The Humanistic Psychologist

Remembering Mike Arons (1929–2008): An Annotated Bibliography

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This article commemorates the life and works of Dr. Myron Milford “Mike” Arons (1929–2008), recognized internationally as one of the founders of humanistic psychology. Although Arons contributed exhaustively to humanistic psychology and he presented extensively during his career, on the whole he published relatively little—and sometimes in publications of limited circulation. This article presents an annotated bibliography of as complete a collection of his writings as possible as both a tribute to his memory and a gateway to reflection and scholarship by future generations of humanistic psychologists who did not have the privilege to know Arons. Following an overview of his work and a biographical sketch, Arons’ papers are presented thematically in 7 sections: (a) his inspiration and influences; (b) history and evolution of humanistic psychology; (c) humanistic education; (d) creativity; (e) research (experimental studies, the hermeneutic method, intuition, psi phenomena, and human science research in psychology); (f) humanistic ethics; and (g) Arons’ final musings. The article concludes with a discussion about the relevance of Arons’ works today.

Keywords: Mike Arons, history of psychology, humanistic education, creativity, hermeneutics

The humanistic vision is the space we must always return to as the starting point, this ultimately irreducible wholeness and diversity of human being. What is the good human life? No other psychology can answer this question.

—Mike Arons (in Elkins, 2000, p. 126)

This article commemorates the life and works of Dr. Myron Milford “Mike” Arons (1929–2008), beloved psychologist, philosopher, existentialist, scholar/researcher, discussant, artist, educator, mentor, and friend, recognized internationally as one of the founders of humanistic psychology. Furthermore, 2018 marks both the 10th anniversary of Arons’ death and the 50th anniversary of his arrival at (then) West Georgia College to pioneer,
per Abe Maslow’s recommendation, the third humanistic psychology program in the United States, while 2019 is the 90th anniversary of Arons’ birth.

Described by Stan Krippner as “a force of nature,” by Louise Sundararajan as “the most authentic person [she] ever met,” by Maureen O’Hara as “a man fully alive!” (quoting John Donne), and by Ruth Richards and Howie Whitehouse as an “advocate of open inquiry, authenticity, and truth,” Arons “urged us all to live authentically in the moment—beyond distortions and limitations—and fearlessly see what life would reveal” (Richards & Whitehouse, 2008, pp. 268, 264). Consistent with humanistic psychology’s emphasis on paradox (Rowan, 2001), which Arons embraced via his hermeneutic negotiation of dialectics, Chris Aanstoos (2008) portrayed Arons as “ever the organizer/disorganizer, leader/anarchist, serious/playful” (p. 375) and as “Socrates and Zorba, Apollo, and Dionysus, an elf and a wizard” who was “ever-ready to encounter life, to embrace alterity, replete with dialectical contradictories, available to every possibility, every nuance. Where others would meet with disaster, Mike’s openness discloses unforeseen opportunity” (Aanstoos, 1989, p. 77).

Arons, who before becoming a psychologist had worked as a cab driver in Detroit, was a strong proponent of narrative and its empathetic implications. He once remarked, “Cabbies, like bartenders and barbers, listen to and tell stories. The storyteller and listener are somehow personally implicated in these life stories, even when they are ostensibly centered on others” (in Aanstoos, 1991, p. 170). Once Arons entered psychology, he strove to use narratives as a vehicle for interdisciplinary and methodological integration in the interests of broadening and deepening the field’s scope and of legitimizing rigorous intersubjective approaches to understanding and contextualizing human experience in psychological science. He “cared deeply for others . . . and for the trajectory of the future, far beyond his own lifetime and ours,” imploring “us [to] be richly present in our lives, our work, our research, our relationships—and [to] use our gifts, for heaven’s sake!” (Richards & Whitehouse, 2008, pp. 268–269).

**Background**

I met Arons in 2001, during my first semester in the master’s program at West Georgia. Though he had retired the previous year, as founder of the program and then emeritus faculty, he still regularly attended departmental events and facilitated Philo Cafés (see Café philosophique, n.d.) in the area. He also presented an early rendition of his *Standing Up for Humanity* project (see Arons, 2007) during a faculty colloquium series early in 2002, which I summarized for the department’s periodical, *The Crucible* (Bland, 2002). A few months later, the Psychology Department changed buildings, and I assisted with sorting and moving materials. In a closet was a stack of mimeographed typewritten articles of Arons’ that I volunteered to convert to electronic documents and post on the West Georgia Psychology Web site (see https://www.westga.edu/academics/coss/psychology/mike-arons.php). That moving day also inspired me to begin work on a history of the department and to serve as curator of its artifacts. As part of the history project, I interviewed Arons at his home on several occasions, which often evolved into conversations that lasted well into the night.

During this time, I was getting to know Arons through two simultaneous channels: (a) the then-present-day Arons whom I encountered in the flesh and (b) the Arons of the past who spoke to me through his writing as I transcribed his papers into Word documents. After I graduated in 2003, Arons and I continued to meet regularly. One day he asked if
I would serve as editor of his collected works. He left me with a box of additional papers—some published, some not; some from decades earlier, others from the previous month. I set about the task of thematically organizing them. Meanwhile, I spent several afternoons with Arons by the fireplace in his bookshelf-lined basement or on the deck he built behind his house (the basis of his “platform experience,” see Arons, 1999c), dialoguing, debating, reminiscing about the past, musing about the next installment of his Standing Up for Humanity project. I also remember observing his e-mail discussions about psychology and science with Zeno Franco and Harris Friedman (compiled in Franco, Friedman, & Arons, 2008) as they took place, as well as his playful competition with Tom Greening over which of them rightfully deserved the title of “Emperor of China.”

Then, in 2007, I left Georgia to begin doctoral studies in Indiana. By this time, Arons’ health was beginning to decline. I saw him for the last time that December, when I visited during winter break. He and his family stopped taking guests shortly thereafter. That February, I received the call from a fellow recent West Georgia alum that he had died, “peacefully with his wife and daughter by his side” (Aanstoos, 2008, p. 375).

Having just started a doctoral program, for better or worse it was necessary for me to put Arons’ collected papers on the backburner. Unfortunately, because of my own family and career obligations, they remained there until last year, when I decided that preparing a book in his memory a decade after his death and on the 90th anniversary of his birth would be a fitting and timely tribute. Knowing that such a volume will need to be selective, in the interim I have prepared this annotated bibliography of as complete a collection of his writings as possible as both a tribute to his memory and a gateway to reflection and scholarship by future generations of humanistic psychologists who did not have the privilege to know Arons.

Arons’ Scholarship

Arons identified his line of scholarship as entailing the exploration of “creative and intuitive processes, human science research, psi phenomena, and humanistic and transpersonal education and psychology” (in Aanstoos, 1991, pp. 170–171) as well as “mythology, history of psychology, cultural and cross-cultural psychology, and Ricoeurian hermeneutics” (Arons, 1999c, p. 1). A summative content analysis of Arons’ (2000b) vita indicates that between 1967 and September 2000, he delivered 192 presentations (throughout the United States as well as in Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, Iceland, Belgium, Russia, India, Thailand, Japan, France, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Mexico, South Africa, England, and China); published 18 articles in journals and 6 in professional newsletters, 7 book chapters, and 8 other publications (book reviews, magazine columns, the Directory of Graduate Programs in Humanistic-Transpersonal Psychology, etc.); participated in 2 radio/TV broadcasts and 4 film presentations; and facilitated 9 experiential workshops. This count is somewhat incomplete. During the process of compiling this bibliography, some publications were discovered that were not included on his vita. Plus, Arons continued to extensively write and present between his retirement in 2000 and his death in 2008 (years not included on the vita), and some additional material was published posthumously.

