

Anthropological Psychology

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Anthropological Psychology is a discipline that has developed in this country during the 1990's, primarily at the Department of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, Aarhus University, in cooperation with the Institute of Psychology, University of Copenhagen.

The position of Anthropological Psychology in general psychology. Anthropological Psychology is part of general psychology. It is in this context that Anthropological Psychology is to be determined.

The task of psychology is to identify, describe and explain the psychological phenomena of the world. Psychology must be able to decide which phenomena belong to the psychological field, as distinct from other phenomena that belong to other areas in science such as biology or sociology.

The task of general psychology is to identify, describe and explain what a psychic phenomenon is. General psychology deals not only with the human psyche, but also with psychical phenomena as such also. I.e. on the one hand we find psyche in animals, presumably right down to the lowest forms of life in the animal kingdom – and on the other hand the artificial psychic phenomena, which maybe will be generated through genetic engineering, bio-digital interconnecting of biological life and digital apparatus, interconnection of people in virtual reality etc.

General psychology can also be described as the discipline that deals with psychological as science. Questions regarding this issue are: What belongs to the field of psychology and which type of explanation psychology use. Therefore general psychology must have a strong theory of science trait. Danish general psychology is (by critics within psychology itself) often mistaken for philosophy. General psychology is not philosophy. Not if one – mistakenly – regards philosophy as uncommitted speculative constructionism. Danish general psychology is by large deeply rooted in reality and committed by the methodological connection between empirical research and theoretical explanation.

This notion of general psychology remains in force whether or not general psychology is seen as an independent discipline handled by general psychologists or as an aspect wherever psychology is carried out. In practice, both are the case in Danish psychology. There are dedicated general psychologists who deal with general psychology as such. But likewise – anybody who works within the development of psychological theories or with the development of pragmatic intervention models implicitly or explicitly - will more or less be carrying out general psychology. One works with general psychology, when one reflects on why one's own knowledge or processing contribution can be registered as a contribution towards psychology, why one's explanations is psychological and how one's contribution is placed in the psychological landscape compared to other disciplines, traditions etc.

Anthropological Psychology is the part of general psychology, which main objective is to identify, describe and explain why the human psyche is especially human. The purpose is to identify what makes our psyche differ from and especially in relation to (but

of course not necessarily better or more advanced than) on the one hand the animal psyche and on the other hand possible the artificial psyche.

Such defined, it is logically imperative that an anthropological psychological aspect (as part of the general psychological aspect overall) is present in any specific psychological theory or intervention model, which the discipline's actors are generating or developing. This trait stems from the fact that one always implicitly or explicitly will more or less consider or assume that (a) the theoretical explanations, one constructs, actually relate to a side of the particular human psyche (and not just the psyche as such), and (b) one's interventions merely start the same kind of psychic processes and changes, which also can be seen in other animal or artefact psyches (e.g. behavioural or neurological changes) or if one's interventions affect the special human part of the client's psyche and thus affects and starts a process, which can only be found in humans.

The historical approach. Anthropological Psychology is especially characterized by a historical approach to human nature. A study of the natural history perspective is carried out to see how human nature is bound to, but also have the possibility of development in our fundamental nature as physical and biological connected human beings. We cannot pass up the way we experience the world is based on the possibilities that lie in our own biological bodies (i.e. not the brain alone, as certain brain researchers like to point out, but in the whole body with its commitment and ability to perform). In the natural history perspective, it is also examined how in particular human nature has evolutionary and biological origins.

In cultural history perspective, we see how culture frames, but also makes the development of human nature possible. Furthermore, Anthropological Psychology, seen from this point of view, examines the similarities and differences in the specific common human expressions and between the common ground phenomena in various cultures at different times and different places on earth. The objective is to examine to which extent general phenomena are connected to human nature and if it is local (i.e. connected to the individual culture or the cultural history epoch), and to which degree these phenomena are universal, that is, irrespective of the culture in which they emerge.

In the history of life perspective, we see how the particular individual's specific existence emerges in the individual's special life story. The perspective is both turned backwards and pointing forward. In the backward perspective Anthropological Psychology deals the developmental processes. The forward perspective is about examining the developmental processes, which are available for the individual in the future development of own personality and existence. Including how one's nature, culture and life history forms the basis of a free will, working out of one's own existence, personality and the self.

(Preben Bertelsen, 2001)