

On the Similarities between Humanistic Psychology and Basic Concepts of Buddhism from the Perspective of “Gestalt”

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Abstract: humanist psychologists have keenly observed the consistence between human psychology and human nature. They hold that psychology must study human psychology from human nature; they attach importance to human dignity, value, creativity and self realization, and attribute the self realization of human nature to the exertion of potentials. Different scholars have put forward their own ideal human models under the condition of full exertion of potentials. In the process of its emergence and development, humanistic psychology absorbed ideas of existential philosophy, and had close relationship with religions and zen. Therefore, it is necessary and valuable to study the similarity and difference between them. Buddhism is as vast as the sea; this paper attempts to start with the concept of “gestalt” shared by humanism, and primarily explain the similarities between their basic views.

1. Introduction

Humanistic psychology originated in the united states in the 1950s and 1960s. It was founded by maslow and represented by rogers. It is known as the “third force” in psychology besides behaviorism and psychoanalysis. It is generally believed that the concept of gestalt comes from gestalt psychology. In fact, the term originated from the study of visual field, but it is not limited to the visual field, or even the whole sensory field. Its application scope is far beyond the limit of sensory experience. According to kohler, gestalt in the sense of shape is no longer the focus of gestalt psychologists; it can include learning, memory, ambition, emotion, thinking, movement and other processes. In fact, the concept of “gestalt” has been applied to all aspects of psychology. Therefore, we can conclude that “gestalt” has two concepts. One is the aggregation of the present awareness and feelings; the other is the aggregation of perfect characteristics or features that an individual may have in the future. In the field of humanistic psychology, we can find many individual concepts of gestalt held by different scholars.

2. “Gestalts” of Different Schools in Humanistic Psychology

2.1 The Concept of “Superior” Held by Alfred Adler

Adler is known as the pioneer of humanistic psychology. He is deeply influenced by freud's psychoanalysis school, but his theories go beyond freud's stereotype of taking sex and death as the basic motive force and starting point, and has their own characteristics. “with the development of the times, adler's view becomes more and more correct,” maslow said. “when the facts are in front of people, adler's opinion on human nature gets more and more support.” Adler's theory is not only against freud's biological determinism, but also against behaviorism's environmental determinism. On the basis of refuting environmental determinism and biological determinism, adler believes that there is another kind of power, namely the “creative power” of humans. He highlights the significance of the realization of wills to human beings, and believes that all human behaviors are dominated by “upward wills”. A person is born with an internal driving force, which integrates all aspects of personality into a general goal: the demand to become superior. This kind of struggle for superiority is inherent. It not only exists in individuals, but also exists in the history of all cultures. It leads people and races to progress forever.

In Adler's opinion, "in everyone, we can also find that there is a single action that can include everything after each part of the action towards a part of the goal: all our efforts are to achieve a goal of gaining a sense of security. The feeling is that all the difficulties in life have been overcome, and we have got the final safety and victory in the whole situation around us. For this purpose, all movements and performances must be coordinated and integrated into a whole."

In practice, he found that some creative artists developed extraordinary talents on the basis of overcoming the physical defects and accidents in childhood. Therefore, Adler further believes that it is this upward development force which preexists in the essence of life that helps people to overcome the "inferiority" or "inferiority complex" such as physical defects and the dependence on adults' help when the body is not developed in childhood. After that period people can come to a more superior position and realize the pursuit for perfect life. Adler believes that individuals generally do not understand the true meaning of their life goals, which are often subconscious, but individuals can generate a sense of motivation and superiority. The pursuit of superiority is not only the core of Adler's individual psychology, but also the general goal which dominates individual behaviors. He believes that everyone has a natural internal drive like Nietzsche's "will to power", which integrates personality into a general goal. Human beings try to be flawless and perfect; envy, superiority, conquest and other feelings are the embodiment of this pursuit of superior personality. The individual is not only gradually transcending the shackles and challenges brought by natural conditions and acquired environment, but also trying to continuously transcend these crises and dangers and transcend the past self. In Adler's view, the world without risks and changes is unacceptable.

He said, "if we imagine that a person or a human group as a whole has reached a state without any difficulties at all, we can also imagine that life in such an environment must be very dull. Everything can be predicted; everything can be calculated in advance. Tomorrow will not bring unexpected opportunities, and we have no hope for the future."

2.2 The "Self-Actualizing Man" and "Perfect Personality" Held by Maslow

As a representative of humanistic psychology, Maslow establishes a multilevel needs system, emphasizes the importance of "peak experience", and believes that only by rediscovering the value of people excluded by technology, can perfect personality be realized.