Arons described his delivery style as an “excursion” (Bland, 2002, p. 1). Accordingly, the papers summarized herein possess the flowing, hermeneutic quality of a quality lecture, often embellished with personal storytelling, more so than a formal written treatise—but anchored in rigorous interdisciplinary discourse all the same. Being ever
open to the transpersonal and the postmodern while remaining firmly grounded in the existential, phenomenological, lived experiential, and practical, Arons seamlessly integrated traditions in the style of his mentor-turned-colleague, Jim Klee (see Klee, 1982). For just a few examples, these included references to and/or dialogues with Maslow, Rogers, May, Watts, gestalt psychology, Ricoeur, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, Straus, Kuhn, Jung, Hellenic and Gnostic philosophies, Plato, Pascal, Bergson, Einstein, early creativity literature (Barron, Guilford, and Getzels/Jackson), Taoism, Buddhism, psi research, cultural anthropology, Greek mythology, and evolutionary science.

Nary a paper herein fails to include an intellectual history of whatever broadly humanistic topic Arons was addressing—personal growth, intuition, holism, creativity, compassion, moral development, authenticity, choice, values, responsibility, experience, embodiment, mindfulness, time orientation, East-West integration, hermeneutics, and so forth—and the relationship between that history (old) and then-current issues (new). He also frequently incorporated inductive, interpretative analyses of everyday language and its connections to greater macro- and chronosystemic issues. Accordingly, to read Arons’ writings in sequence is to witness the unfolding of his thinking and experiencing, ever reflecting and reconnoitering (his word), present to his surroundings and to developments both in and around psychology, over several decades.

Several motifs were explored and revisited throughout Arons’ writings, but never in the same way twice. These included: (a) humanistic psychology as a third option to blind faith and to science that “plays dumb” to that which it cannot measure; (b) Barron’s (1963) description of the creative person as “at once naïve and knowledgeable, being at home equally to primitive symbolism and to rigorous logic” and as “both more primitive and more cultured, more destructive and more constructive, occasionally crazier and yet adamantly saner, than the average person” (p. 224); (c) the dialectics of progression—regression, absolute/singularity—relative/multiplicity, and distal—proximal; (d) the wisdom of the body and the wisdom of insecurity; (e) Panofsky’s interpretation of Dürer’s engraving, Melancholia I; (f) Maslow’s (1999) self-actualization and his conceptualization of creativity as distinct from talent; (g) Ricoeur’s (1970) dialogue with Freud and resacralizing hermeneutics; (h) originality having two vectors, one toward the origins (that which is already there) and the other toward beginnings (the new and unique); (i) multivocal symbols in creative work (e.g., Gulliver’s Travels interpreted differently at ages 10, 20, and 40); (j) Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/2014) phenomenology of the body; (k) the riddle of the Sphinx; (l) Bergson’s conceptualization of his many moods, sentiments, and interests as points-counterpoints in a life symphony as illustration of principles from gestalt and existential psychologies; (m) Socrates’ method of selecting students on the basis of whether they still could blush; (n) the relationship between creativity and intelligence; (o) detached-engagement in creativity and science; and (p) the problem of applying a linear conceptualization of technological progress to art.

Taken together, a principal leitmotif throughout Arons’ work was: How have we—as individuals, as psychologists, as a global human species—arrived at where we are now, that is, our current steps along our journeys through time, history, art, science, and life? And, what need we make sure to pack for the next leg of the trip? To aid in this pursuit, Arons demonstrated the value of (a) starting with the big picture and then zooming in on the parts to prevent tunnel vision and (b) using negotiation of dialectics to approach multiple truths without engaging in nihilistic deconstruction or one-sidedness. Broad-minded as Arons was, he also acknowledged the limits of human potential and creativity (à la May, 1975) and cautioned against free-for-alls. Thus, he delicately integrated the premodern with the modern and the postmodern (or -rational, or -scientific).
Arons’ Professional Biography

To do Arons’ story justice is to hear it firsthand. Rich autobiographical anecdotes are embedded throughout his writings (especially Arons, 1978b, 1990a, 1991b, 1992c, 1994b, 2000a)—that taken together form a cohesive narrative of the first 40 years of his life. In addition, a recounting of Arons’ memoir by Chris Aanstoos (2017; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gyXpwSvqG0) is strikingly comparable both in detail and inflection to my recollection of Arons’ own delivery.

Arons was born October 17, 1929 in Detroit, MI. His family was of Hungarian Jewish descent. Arons’ father emigrated to the United States at age 9 years, and his mother was first-generation American (Sandrine Arons, personal communication, August 14, 2018). Growing up, Arons was “tabbed retarded” (Arons, 1994b, p. 374) by the standardized tests of the day and “classed as what we now call a behavior disorder problem. The less kind and gentle term then was ‘incorrigible’” (Arons, 1990a, p. 124). On the other hand, he also had a natural inclination toward and passion for “guiding” (p. 124):

I spent years of my middle childhood . . . walking, biking, or busing up and down [the] streets [of Detroit] . . . over and over hundreds of times. I went to the top of . . . buildings and looked down and around from each vantage to all the others and then went to the ground and looked up. On days I dressed up like a rich kid and sat in the posh hotel lobbies and days after dressed to be saved and served on Michigan Avenue’s skid row soup kitchens. I came to know Detroit inside and out and upside and down. I was the unpaid guide who understood that city . . . as no paid guide ever knew or presented it . . . Later I took a job . . . as taxi driver. I was not your typical taxi cab driver. Sometimes I would pay the meter bill just to complete the tour I was giving. Sometimes the customer would pay for the whole day just to get the tour. (Arons, 1990a, p. 124)

After several unhappy years spent working in auto factories and selling carpet and real estate (interpolated by a single year at Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, 1950–1951), at age 27 Arons enrolled at Wayne State University and majored in psychology. “No enterprise could have stood more starkly in opposition to the narrative perspective on the world than the field of psychology at the time,” he reflected (in Aanstoos, 1991, p. 170). On the other hand, having independently perused writings by humanistic psychologists via a copy of Moustakas’’ (1956) edited volume, The Self, that he found left behind by a passenger in his taxi (Arons, 2004), Arons (2000a) discovered “what [he] thought psychology was all about” (p. 1).

Arons graduated with honors in 1961. Nonetheless, left with a deep sense of “personal dissatisfaction” with how “sterile [he] had seen psychology” of the day (in Smith, Moerman, & Wertz, 1986, p. 52), he “turned down thousands of dollars of graduate fellowships and assistantships” from eight graduate psychology programs in the United States (Franco et al., 2008, p. 196). Instead, despite knowing little French, he opted to “cross the Atlantic on a Holland-America student ship and hitch to Paris” (Arons, 2004, p. 4) for doctoral study at Sorbonne, “where existential phenomenology was blossoming. . . . I made this ‘irrational’ leap because I intuited [that] there was much more to being a human than anything being taught [in American psychology]—and bet my life on it” (Franco et al., 2008, p. 196).

