



1982

Sidney M. Jourard and Ted Landsman, Healthy Personality: an Approach from the Viewpoint of Humanistic Psychology

Thomas Hicks
Sacred Heart University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/shureview>

Recommended Citation

Hicks, Thomas (1982) "Sidney M. Jourard and Ted Landsman, Healthy Personality: an Approach from the Viewpoint of Humanistic Psychology," *Sacred Heart University Review*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/shureview/vol2/iss2/5>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the SHU Press Publications at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sacred Heart University Review by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact ferribyp@sacredheart.edu.

Sidney M. Jourard and Ted Landsman, *Healthy Personality: An Approach from the Viewpoint of Humanistic Psychology*. New York: Macmillan, 1980. Fourth edition. \$19.95.

Review by Thomas Hicks

Probably more than any other, Humanistic Existentialism is the psychology of our time. A primary concern of this approach to psychology has been to conceptualize the upper levels of human functioning. Most previous psychological theorists developed their theories out of an interest in the unhealthy personality. They generally describe what a healthy personality is not, explaining the normal by the abnormal. Humanistic-Existential psychology points out that psychological health is a good deal more than the absence of symptoms, and tries to describe the positive nature of psychological maturity. It shifts the emphasis from the study of the "sick" to the study of the well. It concerns itself with what it means to live positively in the world as a human being.

Sidney Jourard is perhaps the writer who has made popular the Humanistic conceptions of the positive characteristics of high-level human functioning. This new edition of his most famous work, *Healthy Personality*, comes to us some seven years after his tragic, accidental death on December 2, 1974. Ted Landsman is responsible for this latest revision of Jourard's classic text. An effort is made to update many of the conceptualizations portraying people at their human best by relating them to the findings of Gestalt and Cognitive psychologists, the biofeedback movement, transcendental meditation, and contemporary views about the two sides of the brain, one controlling analytical and the other emotional functions. Ideas from these various approaches are noted throughout the latest revision of *Healthy Personality* with the implication that they suggest further ways in which a person can "maximize" himself or herself, and increase his or her "self-actualization." Occasionally in this latest revision, Landsman offers a counterposition to one of Jourard's strong opinions.

As Jourard says in the introduction, "this book presents what we have learned in psychology about healthy personality . . . about how to function effectively." It offers many ideas about how to make one's self a "better self," or "one's best self." Throughout there is much of the jargon of authenticity and the vocabulary of self-actualization. Jourard offers many of the familiar, perhaps frayed, Humanistic-Existential themes: we hear about "Being-motivation," "authentic communication," "growth facilitating happenings," "consciousness expanding influences," and so on. But certainly at its best this approach emphasizes full participation in life and urges us to experience fully our own existence. Jourard presents a model of human beings as positive, active, and purposeful, and he constantly stresses the values of responsible choice and greater freedom and respect for the individual person. This is an approach that can help give rise to a zest and enthusiasm for living.

In particular, Jourard has some interesting and provocative things to say about research done in scientific psychology. He claims that the subjects of such studies are usually dehumanized, and are studied to help other people control and predict their behavior, not necessarily for their own well being. Jourard states:

I do not believe that the quality of personal life has improved as a result of eighty years of scientific investigation of human consciousness and action. In fact, there is more basis to believe the knowledge of human beings we have acquired has been used to control and limit them rather than to enlarge their awareness, their dignity, or their freedom.

Jourard claims that the subjects of research in scientific psychology are generally seen as Other, or as Them, and the investigators, or Us, want to further their own interests by learning how to make "them" more amenable to control. The investigators want to gain increments of power over "their" experiences and actions. The scientific psychologist serves as a functionary doing research more for the sake of the institution than for the person being studied. He is often not seeking the truth about humans that makes people free, but facts that make them more vulnerable to manipulation. Jourard claims, for example, that the findings of the psychological testing movement are more often used to serve someone else's ends, and not necessarily the ends of the person being tested. The ability of the tester to discover something about the person being tested is not necessarily good for the latter.

