

Development of the Dynamic Humanism Research Perspective 2021

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As a social scientist, I have spent my career trying to comprehend the underlying motivation/source of expressive and religious behavior – the arts and ritual. In this statement, I describe my path to the research perspective that I have ended up adopting, which I refer to as “dynamic humanism.”

During my career, I have examined various artistic genres and specific art “products” as well as different types of ritual. Early on, it became apparent to me that the separation we make in western culture between art and religion does not hold up cross culturally. For most of human history, art and religion have been fused – undifferentiated. If in the modern context we want to make a separation, I would make it between entertainment with its secular focus, and art/ritual with its sacred/spiritual focus. More about this as we proceed.

There are many different and illuminating connections that can be drawn between art/ritual and society/culture or individual/personality, and much of my early professional work was devoted to these pursuits. But these investigations were not fully satisfying to me as they did not reveal the fundamental source of this universal human behavior. As my specialty in my discipline was psychology, I began my expanded search by exploring the various branches of psychology – behavioral, cognitive, developmental, psychodynamic, humanistic, clinical, evolutionary, paranormal, social, etc. to seek an explanation at the mental level for what is happening when humans engage in art/ritual behavior. This led me to the distinction between the two basic modes of mentation – rational versus intuitive and their respective associations with verbal/linear/“left brain” and visual/wholistic/“right brain” operations.

When these inputs were put together with the results of research on creativity and journeys into theoretical physics and the nature of reality as revealed by the sophisticated practice of meditation, my research perspective began to form around a set of fundamental, and interrelated dichotomies: material-energetic, physical-spiritual, objective-subjective, rational-intuitive, thoughtful-inspirational, intellectual-imaginative, profane-sacred, secular-religious, separate-unified, etc. Then, it became apparent that these categorical dichotomies were really a group of overlapping continua, each stretching from one extreme to the other with the various institutions of society and their associated cultural values located at different points along these continua. Within this array, art/ritual behavior was motivated and expressed toward the one end of the spectrum – the intuitive, sacred, spiritual, subjective, energetic, inspirational, imaginative, unified end.

On the social continuum, cooperative social behavior rested toward the middle while behavior associated with individual self-interest/biological survival was located at one extreme and behavior associated with altruism/unification was located at the other extreme. At this point, in the latter 1970s, my overall research perspective consolidated, to which I gave the name: “dynamic humanism.” And as they say, “The rest is [my] history.”

Since that time, among many other endeavors, I have written 220+ expository works – articles, essays and books [www.dynamic-humanism.com]; and 45 artistic works – poems [www.dynamic-humanism.com/poetry]. And I have created 54 sculptures in stainless steel cable [www.tabsculpture.com]. All of this work reflects the dynamic humanism perspective which celebrates the balanced input from all of the continua as the most realistic, productive and sustainable way for individuals and societies to develop and conduct themselves. The correlate of this position is that when the worldviews of humans and their societies move away from this center toward either extreme, they lose their integrity and long-term viability. Attaining and maintaining overall balance in all aspects of the individual self and in and among all of the institutions of society is the ideal goal. Striving to achieve this goal will be VERY difficult, especially for the egalitarian version of complex society which, in terms of the 250,000 year history of modern humans, is still in its experimental infancy. Can we get it right – and rapidly, before we devolve into a permanent condition of authoritarianism or return to a state of bands and tribes? That is up to the leadership of modern humanity as a whole to determine. My concern is that humanity be fully aware of the fundamental level where its essential challenge lies and not just proceed under the dominant rational-material-secular worldview believing it can address its myriad of problems resolving each issue separately.

The two essays that are associated with this “research perspective” statement support the theses that 1) science is in need of greater recognition of the unification perspective as it attempts to account for the way reality “works” from the micro to the macro level [“Humans: Nothing and Everything – A Matter of Perspective”], and 2) western culture is in need of greater input from the unification perspective if its social relations, governmental operations, and relationship to planetary ecology are to promote and sustain humanity’s future in a state of egalitarian, civilized, complex society [“The Underlying Reason Why Western Culture is at Risk”].

Do these two theses just elevate my focus on the perspective underlying art/ritual and try to make it more central in modern complex culture? Maybe. Read the two essays and decide for yourself. In this statement, I indicate very briefly how I arrived at the research point of view that leads to the above theses.