The goal of humanistic psychology is to overcome the paradox of humanism by frankly acknowledging and directly addressing the ways psychology is unique.

- Phenomenology concerns how it feels to be alive
- Existentialism is a concern with the meaning of life

The chemistry of experience

- Wilhelm Wundt founded the first psychology lab
  - Introspection
    - Believed the only way to study experience was to observe it
    - Requires training to describe what occurred in the mind when observing various objects, feeling other sensations (i.e. pinpricks), and coming to simple decisions (i.e. whether or not to press a button)
- The goal of phenomenologists was to analyze any experience, feeling, or thought into its most basic, irreducible parts
- This failed for 3 reasons
  - Usefulness was unclear—once experience was analyzed into the parts, then what?
  - Some complex perceptions, feelings, and thoughts are irreducible
    - i.e. love dissected into its parts is no longer love
  - The method of introspection
    - Scientifically-minded psychologists became unsatisfied with methods that an observer provided data that nobody else could see or verify
    - Behaviorism moved away from introspection

Phenomenology: awareness is everything

- The central insight of humanistic psychology is that one's conscious experience of the world—phenomenology—is more important psychologically than the real world itself
- Sometimes assume that immediate, conscious experience is all that matters
  - Everything that has happened to you in the past, is true about you at this moment, and might happen in the future can influence you only in the way it affects your thoughts and feelings at this moment
  - The only place and time that you exist is in your consciousness, here, right now
  - Only the part that you perceive will ever matter to you
- The realization that only your present experience matters is the basis of free will
  - In this moment right now, you can choose
- Talmud
  - "We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are."
- Epictetus
  - "It is not things in themselves that trouble us, but our opinions of things."
- Carl Rogers
  - "I do not react to some absolute reality, but to my perception of this reality. It is this perception which for me is reality."
- Construal
  - Your particular experience of the world
  - Interpretations rather than direct reflections of reality, so can be freely chosen
  - It is through choosing your construal of the world—deciding how to interpret your experience—that you achieve free will

Existentialism

- The attempt to understand human experience and phenomenology
- Philosophers Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Binswanger, Boss, and Sartre
- Arose as a reaction against European rationalism, science, and the industrial revolution
- Begins with the concrete and specific experience of a single human being existing at a particular moment in time and space
- Key existential questions
  - What is the nature of existence? How does it feel? What does it mean?
3 parts of experience

According to Binswanger, if you look deeply into your own mind, you'll find that the conscious experience of being alive has 3 components

1. Biological experience (Umwelt)
   - Sensations that you feel because of being a biological organism as part of nature
   - Pleasure, pain, heat, cold, and all other sensations that your body experiences
   - Sensations of your eyes, ears, tongue, nose, and skin
   - i.e. poke your finger with a pin

2. Social experience (Mitwelt)
   - What you think and feel as a social being that relates to others
   - Your emotions and thoughts about other people, and the emotions and thoughts you received from them
   - i.e. think about someone you love, fear, or admire

3. Inner, psychological experience (Eigenwelt)
   - The experience of experience itself
   - How you feel and think when you try to understand yourself, your own mind, and your own experience
   - The experience of introspection
   - i.e. try to watch yourself having the experience of a pinprick

Bad faith

Existentialists believe that you must face Angst directly

- Facing your own mortality is your existential responsibility which requires existential courage or “optimistic toughness”

Head-in-the-sand

- A temporary way out is to avoid the topic and problem—not worry about what life means, but rather do as told by society, convention, peer group, political propaganda, religious dogma, and advertising—lead the unexamined life

- 3 problems with this “living in bad faith”
  1. To ignore the troubling facts of existence is to live a cowardly lie
     - Immoral and selling soul for comfort
     - This is the only change you'll get to experience as much of the world as possible
  2. Even if you manage to keep yourself unaware of troubling existential issues, you still won't be happy
     - For most people a meaningful life is more important than being wealthy
  3. It’s impossible b/c choosing not to worry about the meaning of life and surrendering your choices to external authorities is still a choice
     - Sartre: “What is not possible is not to choose...if I do not choose, I am still choosing.”