In 1965, Arons defended a doctoral dissertation under the direction of Paul Ricoeur (cited by Université de Paris as “très honorable”) on the topic of creativity research as an expression of the implicit story of American psychology. During the interim, he and his wife, Christiane (whom he met in Paris and married in 1962), served as teachers in the...
then-recently liberated Gabon, Africa, where they rubbed shoulders with Albert Schweitzer.

Arons returned to the United States for postdoctoral studies at Brandeis University, where he served as Abe Maslow’s teaching assistant in 1966, and he also boasted Jim Klee and George Kelly as mentors. Thereafter, per Maslow’s recommendation, he pioneered two humanistic psychology programs, first at Prince of Wales College (Prince Edward Island, Canada) in 1967 and then at West Georgia College (now University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA) in 1968. The latter was the third of its kind in the United States (Richards & Whitehouse, 2008) after Sonoma State and Duquesne. Aanstoos (2008) reported, “At that time, West Georgia was a rather inconsequential place. [Arons] quickly turned it into a destination school for students and faculty from around the world” (p. 375):

Upon his arrival, Mike effected a tremendous, immediate transformation. . . . Thirty new courses were added, many never previously available anywhere in the country, and a humanistically oriented M.A. program established. It combined ancient Eastern and contemporary Western psychology. . . . quickly [making] West Georgia a mecca for students and faculty starving for a psychology that addressed their human experience. A deep awareness of the personal relevance of this vision of psychological life flourished in this setting. Students and faculty understood this was not a psychology of the impersonal Other, but a psychology speaking to—and transforming—one’s own Being. . . . The program aimed to be mind-blowing, its inclusion of the far-out a way of opening students to go beyond the presupposed, to the very ground of their existence. Nurtured by Mike’s genius for fostering creativity by removing its obstacles, this atmosphere was the clearing, the haven, within which one could ask any question, teach any course, explore any crevice of human existence. . . . Phenomenological, existential, hermeneutic, transpersonal, dialogal, experiential, perceptual, Jungian, Gestalt, parapsychological, [Asian], and body psychologies all were not merely welcomed, but integrated, each cross-fertilizing the others. (Aanstoos, 1989, pp. 78–79)

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to further elaborate on the extraordinary story of the development of the West Georgia program, rich detailed accounts are available in Aanstoos (1989, 1991, 2008, 2017) and in Bland (2003).

Arons served as chair of the West Georgia Psychology Department for 25 years and as professor for 32 years until his retirement in 2000. Aanstoos (2008) recalled that “Mike was a singular teacher, and it was his inspiration of generations of students that is his greatest accomplishment. . . . Dialectically, hermeneutically, intuitively, whimsically, lyrically, magically, Mike called forth . . . in his students the best they had yet to discover in themselves” (p. 376). In addition, Arons served as associate faculty to the Institute of Liberal Arts doctoral program at Emory University in Atlanta beginning in 1977, was a Visiting Professor of Psychology at Aarhus Universitet in Denmark in 1985, cocreated humanistic educational programming in Mexico and France in the 1990s, and he collaborated with Francesco Palmirotta to develop the International University of Humanistic Ontosophy in Bari, Italy during the 2000s.

Arons’ daughter, Sandrine, recalls Arons assisting adults with intellectual disabilities at a farm-based center in the Appalachians during the late 1970s and “pointing out their creative skills (in their artwork) as well as their ability to grow and prepare their own food” (Sandrine Arons, personal communication, August 25, 2018). Arons also served as President and Director of the Papillon Life Enrichment Center (Whitesburg, GA), and in 1999 was awarded by State University of West Georgia “for [his] service to the handicapped” (Arons, 2000b, p. 15).
Arons was an active participant in the institutionalization of humanistic psychology. He served on the executive committees of—and, in some cases, helped found—the Society for Humanistic Psychology (SHP, Division 32 of the American Psychological Association [APA], for which he served as copresident [1975–1976] and as member-at-large [1977–1979 and 1986–1989]) and its Transpersonal Psychology special interest group, the Association for Humanistic Psychology, the Association for Humanistic Education, the Consortium for Diversified Programs in Psychology, the International Human Science Research Association, the Association for Qualitative Research in Psychology, and the Psychical Research Foundation. He also sat on the editorial boards of the Journal of Humanistic Psychology and The Humanistic Psychologist; chaired numerous conferences on humanistic education and human science research; introduced the European Philo Café (see Café philosophiue, n.d.) to the Carrollton, GA community, to the SHP Hospitality Suite at APA conventions, and elsewhere (for further description, see Richards & Whitehouse, 2008); was designated SHPs Oral History Archivist; edited the first five editions of the Directory of Graduate Programs in Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology in North America; and advocated “using the Hospitality Suite [at APA conventions] to offer those ‘off-convention’ events that were more experiential, less formal, and offer us ways engaging our discipline as whole (and not always buttoned down) persons” (O’Hara, 2009, para. 1).

Arons was the first recipient of SHPs Abraham Maslow Heritage Award “for an outstanding and lasting contribution to the exploration of the farther reaches of human spirit” in 1999, and he was awarded the Charlotte and Karl Bühler Award “for pioneering work in graduate humanistic education” in 1993. “That Mike should have won all the awards [he received] should surprise no one. But that was never his aim. Indeed, the award with which he was most pleased” (Aanstoos, 2008, p. 375) was a plaque he received from the SHP Executive Board in the mid-1970s for his “undying devotion and ceaseless efforts to the plaqueless society” (Arons, 1988b, p. 382).

Furthermore, Arons chaired numerous academic committees within the University System of Georgia’s Board of Regents, and he was an active member of Divisions 24 (Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology), 49 (Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy), and 52 (International Psychology) of APA. During Fall Semester, 2007, Arons returned to West Georgia to instruct his last course, on embodied creativity. He died on February 18, 2008.

Organization of This Bibliography

Arons contributed exhaustively to humanistic psychology, and he presented extensively during his career. However, on the whole he published relatively little—and sometimes in publications of limited circulation. As noted above, whereas an eventual edited volume will by necessity include only the most essential material, here my intent is to present as complete a collection of his works as possible. To convey the essence of and maintain fidelity to the nuanced quality of Arons’ original writings, I have liberally incorporated direct quotations, especially for entries that are not easily located. Arons’ works are presented in seven sections: (a) his inspiration and influences; (b) history and evolution of humanistic psychology; (c) humanistic education; (d) creativity; (e) research (experimental studies, the hermeneutic method, intuition, psi phenomena, and human science research in psychology); (f) humanistic ethics; and (g) Arons’ final musings. Within each section, the papers have been arranged thematically (rather than alphabeti-
cally or chronologically) and ordered so that the content of each paper sets the stage for that of the subsequent one(s).

Unfortunately, a handful of writings included in Arons’ vita is excluded because they could not be located despite extensive searching of the Internet and of multiple libraries and archives. These include: (a) a study Arons conducted and delivered to the Canadian Senate in 1967 on the effects of legislation on LSD research (also referenced in Arons’ [1967] letter to Maslow); (b) “Nailing Down the Windstorm” (in Aum, 1968); (c) “Research and Humanistic Psychology” (in The Humanistic Psychologist, 1980); and (d) “Paradox of Psychoanalysis and Psi” (in Parapsychology Review, 1980).

