

Models of The Human Person (Outline)

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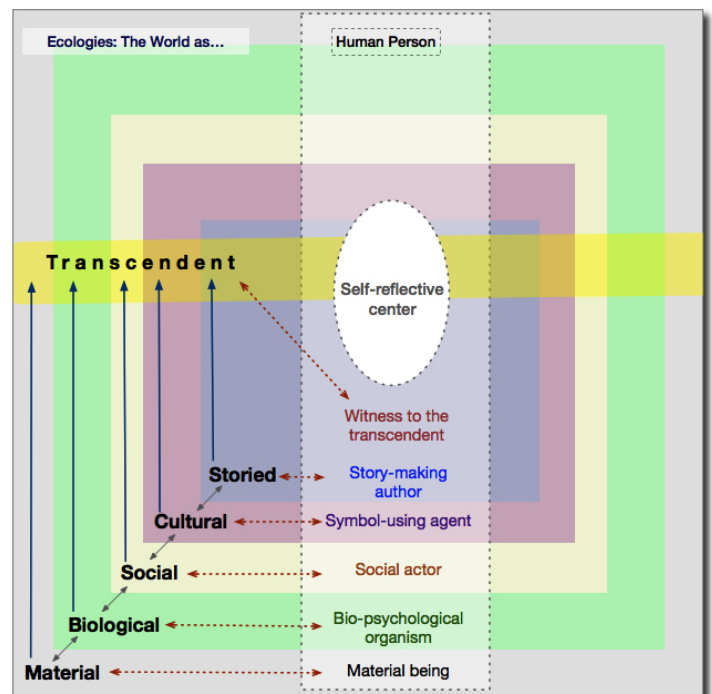
Some 20th Century Models of Human Persons in Psychology

- **Psychoanalytic** (early 20th century): Closed system, behavior compelled by mostly unconscious psychic energies (libido & aggression)
- **Behavioral** (middle 20th century): Humans respond to reinforcements & punishments from the environment which shape all our behaviors.
- **Cognitive-Emotional-Biological** (2nd half 20th century): As living beings, humans have sophisticated brains which, in ways similar to the way computers analyze data, evaluate how we should behave both at the current moment and into the future.
- **Evolutionary Psychology** (late 20th century/early 21st century): As animals, humans were shaped to cope with the world of 50,000-100,000 years ago when we lived in small hunter-gatherer bands. Much of our behaviors are coded in our genes to promote our chances of survival, mating, and successfully raising our offspring.

An Ecological Model of the Human Person

Humans live in multiple ecologies, that is, interconnected worlds, which call forth different ways of behaving. We can identify at least six ecologies:

1. **The Material World:** Humans are subject to the laws of physics, chemistry, the weather, etc. and must cope with the limits imposed by these laws.
2. **The Biological World:** Humans are living organisms and we live among many other organisms. We must learn to stay alive, to find food, to stay warm and protected from hostile conditions, etc. Our bodies are maintained by the psychological decisions of our brains as they guide how we behave.



3. **The Social World:** Humans are fundamentally embedded within a world of other human persons. From the moment of our conception through the course of our lives, we are in constant interaction with and dependent upon other persons.

4. **The Cultural World:** Over the course of human history, in distinctive groupings humans developed common cultural worlds, that is, sharing through language, ritual, art, etc. (that is, communicative symbols), how they understand what it means to live and interact with others. We use the symbols of our culture(s) to communicate with each other.
5. **The Storied World:** Human beings construct, tell, and listen to stories constantly. For each of us, there is the need to make sense of our experiences across time frameworks, both short and long. As such, humans are constantly authoring tales which explain what has happened, is happening, and will happen.
6. **The Transcendent World:** As witnesses to the universe in all its many aspects, human beings across history have experienced heightened levels of consciousness with associated emotions such as awe, wonder, veneration, astonishment, fear, and other strong feelings. In all these responses, there is a sense that something in life and the world lies beyond the ordinary and the usual. For many people, this sense of transcendence is associated with religious beliefs and the sacred, for others, with an appreciation of nature, of art, and of science.

Understanding and appreciating all these interconnected levels of experience rests upon or reflects what we can call a self-reflective center, that is, our consciousness.

Narrative Psychology: The Human Person as Storied

Think about some character in your favorite story or, even, someone in your family who did something that everyone has been talking about for a long time afterwards. Suppose we use the example of President Jimmy Carter who served one term in the White House between 1977 and 1981. He is just now (late August 2024) a month short of his 100th birthday. He was raised in rural Georgia on a peanut farm, went to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, served as on naval submarines in the 1950s as a nuclear engineer, served in the Georgia State Senate and as Georgia governor, and, after leaving the White House, set up the Carter Center to champion civil rights around the world. He won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work. He is well-known for actively serving as a hands-on home builder for Habitat for Humanity' construction projects, and for most of his life, served as a Sunday School teacher at his Baptist Church. From these "facts" of his life, we might try to understand Carter's life as one of multiple important stories.



1. **Agentive/Role Enacting.** We are *agents* (i.e., actively do things and make things happen) and *actors*. We have purposes, make decisions, look to future goals. We do so within a social world of other agents/actors and assume different roles (parent, student, professional, friend, etc.) without often realizing what we are doing.
2. **Driven by Meaning.** Our behaviors are guided by what we find important, meaningful, what "counts." Different people can have VERY different meanings in their lives because of their experiences. We cannot reduce human behavior to very simple explanations.
3. **Positioned by (Em)plotted Behavior.** The sequences of our behaviors are not ultimately random, but tied together by plots: there are links and connections across what we do as we

pursue our goals. These plots may be complicated or relatively straightforward. And, in carrying through on these plots, there is a moral dimension to what we do.

4. **Diachronic** (“dia”= through & “chronos” = time). Our lives are lived across and through actual time. We are affected by past, present, and future. Three forms of time :
 - **Social or Generational Time**: We all belong to specific generations in a specific historical era (as well as living in a particular social/historical location or place).
 - **Developmental Time**: We are always at some stage in our growth & maturation (e.g., child, adolescent, young adult, middle age, old).
 - **Personal Time**: Everyone has a unique set of experiences and events even if they share the same generation & period of development with others.
5. **Cognitively Constructive**. Human persons are always trying to make sense of their experiences rather than simply being passive recipients of sensation. We try to put together what our experiences mean, how they make sense. We use a vast range of technological and mental tools (“**cognitive prostheses**” or “**cognitive gadgets**”) with which to explore the world. Fundamental tools are language and cultural customs.
6. **Socially Mediated & Constrained**. All human persons develop at all times within densely social environments via language, beliefs, knowledge, and the practices of others. Society always precedes the individual.
7. **Dialogical**. Human persons converse with one another and with themselves. We join into many (sometimes overlapping) **narrative communities**, i.e., groups who share the same stories and background.
8. **Embodied**. Human persons live with their bodies with an underlying unity between their physical & mental selves. This means we are also constrained by our bodies in what we can do or imagine.