According to Maslow, on the whole, "self-actualization can be defined as the continuous realization of potential, intelligence and talent, the achievements of talents, destiny and temperament, and the process of the continuous unifying, integrating or collaborating the actions of an individual." For a person, self actualization means that "he has become himself truly and realized his potentials perfectly. He is closer to the core of his existence, and becomes a perfect person." Because each person's potentials include common potentials shared by human beings and the potential of personal difference, self actualization means "becoming full of human nature" and "becoming completely special". Among them, "to be completely special" has the priority. "That is to say, a person must first become a healthy woman, or a healthy man, and then the self actualization of general human nature can become possible." Later, especially after entering the stage of transpersonal psychology, Maslow expands the above-mentioned views from two aspects. On the one hand, he proposes that self actualization is the organic unity of "existence" and "formation". In his opinion, self actualization is first of all a kind of "existence". It is the perfect state in which human potentials are fully tapped after they transcend deficiency requirements; it is the ending or the final "state of affairs" that only a few people can relatively complete, and a kind of ultimate existence of human state. Furthermore, Maslow lists various conditions and definitions of "self-actualizing man" in his book, with 16 items in the original version.

First, a self-actualizing man can accurately and objectively understand the reality and form a more agreeable relationship with it.

Second, a self-actualizing man has greater recognition for himself, for others and the nature as a whole.

Third, the thought, words and deeds are more natural, frank and pure.

Fourth, a self-actualizing man is problem centered, rather than self-centered.

Fifth, a self-actualizing man needs to be alone and independent sometimes.

Sixth, a self-actualizing man is able to independent and control himself, and transcend the constraints of the culture and environment.

Seventh, a self-actualizing man is able to appreciate many novel things and experiences in life.

Eighth, a self-actualizing man has more mysterious experiences or peak experiences.

Ninth, a self-actualizing man has deep sympathy and love for human beings.

Tenth, a self-actualizing man has deep interpersonal relationship.

Eleventh, a self-actualizing man has a democratic character structure.

Twelfth, a self-actualizing man is able to distinguish the means and purposes of good and evil.

Thirteenth, a self-actualizing man has a sense of humor which is rich in philosophy and kindness.

Fourteenth, a self-actualizing man is creative.

Fifteenth, a self-actualizing man resists to cultural adaptation.

Sixteenth, a self-actualizing man is able to transcend all kinds of dichotomous opposites and reach a state of integration.

Based on various qualities of self actualization, Maslow points out that individual's subjective initiative and creativity are more caused by personality and are by-products of self actualization personality. Through the perfect personality quality of self-actualizing means, such as the maturity or performance of boldness, bravery, freedom, spontaneity, clarity, integration and self recognition, the creativity of self actualization will be produced as a by-product, and will be projected and distributed to all aspects of life.

2.3 "The Fully Functioning Person" Held by Carl Ransom Rogers

Compared with Maslow, Rogers has more first-line psychotherapy experiences, so he can better understand what key factors are missing from a mental disorder patient to a healthy and confident person, and what factors are crucial for a healthy person's psychological construction.

Rogers acknowledges Maslow's assumption of personality, and believes that everyone has an inherent and innate motivation to self-maintain, self-improvement and self-enhancement. It is the most basic and the only motivation and purpose of human beings, and it guides people to grow up towards the ideal of being a satisfactory person. However, only a few people can reach the level of self actualization. Therefore, the concept has more theoretical significance than practical value. Rogers thinks that in most cases, people live in a self-centered and constantly changing "phenomenon field". They constantly realize their current physical and spiritual situations; once there are conflicts between the situation and their instincts of self actualization, the individuals will become anxious and feel that their are being threatened. If the disorder can not be relieved and eliminated, psychological problems will occur eventually. Therefore, it is more meaningful for most people who are still on the road of "self actualization" to reduce the disorder and fully mobilize their functions to fight against the ubiquitous anxiety. That is a more meaningful research direction. Rogers said: "human life, at its best, is a process of flow and change, in which nothing is fixed. From my clients and my own experiences, I found that life must be a flowing process in the most abundant and valuable moment. "

For how to adjust functions to achieve self actualization, Rogers put forward many practical methods, and provided guidance for group psychotherapy afterwards. Because it has nothing to do with the theme of this article, and will not be discussed in detail. The paper only analyzes how Rogers defines his Gestalt of "fully functioning person".

The Gestalt defined by Rogers has following characteristics.

First, the Gestalt is more open to experience.

Second, the Gestalt enjoys the life with the sense of presence.

Third, the Gestalt trusts the body.