A new chapter on religion has been added to this latest edition of *Healthy Personality*, in which Jourard's debt to Erich Fromm is obvious. Jourard opposes the institutionalized authoritarian religion of which Fromm wrote so much, and, like Fromm, claims that a healthy religion should encourage one to live in "growth-promoting" ways. Jourard offers the Humanistic position that a religious orientation is healthy if it enhances life and fosters the growth of one's powers as a human being. The test of one's religion is the quality of existence that it evokes. Jourard suggests the hypothesis of replacing the word "God" with the word "Life." True devotion to God would mean "living in a life-giving way," and "sin" would amount to disobedience to the laws of life. Humanistic guilt arises when persons have diminished the quality and possibility of life for themselves and others, and not when they violate some rule imposed upon them. Jourard accepts what O.H. Mowrer says about people

repressing their consciences, and needing to change their usual ways of behavior from self-centered pursuit of satisfaction to more loving concern for others. Guilt can be useful as a signal that some behavior has wronged someone, and Jourard, like Mowrer, strongly suggests an old remedy — righting the wrong that has been done. But Jourard is willing to admit that "there are professionals in the field of religion," and this is, after all, a text on psychology, not religion.

Jourard had a long-time interest in self-disclosure and interpersonal communication, and in *Healthy Personality* he frequently makes the point that dialogue, not imposition, power plays, and manipulation, is the appropriate way for human beings to be or to strive to be with each other. He makes the point that it is probably only within the context of an authentic loving relationship that sexual experience is the source of the richest pleasure: "There is still no better aphrodisiac than authentic, committed, responsible love for the partner." In an article titled "Marriage is for Life," appended to *Healthy Personality*, Jourard reveals how he himself refused to divorce and remained married to the same woman for twenty-six years. He states that choosing to remain wedded to the same spouse is virtually to live an alternate lifestyle in the twentieth century. He forcefully states his conviction that enduring, growing relationships are essential for a truly human life. A life lived in continuing dialogue with some few others is essential for personal fulfillment and growth.

As with most works of Humanistic-Existential writers, working class men and women are hardly represented in *Healthy Personality*. As one reads this book, and other Humanistic-Existential works, one can get the impression that the lifestyle these writings represent has little to do with the ordinary world. Throughout *Healthy Personality*, Jourard makes "Some Existential Suggestions." He suggests that people might meticulously plan to pilot an airplane, or learn a new language and seek a new culture. He tells people to take joy in their accomplishments as they skim along the water skilfully maneuvering their boats or play a sonata with distinction. He clearly writes for "persons who are basically need-satiated and can see the world in a broader, cosmic fashion," for people who have become "Being-motivated" and "partake generously of all the joys that life provides . . . and give joyous vent to the highest aspirations and needs."

Indeed, the tone of some of Jourard's writing echoes that strand of Humanistic-Existentialism that seems to be deeply contemptuous of ordinary people and the humble realities of everyday life. We hear about "optimal persons" who function on a qualitatively different level than the rest of people; of B-motivated people who see the world in a manner that differs from the way D (for Deficiency)-motivated people see it, and "face a problem in communicating with those of lesser awareness."

Self-actualizers like to situate themselves on a higher plane, incomprehensible and inaccessible to the common run of humanity. They often seem to have a disdain for the average experiences of the worlds of common people. Many "existentially" minded people can seem unreal. Their ideology does not seem conducive to values that enable people to bake bread, raise children, and keep old men warm in winter. The Humanistic-Existential position often sounds more plausible when advocated for the materially prosperous. It seems best suited for those with money and leisure. For most people, it is simply hard to actualize at today's prices. The virtue of "self-actualization" often seems to degenerate into a self-conscious and self-preoccupied kind of life in the worst sense of those words. It often seems to involve such an awareness of the self as something to be expressed and defended, and such an insistence upon obligations to oneself, that it amounts to an existential narcissism.

But overall this latest edition of *Healthy Personality* takes us back to the Humanistic faith in the human capacity for good and betterment, and gives us views of human life at its best. Sidney Jourard was an erudite but lucid writer, and his book remains pleasantly readable.