Arons’ Inspiration and Influences

Arons readily acknowledged, reflected on, and expressed appreciation for his mentors, influences, and colleagues. On the first page of his vita, Arons (2000b) included a list of 20 “teachers to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude”: his homeroom teacher during grade school, his high school English teacher, an instructor at Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, five professors at Wayne State (including Roberto Giammanco; see Arons, 1992c), “Hans” in Paris and “Andre” in Gabon, Paul Ricoeur and Claude Lévi-Strauss in Paris; Jim Klee, Abe Maslow, George Kelly, and Min Chiang at Brandeis; Sidney Jourard; the Dean of Education and a history professor at West Georgia; and his wife, Christiane. During his career, he also prepared heartfelt obituaries for Frank Barron (Arons, 2003b), Duncan Blewitt (Schor & Arons, 2007), Earl Brown (Arons, 2003a), Carmi Harari (Serlin & Arons, 2004), and Jim Klee (Arons, 1997a, 1997b).

This section includes three autobiographical accounts. First, Arons (1994b) offers reflections on how he was drawn to humanistic psychology via a sense of resonance. Then Arons (1992c, 2004) describes his formative encounters with influential teachers. “Recognizable Paths of Humanistic Psychology” (Arons, 1994b)

Sketches Arons’ journey from childhood to chairing the West Georgia program. Arons emphasizes that although humanistic psychology is considered by some to be a “relative vision” that is “socio-temporally bound” (p. 371) to post-World War II America, for him its emphasis on full humanness by “rejoining [psychology] with the humanities at the essential value level” (p. 372) gives it a universal, eternal quality that renders it capable of addressing the social, ethical, and spiritual problems of the 21st century.

“Two Suns of My Student Years” (Arons, 1992c)

Arons reminisces about his encounters with two professors who “spoke to a part of me I was yet to discover” (p. 46): Roberto Giammanco at Wayne State and Paul Ricoeur at Sorbonne.

“My Passage Through Maslow” (Arons, 2004)

Traces the series of events—sometimes synchronous, sometimes serendipitous, often both—that constituted Arons’ excursion out of existential frustration in Detroit in the 1950s into a classroom at Brandeis with Maslow in the 1960s.
History and Evolution of Humanistic Psychology

Arons’ writings provide a fly on-the-wall perspective of the lived history of humanistic psychology and its impact both on psychology and on U.S. society and culture. Having entered the movement just as its institutionalization as the Third Force in American psychology was rapidly blossoming (see Aanstoos, Serlin, & Greening, 2000; DeCarvalho, 1991), Arons was an active participant in each of the waves of its developmental trajectory to date (i.e., Third Force, existential, transpersonal, constructivist/postmodern, integration with conventional psychology; see Bland & DeRobertis, 2017). He was ever loyal to the movement, despite whatever tensions emerged vis-à-vis what he described as “all the storms” (Arons, as cited in Smith et al., 1986, p. 53) of its unfolding. To illustrate, at an executive meeting of the Association for Humanistic Education, some board members suggested that the organization change its name to make it more palatable to the mainstream. Arons countered, “If the Jews had followed this line of thinking they would have stopped identifying themselves as Jews years ago! He felt the term ‘humanistic’ had a noble and strong tradition and ought to be preserved” (Allender & Richards, 1986, p. 137).

This section begins during the early 1970s, with Arons’ descriptions of humanistic psychology for the public (Arons, Harari, & O’Donovan, 1972, 1973) and for students (Arons, 1970). Next, Arons overviews Maslow’s theorizing (Arons, 1999a) and recounts the early history of humanistic psychology (Arons & Harari, 1992, 1994). Thereafter, Arons addresses humanistic psychologists in his role as President of the newly established SHP during the mid-1970s (Arons, 1976a, 1976b; Arons & Graham, 1976). Then Arons reflects on the next steps for the humanistic movement as it negotiated its relationship with the human potentials movement in the late 1970s (Arons, 1977c), as it matured in the 1980s (Arons, 1985b, 1988a), and as it reconciled its theoretical assumptions on self in the 1990s (Arons, 1999d), having expanded to also include transpersonal and postmodern perspectives.


Provides a brief, lay-friendly position statement of humanistic psychology’s emphases on (a) people “in all [their] complexity,” including the dimensions of “love, creativeness, will, choice, belief, purpose, meanings, and values,” and (b) the importance of a “process-centered” approach and of psychologists’ own personal growth as integral to the pursuit of studying individuals “as [they] live in [their] engagement in the world” (pp. 1–2). Outlines humanistic psychologists’ accomplishments as of the early 1970s, including the development of educational programs, research methods, community applications, therapeutic approaches, and professional organizations and seminal texts.

“Foreword” to Stewart and Thomas’s Introductory Experiential Psychology (Arons, 1970)

With no other textbook available at the time to guide the newly developed experientially oriented courses at West Georgia (designed to “open [students] to a more sensitive understanding of [themselves], others, and psychology,” p. x), Arons encouraged the faculty to develop their own. In his introductory remarks, Arons addresses the problems of psychology’s inheritance of Western philosophical bifurcations of mind and body, spirit
and matter, and emotions and intellect, and he suggests that “opening [oneself] perceptually, emotionally, and intellectually . . . expands [one’s] capacity for discovering relevance” (p. viii, emphasis added).

“Abraham Maslow: Yesterday, Tomorrow, and Yesteryear” (Arons, 1999a)

Originally presented as part of a symposium on humanistic icons at the 1996 APA convention in Toronto. Reviews Maslow’s contributions to psychology in their biographical and cultural-historical context. Suggests that, despite his influence in decades past, Maslow’s greatest inspiration has yet to take place. Specifically, “Maslow had much explicitly to say about values, and this value orientation implies much about ethics,” which constitute “a central problem of our times” that is “related to a chaotic historical stage of passage from a modern to a postmodern epoch” (p. 341). Accordingly, “if chaos is pregnant with order, as much of the creativity literature leads us to believe, there will likely be much of Maslow in whatever new ethical order emerges” (p. 341). Arons justifies this claim by critiquing the critiques of Maslow by transpersonalists (“ethical elitism [that] does not fully respond to the range of concerns for a population as a whole”) and by postmodernists (“deconstructive processes [that] are regressive and nihilistic”). He continues, “Maslow’s model, on the other hand, speaks to the whole range of human need and value states and does so from vantage points that include the biophysiological, sociological, anthropological, and . . . psychological as well as spiritual” (p. 343).

“Recollections and Reflections: Snippets From an Oral History of Humanistic Psychology” (Arons & Harari, 1992; republished as Arons & Harari, 1994)

Arons was designated Oral History Archivist by the Executive Board of SHP. In 1991–1992, he facilitated three group interviews in New York and San Francisco “to let ‘longtimers’ recount their memories of humanistic psychology” (p. 200). This article summarizes participants’ reminiscing about (a) the first humanistic psychology program at Sonoma State and early AHP conferences in the 1960s; (b) the human potential movement and of the establishment of Division 32 and the Association for Humanistic Education during the 1970s; and (c) humanistic luminaries such as Perls, Rogers, May, Maslow, Klee, Bühler, Angyal, Murphy, and Sutich. Arons’ own input includes comments about the isolation of humanistic psychologists in academe and a critique of the historical cultural homogeneity of humanistic psychology.