Fourth, the Gestalt includes the process of giving full play to functions

2.4 The "Goal of Integration" Held by Rollo May

Rollo May's Humanistic Psychological Theory, also known as the existential psychology, is

obviously influenced by the times. From the definition of existence, he believes that when people realize their own existence, they can transcend all kinds of separation and realize self integration. Only the consciousness of self existence can make all kinds of human experience coherent and unified, and can integrate body with mind, combine human and nature, and relate human with society. In this sense, the sense of existence is the core to the inner world of human beings. A person's mental health should depend on his own feelings. The individual with strong and deep sense of existence has wide scope of free choices, and can be more creative and responsible to his wills and decisions. Therefore, he can control his life more effectively. On the contrary, when a person loses the sense of existence and is not aware of the existence value of himself, he will be subject to the orders of others, unable to freely choose and decide his own future, which will lead to mental illness. Therefore, Rollo May emphasizes the uniqueness and importance of self. He thinks that the standard of mental health is to accept the uniqueness of self, rediscover self, and strive to achieve internal integration as a “person living in such a divided world” in the era of changing standards and values. The four factors of human existence, namely freedom, individuality, social integration and religious tension, are basic elements of the personality structure .

Religious tension is a state of tension or imbalance existing in the development of personality; it is the driving force for the development of personality. He believes that the highest value and significance of life can be obtained in the group religion. When people can't realize their ideals, they will experience guilt, which can make people constantly nervous and promote the development of personality.

In his works, the goal of integration has four elements.

First, the person has the freedom to “choose his own self” and the belief that individuals have the internal power to solve problems in growth and development.

Second, the person has a creative conscience. The so-called “creativity” means to have independent moral consciousness and the value judgment. The individual has his own views and behavior choices in the face of new ideas and moral insights; he is able to get rid of and, to a certain extent, make use of the benefits of traditional religion or philosophy, and selectively inherit the experience and methods of the predecessors.

Third, he has the courage to resist the anxiety and isolation in life, and strive to become the ideal self, rather than “automatic compliance”. He has all mature virtues, especially the ability of love.

Fourth, he is able to transcend time and focus on the effective control and use of time at present. “The more consciously a person guides his or her life, the more constructive benefits he or she can obtain when using time. However, the more obedient, less free and undifferentiated he is, the more he is forced to work rather than work through choice, the more he will be dominated by the amount of time.” In other words, Rollo May thinks that “time” is just a meaningless measure, and a concept that will be forgotten when people are immersed in their own careers. “The more energetic a person is, the more dependent he is on quality time to live.”

3. The Similarities between Humanistic Psychology and the Basic Theory of Buddhism

3.1 Positive Assumptions and Positions

Humanistic psychology was born after World War II. The war seriously damaged peoples' enthusiasm for material wealth as well as scientific and technological progress. People began to doubt whether the unlimited materialization of human beings as well as the world's mechanization and industrialization are really beneficial to human beings. Therefore, the main tone of humanistic psychology can not be negative or deconstructed. It should meet the needs of the times and actively concern about human beings. Therefore, the humanistic psychology is spiritual and constructive. Humanistic psychology has changed the trend of belittling and dehumanizing human nature in traditional pathology psychology, broken the limitation of the original psychoanalytic theoretical paradigm, and formally put forward a research model with the nature of humanistic care. It believes that human nature in society has the characteristics of kindness and independence; humans can select things out of its own will. The humanistic psychology also identifies the tendency of self

realization, growth and development of human beings. The derived positive psychology inherits this idea. “In order to best summarize or determine the attitude orientation of the consultant in the client centered therapy, we can say that the consultant must insist on the assumption that the individual has sufficient ability to deal with the various parts of his life that may be perceived by consciousness constructively,” said Rogers.

Buddhism has the same positive establishment and assumption, for example, in the whole world view, Buddhism, especially the Mahayana Buddhism, thought that the Buddha land was strict and pure. The world is perfect, and what blocked all this is the inner uncleanness and desire of human beings. For example, in the *Vimalakirtinirdesa-sutra*, there was a dialogue between Sariputra and Buddha.

“Shariputra, the sin of all living beings is that they cannot find that the Buddha's land is strict and pure, but the Buddha does not blame them. Shariputra, the land is pure but you cannot find that... If your heart is pure, you will find the merits and virtues of this land.

All beings have the Tathagata wisdom by born, but their obsession and delusion cover the wisdom. If they reject delusion, all wisdom, natural intelligence and unobstructed intelligence will come to the fore. “

As a matter of fact, the Buddha does not only affirm that the world is originally pure, but also affirms that everyone has the “Tathagata wisdom”. As long as they give up the delusion, the real nature would come. It is more active and thorough than Confucius' “make no social distinctions in teaching“. Moreover, in the history of China, there was the “Yi Chan Ti” controversy around the *Mahaparinirvana-sutra*. Even if the “one who breaks all the good roots” can eventually become a complete Buddha in the long future. Obviously, the background of Buddhism must be positive. It is a thorough and completely positive direction.

In addition, in many scriptures, the Buddha also depicts the solemn appearance of different Buddhist lands. Although Buddhist lands are different because of diversified Buddha's wishes, they all have one common feature: they are the reflection of the most perfect and ideal world for various people.