Authentic existence

- Being honest, insightful, and morally correct
- Courageously coming to terms with your existence in the world
- Won't relieve you from loneliness and unhappiness, however; a courageous examination of conscious experience reveals the awful truth that every person is forever alone and doomed to die
- Life has no meaning beyond what you give it
- The essence of the human experience is this discovery: the human is the only animal that understands it must die
- Existentialism takes moral courage to peer into the void of mortality and meaninglessness

Optimistic humanism: Rogers and Maslow

- 2 Americans turned existentialism into an optimistic philosophy of life
- Assumption, but there’s no proof it’s true
  - People have free will, are basically good, and have an innate need to make themselves and the world better
Self-actualization: Rogers

- A person can be understood only from the perspective of their **phenomenal field** – The entire panorama of conscious experience
- These experiences continually combine in different ways at every moment of a person’s life, and the result of their combination is what the person experiences at each moment
- Rogers added that all people have a basic need to actualize—maintain and enhance life
  - The goal of existence is to satisfy this need

The hierarchy of needs: Maslow

- Begins with the basic assumption that a person’s ultimate need or motive is to self-actualize
- Maslow, however, claimed that this motive becomes active if and only if the person’s other, more basic needs are met 1st
- According to Maslow, human motivation is characterized by a hierarchy of needs
  - Basic survival—food, water, safety, etc.
  - Once basic needs are met then seek sex, meaningful relationships, prestige, and money
  - Only when enough of those things are met does one turn to the quest for self-actualization
- Someone starving to death isn’t concerned with higher aspects of existence
- Practical applications in areas like career choice and employee motivation

The fully functioning person

- Maslow and Rogers shared a belief that the best way to live is to become more clearly aware of reality and of yourself
  - If you can perceive everything in the world accurately and w/o neurotic distortion, and if you then take responsibility for the choices you make in life, then you become a fully functioning person (Rogers), who lives an authentic existence, except the fully functioning person is happy
  - The only way to accomplish this is to face the world w/o fear, self-doubt, or neurotic defenses
  - This is possible only if you have experienced “unconditional positive regard” from important people in your life—esp. your childhood
  - Maslow disagreed and believed that anyone from any background could become a fully functioning person
  - Rogers thought that if you come to feel that others value you only if you’re smart, successful, attractive, or good, then you’ll develop “conditions of worth”
- “Conditions of worth” are bad b/c they limit your freedom to act and think
  - If you believe you’re only valuable if certain things about you are true, then you’ll distort your perception of reality to believe that those things are true, even if they’re not
- A person who has experienced unconditional positive regard from parents and other important people in their life doesn’t develop such conditions of worth

Psychotherapy

- The goal of Rogerian psychotherapy is to help the client to become a fully functioning person
  - This is achieved through the therapist’s providing unconditional positive regard
  - The therapist’s job is to help the client perceive their thoughts and feelings w/o trying to change them, and to make the client feel appreciated no matter what they think, say, or do
  - This process allows insight and the removal of conditions of worth and the eventual result will be a fully functioning person
  - Rogerian psychotherapy requires large amounts of time and patience by the therapist
  - What is the result of this kind of therapy?
    - People become more like the people they wish they were
      - 2 problems with this conclusion
        1. The results seem to be about equally due to the clients changing their own self-views as to their changing their ideal views—not only change what they think they’re like, but also change what they wish they were
        2. It’s not certain that describing oneself as being highly similar to one’s idea of a perfect person is always a good measure of psychological adjustment
    - There’s more to mental health than believing that one is the person they want to be
    - The 1st job of the therapist is to listen to the client—“uh huh”
Personal constructs: Kelly

- Personal constructs
  - How one’s “cognitive” or thinking system builds one’s experience of reality out of a unique set of ideas about the world
- Personal construct theory
  - Constructs as bipolar dimensions along which people or objects can be arranged
  - These constructs can be nearly anything
    - The idea of good vs. bad, large vs. small, weak vs. strong, conservative vs. liberal, etc.
    - Each individual has a unique set of constructs that make up their personal construct system
- There are many ways to assess your personal construct system, but Kelly favored the Role Construct Repertory Test, or Rep test
  - Asks you to ID 3 people who are or have been important in your life
  - Then describe how any 2 of them seem to you to be similar to each other and different from the 3rd
  - Then you do the same with 3 other ideas important to you
  - In each case the 2nd question is the same: how are 2 of these similar to each other and different from the 3rd?
- Kelly believed that the ways you discriminate among these objects, people or ideas reveal the constructs through which you view the world
- Principle of parsimony
  - All other things being equal, the simplest theory is the best
- Constructs come from past experience
  - Everything that’s ever happened to you and that you’ve ever seen or heard provide the data from which you must develop an interpretation or theory of what the world is like
  - Your personal construct system becomes the framework for your perception of and thinking about the world

