

Preface

Each of the following articles was written by a person who was or is at Duquesne University. In some cases, the author still functions within the psychology department; in others, he or she has moved on but continues to sustain and enrich the thought that was begun earlier. Hence, aside from current members of the faculty, the list of contributors includes visiting professors, resident scholars, and past as well as present graduate students. Of the twenty-three articles that constitute the substance of this volume, nine are reprints of already published works while fourteen are original investigations written expressly for this collection.

Although a number of considerations were involved in the decision to produce this book of readings, the principal reason for its existence is our desire to communicate to our colleagues as well as to those who would study psychology something of the flavor of our orientation here at Duquesne University. In our view, this communication is necessary because much of the feedback that we have received concerning the meaning and implications of our existential-phenomenological psychology has indicated that there is considerable confusion and misunderstanding. For example, we frequently hear of our work described as armchair philosophy, as introspectionism, as unscientific, as humanistic poetics, or as a number of other misleading and usually undesirable activities. In point of fact, we understand our work as constituting a unique project that is firmly rooted in both philosophical and psychological traditions. Yet, it involves an original and creative synthesis of each. Further, we see ourselves as psychologists who are working within an expanded conception of science, trying to articulate an integrated approach to the study of human experience and behavior.

The doctoral program of the psychology department at Duquesne University was founded in 1962 by Adrian van Kaam. Through his singular effort the project to found psychology as a human science received its original conception as well as its initial impetus. However, the further development and articulation of this enterprise has been an expression of the entire department. It really could not have been otherwise since the nature of our emerging orientation and its relation to the field of psychology at large has demanded a communal, collaborative effort.

The reader of this volume will readily grasp the fact that our existential-phenomenological psychology is continuously in evolution. In our attempts to deepen our understanding of the meaning of human existence, we are constantly questioning our presuppositions and forever challenging our tendencies to reach premature closure. Thus, while we are reasonably certain of our overall direction and the goals towards which we are striving, we want to remain open to change; we seek to deliberately avoid any dogmatic stance. There is no room in our project for irrevocable prescriptions, for dogmatic assertions, or for the construction of an immutable conceptual edifice. In the sense that it is still unfolding, our existential phenomenological psychology remains essentially unfinished, critical of its presuppositions and concernfully oriented towards widening its relevant contexts. This style of developing—one that is ever mindful of the fact that the paradigm itself can change and grow—seems to us to be a prerequisite for adequate and mature theorizing.

While the majority of American psychologists are still rooted in a natural science preconception of being human, there is increasing evidence of a concern with breaking the binds that have tied us exclusively to that conception, with opening psychology to the full richness and subtlety of human living. We feel that our approach provides a way of thinking and speaking that can both facilitate and implement this opening process. We see our focus upon understanding the way in which individuals experience, interpret and act in the world as constituting a significant step forward in the movement of psychology towards becoming a truly human science of man.

In our introduction to those articles that will be described as implementations of the human scientific approach to psychology, we try to stress the fact that this perspective in no way limits the diversity of researchable problems. Certainly, a moment's reflection upon the range of topics covered in this single volume will attest to that. As a matter of fact, most of us who are actively engaged in the pursuit of a human scientific psychology tend to feel that the approach that we have adopted and are endeavoring to refine has, if anything, opened us to an even greater field of richness and subtlety. In other words, to study man as a human being, rather than as a human organism or as a human machine, has meant that

we are now challenged by the problem of capturing the full depth and diversity of human living. Our only problem, and it is a truly monumental one, is that of finding those methodological and conceptual tools that will enable us to do justice to the phenomena that we seek to understand.