“Presidential Address (1976): Transformations of Science and Religion Through Humanistic Psychology” (Arons, 1976b)

Arons suggests that humanistic psychology’s focus on consciousness has helped or can help “to transcend the historical opposition between science and religion” and, therefore, “to restore a basis of authenticity to both” (p. 1). He cites numerous examples of how the values associated with humanistic psychology (e.g., orientation to process, potentials, meaning, fulfillment) offer the alternatives of (a) “direct salvation” to scientists who “play dumb” to subjective experience in their “bit-by-bit elimination of darkness and irrationality” and (b) “enlightenment” to fundamentalist religion that “offers significance only to the extent that one [buys] a hopeful future on blind faith” (pp. 1–2).
“President’s Column” (Arons & Graham, 1976)

At first, the development of Division 32 was controversial among humanistic psychologists. Arons later recalled that many humanistic psychologists were ambivalent about joining the organization out of concern that doing so would “dilute the movement” (in Aanstoos et al., 2000, p. 10) and/or “would be competitive and harmful to AHP” (Arons & Harari, 1992, p. 195). Arons was among the first Presidents of Division 32. As the result of a tie vote, he shared his Presidential year with clinical psychologist Stanley Graham. In this column, Arons and Graham exchange views on the priorities of the fledgling division.

“The Changing Winds” (Arons, 1976a)

Arons expresses concern that as humanistic psychology was gaining ground in academe, “some ill-advised measures [were] being instituted, mostly out of fear and pressure by university systems, which would put the focus back on standardization and quantification” (p. 5). While “the numbers game is highly appealing to those whose game is numbers, [it] is a catastrophe for those of us whose reality is people” (p. 5). Accordingly, he recommends that humanistic psychologists advocate for “quality” (p. 5).

“Humanistic Psychology Versus Human Potentials Movement” (Arons, 1977c)

This column was written in response to Gilbert’s (1977) warning about humanistic psychologists’ affiliation with the one-sidedness of the human potential movement. Arons reviews the American cultural context within which both humanistic psychology and the human potential movement arose and acknowledges the excesses of the latter. On the other hand, he also suggests that with time the extravagances will work themselves out, and he cautions against humanistic psychology becoming watered down in an effort to cater to the mainstream. “When one goes to purchase an automobile, the standard model is the mediocre one, the one where every part is the most standardized and interchangeable. The more deluxe, the more unique” (para. 4).

“A Quarter Century of Humanistic Psychologies” (Arons, 1985b)

In this conference report, Arons compares and contrasts the atmosphere of the Quarter Century Conference in 1985 with meetings of previous years. While “intellectually provocative, . . . it was not rebellious. There were no beads or bandanas around the head, few jeans, none torn” (p. 55). Humanistic psychology had grown up. On one hand, the mind-body exhibits “were commercialized” and “required little active participation” (p. 55); on the other hand, the information booths for humanistic graduate programs and the book tables were in abundance. Humanistic psychology was no longer “alien to the wider society” (p. 55). Arons reflects that the presentations clearly implied that “the experimentation with experience [was] now ready to evolve a more serious scientific and social dimension in the broader humanistic sense that Maslow, May, Jourard, and others had envisaged” (p. 60). Accordingly, citing Will Harmon, Arons identifies “three agenda items” for humanistic psychologists in the coming years: (a) to not “reject . . . the idea of objectivity” but rather to replace “the old flawed one” (positivism) with “a different sense of seeing reality as it is, the nonattachment of Buddhist philosophy”; (b) to participate in the “respiritualization of our institutions” (i.e., “economics cannot be the value center of our society”); and (c) to promote focus beyond national security (“either we have global
security or no security”) via further developing “new and positive images” of humanity (“we’ve had ample negative images . . . to bring on the power of human destruction”; p. 60).

“The Legacy of Maslow and Rogers” (Arons, 1988a)

Surveys the contradictions of humanistic psychology during the late 1980s. On one hand, it had “brought the East and West together” (p. 4) by bridging the present-centered temporality of existentialism and the eternal now of transpersonal psychology. On the other hand, despite its “progressive process to transcend polarities and become more holistic,” by having assumed the American visions of ongoing progress and of split between science and spirituality, it also had managed to become “caught up in newer polarities” (e.g., bifurcating cognitive—affective and intellectual—experiential and “[embracing] humanistic techniques while reacting against technology”; p. 3). As an antidote, Arons proposes that humanistic psychologists lead a “resurgence of the humanities” (p. 4). He suggests practical applications thereof in education, organizational development, and therapy, and he also proposes that humanistic psychology could contribute to constructive dialogue with cognitive psychology.

“Self, Multiple Selves, and the Illusion of Separate Selfhood” (Arons, 1999d)

Arons’ address to Division 32 upon receiving the first Abraham Maslow Heritage Award in 1999. Compares or contrasts perspectives on self though the lenses of humanistic (“an intrinsically core responsible self”), constructivist/postmodern (“a multitude of ‘selves’ playing themselves out reconstructively in their embedded cultural, historical contingency”), and transpersonal (“‘I’ am other, my greater identity is with the whole of Being, having dropped the illusion of my separate selfhood”) psychologies (p. 188). After reviewing critiques of each orientation, Arons concludes by emphasizing “the compatibility, even necessity of a compatibility, of differences” between the three viewpoints (p. 187).

Humanistic Education

Arons (1992c) envisioned higher education as a space where “the traditional ‘Who am I?’ question can draw from the living memory of the best of West and East” (p. 46). One of Arons’ students, B. Z. D’Elia, later recalled that he “[created], through his great mind a spirit, an atmosphere in which we are the learning and the learning is us. Seamlessly combining the intellectual, the experiential—the mind and the spirit—Mike was able to offer his students . . . a space in which to be” (in Richards & Whitehouse, 2008, p. 266).

This section commences with Arons’ portrayals of humanistic approaches to education for university administration (Arons, 1978a), for incoming students (Arons, 1972c), and for other psychologists (Arons, 1969). Then Arons (1977a) reflects on the social conditions that established the need for humanistic education. Thereafter, he offers practical suggestions for humanistic approaches to exams (Arons, 1977b), to teacher selection (Arons, 1977d), and to training/credentialing of psychotherapists (Arons, 1988b, 1999b). Finally, Arons discusses the roles of intuition in learning (Arons, 1978b, 1990a) and of values in education (Arons, 1991b).
“The Humanistic Orientation” (Arons, 1978a)

A mission statement of humanistic psychology for university administration. Contextualizes humanistic psychology’s role in the history of American psychology (transcending the limitations of psychoanalysis and behaviorism while subsuming their contributions in the interest of “discovering means of greater personal and social realization,” p. 1). Emphasizes its contributions to scientific methodology (“a rigorous approach which takes human experience of phenomena as its primary source of data,” p. 1) and education (“reaffirmation of personal uniqueness, of choice, of individual responsibility,” p. 2).

“Humanistic Psychology: West Georgia College” (Arons, 1972c)

A welcome statement from the chair to new students. Emphasizes humanistic psychology’s focus on growth, paradox, and epistemological and methodological heterogeneity (“What is growth inducing for one, at one time, may not be for another at another time,” p. 2). Arons concludes, “The most encouraging part of the program is that not everybody—student or faculty—leaves as they came” (p. 3). Arons included this statement on a poster display that he carried to conferences. Today it is exhibited prominently in the lobby of Melson Hall, home of West Georgia’s Psychology Department.