Flow: Csikszentmihalyi (chick-sent-me-high)

- Believes that your moment-to-moment experience is what really matters in life—how you make the most of it
- "optimal experience"
  - What it is and how to achieve it
- Flow
  - The subjective experience a person has during an autotelic activity—the enjoyment itself
  - Not the same as joy, happiness, etc.
  - Tremendous concentrations, utterly no distractibility, and no thoughts of anything but the activity itself
  - One’s mood is elevated slightly (not to the point of ecstasy) and the time seems to pass very quickly
  - This is what is experienced when all goes well by a writer writing, a painter painting, a gardener gardening, a baseball player waiting for the next pitch, an instructor lecturing
  - Computers induce flow in many people
    - i.e. Sim-City
    - The sense of losing track of time is a sign that you have been experiencing flow
  - The defining attitude of flow is that it’s a focused and ordered state of consciousness that comes from the interplay between skill and challenge
  - If an activity is too difficult or too confusing, you’ll experience anxiety, worry, and frustration;
  - Advancing flow entails finding something you find worthwhile and enjoyable and becoming good at it
    - Watching TV dissipates and prevents flow for long periods of time
  - A rather acute kind of happiness
    - The drawback with flow is that someone experiencing it can be difficult to interact with—they may not hear you, may seem distracted, and may be poor company in general

Hardiness: Maddi

- Stress has become a bad word, but a life w/o stress would be boring and meaningless
- Many people seek to avoid stress by conforming to the expectations of others and society which is a existential psychological pathology similar to Sartre’s "bad faith" and R.D. Laing’s "false self"
- The most extreme is "vegetativeness"
  - Feeling that nothing has meaning and becoming listless and aimless
- Less severe and more common is "nihilism"
  - Experience becomes dominated by anger, disgust, and cynicism
- Another potential side effect of the conformist lifestyle is an "adventurousness" in which only extreme thrills capture attention and distract from the deep feelings of meaninglessness
- "Hardiness"
  - A lifestyle that embraces rather than avoids potential sources of stress
  - Properly approached, stressful and challenging experiences can be sources of learning, growth, and wisdom and success in dealing with them is an important part of what gives life meaning
  - Self-report scales to measure the trait of hardiness

Construals and reality

- Any pattern of experience can lead to numerous construals
- Constructive alternativism
  - The construal you use is one you chose, not one that was forced on you b/c others were equally possible
  - Your personal reality doesn’t simply exist; it’s constructed in your mind
  - There are always alternative ways you could choose to construct reality, besides the way you are using at this moment
- Scientific paradigms are different frameworks for construing the meaning of data
  - 2 implications about scientific paradigms
    1. The choice between them is not between which is right and which is wrong, but rather which one addresses the topic you are interested in understanding, and
    2. You need all of them b/c any one of them always leaves out something important
Positive psychology

• The purpose of this new field of theorizing and research is to correct what its proponents see as years of overemphasis by psychology on psychopathology and malfunction

• Instead, the field seeks to refocus attention on phenomena such as “positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions” in order to “improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless

• “subjective well-being”
  – The degree to which one feels good
  – Beyond a certain level of necessity, money isn’t important for happiness and overcoming challenges becomes more important—Maslow’s theory

Conclusion

• The mystery of experience
  – Conscious experience is a basic mystery of life
    • It can’t be explained or described well by science or words

• Understanding others
  – One direct consequence of the phenomenological view is a far-reaching cultural and even moral relativism
    • You can’t judge the moral codes of others through your own moral code b/c there is no objective reality—or, if there is, there’s no way to know it
    • Would be unwise to judge the values and practices of other cultures from your perspective
      – Different cultures see the world very differently, and to understand them, just as understanding another person, we need to seek to understand how reality look from an alternative point of view