Nottingham, England, 1965. F. L. Milthorpe and J. D. Ivins, Eds. Butterworth, Washington, D.C., 1966. 370 pp. Illus. $19) consists of a series of review articles. Most of the con-