“Humanistic Psychology and the Academic Curriculum” (Arons, 1969)

Contextualizes the appeal of humanistic psychology to late 1960s youth, “a generation which has the leisure to transcend the self-preservative values of the rat race, to transcend—in Maslow’s words—the deficiency needs and values for the being needs and values. And providing this affluence, I believe, is the real success of their parents” (p. 3). Addresses the contradiction within psychology at the time to “tell the students that our psychology is young,... then we act like old men and oblige them to do the same thing” (p. 4). As an alternative to the “assumptions and prejudices” of experimentalism (p. 11), Arons outlines a humanistic curriculum that “makes a better scientific psychologist” by (a) “starting with a richer view of [humans]” (p. 9) and then (b) using a rigorous human science approach in the traditions of Husserlian phenomenology and James’ radical empiricism.

“The Future of Humanistic Education at the Heart of Crisis” (Arons, 1977a)

Emphasizes the value of and need for humanistic education as a “starting point for all questions related to self-knowledge” (p. 3). This provides an alternative to (a) the ethical void wrought by American society’s dichotomization of church and state and (b) the cultural assumption that “the ‘higher self’ is that which is infinitely adaptable to the changes [brought by] technology” (p. 5). Arons identifies the connections between these problems and American education’s centering around the three Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic) in the interest of “social conformity, psychological adjustment, and corporate goals” (p. 6).


Arons’ group oral exams, which he imported from Europe and hermeneutic tradition, are legendary among his students (see Richards & Whitehouse, 2008). He delivered presentations on the utility of this method several times, including to Division 2 of APA (Teaching of Psychology; Arons, 2000b). Arons describes, “It is a natural vehicle for
synergistic learning and, above all, for the encouragement of the experience of major insights from the diverse material covered in the course” (p. 3). In addition to addressing practical considerations, Arons reflects that an indication that the exam is going well is “when . . . students who looked rather dumbfounded at the beginning or who were waiting to go last or who were about to give rather superficial answers to their isolated question, now show excitement and want to go next” (p. 3). He attributes this to the discussion having “opened up all sorts of things—ideas, possible new relationships, heuristic tangents—which the student was unlikely to have seen in his/her question alone, in isolation” (p. 3). Rather, “each question and each discussion over it adds new dimensions, perspectives, and ways of seeing the other questions” (p. 3).

“O. J. and Teacher Selection” (Arons, 1977d)

Addresses the limitations of using standardized, quantifiable performance-based criteria as the basis for assessing quality of educators. Although such is a step in the right direction beyond teachers appealing to emotion in their “[insistence] on raises based on the fact that we are professionals” (p. 58), it does not adequately account for “our most qualitative means—human discernment” (p. 66). Arons proposes the development of educational talent scouts who “would look, as we do with athletes and, above all, artists, for talent at the earliest ages” (p. 65). Then, “when signs of it are discerned, . . . establish the conditions for developing this talent” by honing competencies in an individualized manner (p. 65).

“A Proposal for Credentialing Humanistic Practice” (Arons, 1988b)

Ever flexible by virtue of his ability to “[be] fully where [he] was” (Arons, 1990a, p. 125), as the credentialing movement for clinicians had “gone too far” by the 1980s, Arons advocates for the development of accrediting bodies within humanistic psychology to “say that our students have been educationally prepared to practice as ‘growth therapists’” (p. 382) to “give [them] a more even playing field in the therapy marketplace” (p. 383).

“New Vocation for an Age-Old Market” (Arons, 1999b)

Provides a middle-way, holistic perspective on the development of humanistic psychotherapy training. Cautions against “totally [extricating] from the medical or natural science models” (p. 4) but rather, “while decentering from the medical model, recognize where the two models (medical and humanistic) overlap, e.g., symptom of traditional pathology which may speak to frustrated realization” (p. 5). Accordingly, “a new humanistic vocation needs to find its own authentic center and cross all other areas from that center, e.g., pathology seen from the medical model perspective may also, or more fruitfully, be seen from a ‘creativity,’ ‘existential,’ or ‘transpersonal’ perspective” (p. 4).

“The Value of the Arts for Special Populations” (Arons, 1978b)

Reviews the role of intuitive experience in the learning process, of seeing “well beyond the tangible details to the hidden obvious” (p. 5). Challenges the notion of linearity and convergent thinking as “the best or only way of conceiving of human progress” (p. 3). Explores how “art expands our awareness without one form superseding or rendering obsolete the previous ones” but rather by “[deepening] and [preparing us] for insights at another level” (p. 4).
“The Growing Chasm Between Mission and Job” (Arons, 1990a)

Arons’ Presidential address to the Association for Humanistic Education in 1989. Provides an autobiographical account of Arons’ journey from public school to college and how his ability to apply intuitive and empathetic processes enabled him to be successful:

My reading pace was no more than two pages an hour. . . . [But] I stayed with the page, with the word, until I felt myself at the inside of [the books I was assigned] and, finally, on the inside of the authors. I came to share the human space they were coming from and then knew what they were saying because I could see what they were seeing. (p. 125)

Arons proposes that burnout in teachers is the outcome of “powerlessness before the social forces” (e.g., preoccupation with testing, mechanical productivity) that result in “experienced conflict” between their values (sense of calling) and their “job description or task orientation” (p. 127).


Carl Rogers visited West Georgia in 1975. Fifteen years later, Arons reflects on the contributions and the limitations of Rogers’ talk on humanistic education during a more conservative era. Arons critiques Rogers’ dichotomization of traditional and person-centered approaches, suggesting that doing so ultimately backfired and beget a “generally antihumanistic socio-political climate” (p. 7). Arons attributes this in part to Rogers’ underestimating the “unique educational source of power” (p. 9) and the “best in [educators’] humanly sacred mission” (p. 17). Arons proposes a middle-way approach for education to get back on track, and outlines its numerous dimensions, that is, promoting “the opening, freeing, and revelatory experience of the student” by focusing on universal values and transformation (p. 16).

Creativity

Questlove (2018) describes creativity as “a mix of unfocusing your eyes in the right way, while still remaining focused on the picture” (p. 30). Based on this description, if forced to choose one subject area that encapsulated the essence of Mike Arons—as a person, psychologist, educator, and writer—it would be creativity. The entries in this section are highly interrelated. Arons (1965, 1972a, 1985a, 1987, 1991a, 1992a, 1994a, 2000a; Arons & Richards, 2015; Krippner & Arons, 1973a, 1973b) explores the implications of the concurrent infusions of creativity research and of humanistic psychology in American psychology, science, culture, and values during the mid-20th century. Then he (Arons, 2007) presents his musings on the upright body posture as a platform for creative outlooks in human consciousness.