3.2 Constructive Direction and Objectives

Both Mahayana Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism have the constructive orientation, that is, to practice from an ordinary man who has no wisdom and blessings to a saint. Being a saint is the goal of both Mahayana Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. The conduct, ability, wisdom and blessings of saints are far beyond the starting points of ordinary men. The process is just like grinding a mirror to make the it shines again, and is of great significance like extracting pure gold from miscellaneous ores. For example, the highest goal of Mahayana Buddhism is being an Arhat. In modern words, an Arhat solves all doubts in life. He is not tempted or influenced by all things in the outside world; he has no lust. He is not obsessed with a certain realm; he is not bound by any concepts. He is not self-conceited; he never underestimates others. The realm of an Arhat is, “my life is done; the Buddhist practice has been established. All things should be done are completed.” It can be explained as, all behaviors in his life are reasonable and in accordance with the norms and principles. The responsibilities and obligations that one should do have been completed, and there are no more problems left. Therefore, it can be seen that Arhat's requirements are very high in both morality and behavior.

The constructive guidance of humanistic psychology can be found everywhere. It is established to seek the all-round development of human beings, tap human potentials and awaken human instincts of self-improvement. From the first day of its birth, it claims that human beings are essentially prosocial, positive, rational and constructive, and have the natural motivation for self-development. Although Rogers, who is a representative of humanism, doesn't fully agree with Maslow's radical view that human beings have the same and apparently constant needs, his view is very close. His non directional therapy is designed to help people find a positive self. He calls it as the “wonderful and constructive realism” and says it is “positive, constructive, self fulfilling, mature and socialized”.

3.3 Emphasis on Spiritual Experience and Inner Feelings

Humanistic psychology holds that the maturity of personality is the prerequisite to improve our cognition of the outside world. Only a good-natured person can understand kindness, conscience, morality and guilt. It's hard for an abnormal man to understand these things. He's not related to them. A kind, sincere and beautiful person can realize the truth, goodness and beauty existing in the outside world better than others. Similarly, if we have a unified and harmonious psychological state, we can easily perceive the unity of the world, and then produce peak experiences. The maturity of personality is based on a good environment. The more harmonious, beautiful and just the world is, the more it can make people achieve these goals. When we find the highest value in the outside world, we may generate or strengthen these values in our own heart at the same time. This means that better people and people in better environments are more likely to have peak experiences. So, "in almost any case, as long as people can achieve perfection, realize their hopes, and satisfied with everything, they may have peak experiences from time to time." Therefore, we can say that humanistic psychology first constructs the purest state that can be achieved by the best and the most beautiful person: "Gestalt", and then reversely deduces the internal or external conditions needed to achieve this gestalt. The first and most important thing is the internal body feeling which is experiential and hard to quantify.

Buddhism's emphasis on spiritual experience and inner feelings can be easily found in the four aspects of practice, such as "enjoying is suffering", "viewing mind impermanence", Zen's "viewing mind" and "looking for the beginning of conversation". An example is the passage from the 15th volume to the 23rd volume of *Digha Nikaya*.

"Here, bhikkhus, when experiencing a pleasant feeling, the bhikkhu knows, 'I experience a pleasant feeling'; when experiencing a painful feeling, he knows, 'I experience a painful feeling'; when experiencing a neutral feeling, he knows, 'I experience a neutral feeling'; when experiencing a pleasant worldly feeling, he knows, 'I experience a pleasant worldly feeling'; when experiencing a pleasant non-worldly feeling, he knows, 'I experience a pleasant non-worldly feeling'; when experiencing a painful worldly feeling, he knows, 'I experience a painful worldly feeling'; when experiencing a painful non-worldly feeling, he knows, 'I experience a painful non-worldly feeling'; when experiencing a neutral worldly feeling, he knows, 'I experience a neutral worldly feeling'; when experiencing a neutral non-worldly feeling, he knows, 'I experience a neutral non-worldly feeling.' "

4. Conclusion

As the third trend of thought in psychology, the most unique and valuable feature of humanism is that it goes against the tide of contemporary science. It clearly points out that human beings have common values and moral standards, and that these standards have the scientific basis. They can be found through the research of excellent representatives of human beings. Human beings have basic, potential and cross culture value standards, such as truth, goodness, beauty, justice and joy. They all intrinsic human nature and an integral part of human physiological characteristics; they are instinctive rather than acquired. This coincides with Buddhism, especially Mahayana Buddhism's vision of "Buddha's self-sufficiency" and its aspiration of "solemn lands full of joy and happiness". Although there are great differences between the two in some aspects, I believe that in the near future, they will support and help individuals and groups who are ready to grow up in mind and spirit.

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