“Le Problème de la Creativité: Discussion Méthodologique, Reactions dans la Psychologie Américaine (The Problem of Creativity: Methodological Discussion, Reactions in American Psychology)” (Arons, 1965)

As noted earlier, Arons’ dissertation on the contradictions in mid-20th century American psychology’s general dismissal of creativity was supervised by Ricoeur. For it to be accepted, Ricoeur, who served on L’Académie française, aided in having the word créativité added to the French language (Arons, 1992c; Richards & Whitehouse, 2008).
See Arons (1992c) for further recollections of Ricoeur’s enthusiasm for the project. “How could I, an average student who had never produced any recognized creative work, be writing a dissertation on creativity?” Arons (2000a) later reflected (p. 1). Having encountered psychology as an undergraduate:

[With] its claims to detachment and objectivity . . . as its central themes, psychology revealed itself to [me] as a story of particular intrigue: an ironic ongoing story that erases its fuller historical, cultural, and existential meanings with the very ‘positivistic pen’ it uses to itemize its achievements. (in Aanstoos, 1991, p. 170)

For the remainder of his life, Arons frequently referred back to a factoid from his dissertation: whereas before 1950 there were only 186 psychological studies on creativity, following Guilford’s APA address that year (see Arons, 1972a, 1987, 1991a, 1992a, 1994a; Arons & Richards, 2015), the literature blossomed to 800 studies in a decade.

“At the Juncture: Creativity, Humanistic, and Transpersonal Psychologies” (Arons, 2000a)

Traces the intellectual history that culminated (a) in the reductionistic, monistic, homeostatic, value-free science model adopted during the early history of psychology and (b) in the challenges posed thereto by the concurrent advent of creativity literature and humanistic and transpersonal psychologies. In the latter’s emphasis on eudaimonia, the issue of happiness is taken up “not in the simple terms of ‘Does prosperity and the products of science and technology make us happy?’” but rather by addressing “how these benefits and products are experienced and lived in terms of fulfillment values, creativity [itself] being a central value” to well-being (p. 11). This also “raises [questions] for those who seek happiness in products alone” (p. 11).

“Two Noble Insurgencies: Creativity and Humanistic Psychology” (Arons & Richards, 2015)

Suggests an operational definition of creativity as entailing both originality and meaningfulness. Explores the historical impact upon psychology of Guilford’s “bemoaning the paucity of research on creativity” in his 1950 APA Presidential address (p. 163) and of Maslow’s self-actualization psychology. Outlines myriad “modern outcomes of the humanistic psychology-creativity insurgency” (p. 168), including the development of nonlinear dynamical systems (chaos theory) approaches to science; awareness of self in interdependent relation with culture and environment; integration of mind, body, and spirit in medicine and psychotherapy; destigmatization and reconceptualization of psychopathology; ecopsychology; positive psychology; qualitative research methods and interdisciplinary inquiry; socially engaged spirituality; and so forth. Proposes that today, “everyday creativity is anything but a frill or an extra [but rather] it helps us adapt to changing conditions, may keep us alive, and shows us just what we are living for” (p. 168).

“Creativity: Person, Product, or Process” (Krippner & Arons, 1973a; republished as “Creativity East, Creativity West,” Krippner & Arons, 1973b)

Examines the role of mystery in creativity and its purpose of “bringing new order out of nonorder” (p. 116). Compares/contrasts Western and Eastern approaches to creativity through the lens of their respective relationships with nature (conquering for the former, harmonizing for the latter): “It is difficult for [most Westerners] to accept helping things
to be what they are because we have been too successful in changing the nature of things . . . to serve human needs” (pp. 120–121). Calls for research to explore the interface of creative people and products (Western) and creative process (Eastern). Discusses implications for parenting and child development.

“Creativity, Humanistic Psychology, and the American Zeitgeist” (Arons, 1992a; republished as Arons, 1994a)

Reviews the “intrinsic relationship between” the study of creativity and the emergence and development of humanistic-transpersonal psychology as “expressive reactions” to the “limitations of psychology and the social climate of the times” (p. 158). Surveys the contradictions of America’s linear conceptualization of progress and the relationships between creativity and intelligence and between mistrust of divergent thinking and social conformity. Celebrates humanistic psychology’s accomplishments of contributing to the legitimization of consciousness, experience, and “inner development and personal understanding” (p. 169) in psychology via its focus on personal growth as creative process (as distinct from talent-centered productivity). Laments the devolution of the “meaningless” social character of the mid-20th century into “meanness” by the end of the century as “our stewarded earth in pain bites its master [and] the ghost of McLuhan taunts that of Gutenberg” (p. 172). However, concludes hopefully that “some of our humanistic-transpersonal psychologists, who yanked psychology from the old physics, are feeling right at home in this new [chaos theory], recognizing in it familiar and exhilarating messages from the creative heart, viz, chaos is pregnant with order” (p. 173).

“Creativity, Humanistic Psychology, and the Emerging American Consciousness” (Arons, 1972a)

An earlier paper that eventually culminated in Arons (1992a, 1994a). Examines the relationship between creativity and intelligence in more detail. Also reviews formative humanistic psychologists’ interdisciplinary contributions to an image of the person as an alternative to the reductionistic, deterministic one posed by behaviorism; the contributions of phenomenology and Eastern philosophy/psychology as alternatives to the “fixation on technique at which Americans have always been consistently good” (p. 12); and the emerging emphases on subject-object unity, responsibility of care, and multidimensionality in “a more feminine era” as alternatives to the “adolescent attitude of omnipotence” in American society (p. 15).


Another earlier paper from which Arons (1992a, 1994a) was drawn. Offers further exploration of humanistic psychology’s contributions to philosophy of science as a creative endeavor and its foci on (a) spirituality as “the most concrete experience of knowing firsthand what it means to be more human” (p. 19); (b) recognition (i.e., resonance) as “holistic, integrative, profound, and sacred” (p. 19); (c) temporality (“one feels to be in the infinite or eternal but also extraordinarily finite—miniscule in relation to all there is,” p. 20); (d) vulnerability as leading “to natural, right action—an inner valuing criteria” (p. 21); and (e) creative experience as “a revived respect or sense of awe before . . . profound truths and horizons” (p. 22).
“Creativity and the Methodological Debate: A Mytho-Historical Reflection” (Arons, 1987; republished as Arons, 1991a)

Note: Page numbers here refer to Arons (1991a). Arons’ presentation at the Second International Symposium on Qualitative Research in Psychology, Netherlands, 1985. Further explores humanistic psychology’s qualitative methodological contributions as a creative alternative to conventional American psychology’s “early and total autonomy from philosophy” in which “hedonism largely provided the energetics and functionalism the telos” and, therefore, “the scientist played dumb to the man, to his feelings, to his own personal experience” (p. 16) as well as “to the claims of an invisible spiritual world proclaimed by those of blind faith” (p. 17). “There is no doubt plenty of room for misunderstanding and mischief when a society stands between the authorities of the dumb and the blind” (p. 17). In addition, Arons identifies parallels between Maslow’s portrayals of psychologically healthy people and descriptions of creative individuals from the early creativity literature (e.g., “[dealing] with the world intrinsically rather than instrumentally and . . . prone to take psychological, creative, and spiritual risks,” pp. 23–24).

Furthermore, overviews the connections between phenomenology/hermeneutics and creativity/humanistic psychology. For example, mending the subject-object split via detached-engagement; “revitalization of the sedimented symbols and meanings of the past, historically and personally” (p. 29); and “inherent validation—necessity, intuitive coherence, and heuristically suggestive of next paths to follow” but via “a well-thought-out method that has the essential quality of reversibility” (p. 30). Arons advises that while psychology has been “altered radically” by the presence of humanistic psychology and the study of creativity, it “has yet to take full stock of the directions and meanings suggested by these changes” (p. 25).


Arons dedicated his postretirement years to exploring and delivering presentations and preparing a book on the relationship between “human creative capacity, values, and aspirations” and “tensions inherent in the lived . . . biped upright body posture” (p. 175) that is unique to humans. Unfortunately, he did not complete the project before he died. However, during his final year, a succinct synthesis of this work was published in an APA Press volume on everyday creativity edited by Ruth Richards, who recalls that “the chapter became a favorite of the volume’s APA development editor, who even shared it prepublication with his minister” (Richards & Whitehouse, 2008, p. 267). Evaluates the relationships between humans’ vertical platform, our evolutionary history (and its contradictions with our inverted pyramidal geometry), our consciousness and spirit, our longing for balance and harmony, our use of language, and our notions of progress and originality. Suggests that the upright body posture serves as a metaphor for negotiating dialectics (e.g., adult–child, detached–engagement, survival–potential) in the creative process. Arons concludes, “Just as the wonder of upright posture may be taken for granted, perhaps we are not adequately recognizing potential for creativity and spiritual growth that are embedded in the activities of everyday life” (p. 190).

Research

Although Arons generally devoted his career to promoting human science (qualitative) research in psychology, he was ever a proponent of methodological integration: “I have
been a consistent advocate of blending qualitative and quantitative methods, where appropriate and heuristically promising. Some subjects and dimensions of these lend themselves better to one or another” (Arons, as cited in Richards & Whitehouse, 2008, p. 267). This section begins with Arons’ experimental studies early in his career on time perception (Arons & London, 1969). Second, he presents the hermeneutic method (Barrell, Aanstoos, Rechards, & Arons, 1987), overviews Ricoeur’s (1970) application of it in dialogue with Freud (Arons, 1982, 1998b), and then demonstrates it himself as applied to (a) the topic of intuition (Arons, 1990b, 1993a) and (b) understanding the circumstances under which psi phenomena have been eschewed by science and fundamentalist religion (Arons, 1986, 1990c) and how they may entail more than ghost-hunting (Arons, 1992b) but rather nonpathological embodied intuitive/meditative space or spiritual energy (e.g., qi in Eastern philosophy and medicine; see Lee, 2009). Finally, Arons (Aanstoos & Arons, 1985; Franco, Friedman, & Arons, 2008) discusses the general place and purpose of human science research in psychology.

Experimental Studies

“Correcting for compensation in studies of time estimation” (Arons & London, 1969). The experimental research Arons conducted early in his career involved perception of time. First, in France, Arons and his wife served on a research team with Michel Siffre, a speleologist. Arons (2004) recalled that “Michel spent two months in an Alps cave without access to time, reporting his subjective time estimations to clock-calendar time monitors above, and as these related to his sleep-wake cycles, dreams, routines, and feelings and moods” (p. 4). They discovered that Michel’s internal body clock, in isolation and without access to a watch or sun, operated on a 24.5-hour cycle. (For more information, see J. Foer & Siffre, 2008). Later, at Brandeis, Arons conducted another study on time estimation. This time, participants were asked to estimate the amount of time they spent on a marble sorting task. Some participants were led to believe that the task indicated their level of creative potential; others that they were engaging in a routine mundane activity. Results indicated (a) that the participants estimated time as passing faster when they were invested in the task and (b) that the presence of a question that stimulated participants’ beliefs that their estimation could have been inaccurate enables researchers to correct for participants’ time compensation.

The Hermeneutic Method

“Human science research methods” (Barrell, Aanstoos, Rechards, & Arons, 1987). This article presents four qualitative research methodologies—experiential (Barrell), hermeneutic (Arons), perceptual (Richards), and phenomenological (Aanstoos)—and applies each to exploring the topic of anxiety. Surveys the formulation of the research question, purpose of the research, and methods for data collection and analysis. Arons surveys the Ricoeurian hermeneutic method, which “emphasizes interpretations from one to another apparently different and even seemingly opposing meaning systems” to arrive at “many overlapping meanings” in a “single word or symbol” to achieve “contextual awareness” and “a larger perspective that allows [one] to see [a topic] from many different angles (vantage points)” (pp. 433–434). Overviews the steps of the method: (a) determining multidimensional significance from various texts; (b) differentiation (describing experiences that represent oppositions and similarities); (c) dialectic process (e.g., contrasting related phenomena); and (d) intuitive understanding (“discovering the many sides of something rather than what it is”; pp. 435–436). One then returns the original starting
point from a “new and larger perspective”; although one can retrace the steps back (reversibility), it is “never in the same way because one now carries a different perspective” (p. 436) that “can aid the process of specifying particular questions for formal research” (p. 437) and a “continuation of the process” (p. 436).

“Hermeneutic of a complementarity between energy and meaning in Freud” (Arons, 1982). Applies Ricoeur’s (1970) *Freud and Philosophy* to explore “the power of hermeneutics to find fuller meaning across irreconcilables—the ability to communicate over distance” (p. 5). Arons suggests that Ricoeurian hermeneutics both (a) introduces “movement from estrangement towards intimacy” in psychology (p. 2) and (b) poses a challenge to phenomenology in its “basis for grounding reality” (p. 5). With regard to the latter, because phenomenology “begins and ends with the objects of consciousness,” it does not account for “a reality more fundamental than consciousness” which “Ricoeur concedes to Freud” is the “unsurpassable reality of the instincts” and “liberation by demystification” via “progressive . . . movement of the instincts . . . out toward the world, [not only] as desire for gratification but [also] to transcend . . . desire and death” in creative activity (p. 5). Arons concludes that the multidetermined symbols in creative works “are like [hermeneutic] texts which gain autonomy beyond their author’s intentions through [participation] in the deeper human reality, a mixed discourse . . . of energy and meaning [that] is not exhausted in explanation nor in understanding alone” (p. 5).

“Sacred and symbol: From Ricoeur’s *Freud and philosophy*” (Arons, 1998b). Arons further explores the hermeneutic path of interpretation that renders “what was previously presumed known—concrete—the less or least known” insofar as “every ending of a cycle is the fresh beginning of—a new call for interpretation by—the next” (p. 1). Uses Ricoeur’s (1970) *Freud and Philosophy* as a platform for “[starting] along the path of resacrilization” by leading “us to a fresh view of what might be sacred both beyond the idols and a reality shorn of idols” (p. 6) via “the passage of interpretations of that which . . . the other of symbol . . . presents to consciousness” (p. 9). That is, symbols’ “enigmatic language” (p. 11) pulls us toward interbeing, a “fuller consciousness and intimacy with [that which] we cannot know directly” (p. 10).

**Intuition**

“Intuition and the intimacy of instinct and consciousness” (Arons, 1990b). Applies the hermeneutic method to identify and explore four kinds of intuition and their points of convergence with and/or divergence from creation myths, psi phenomena, and superconsciousness. First, dawning/creative intuition involves “forward movement from innocence toward reflection” (e.g., Heidegger’s interpretation of poetry; p. 4). Second, recovery intuition “starts with reflection and returns toward innocence” (e.g., phenomenology revealing the essential structures of an experience; p. 4). Third, spontaneous intuition 1 entails “pure consciousness” that “embodies itself (creates everything) and expresses itself through its embodiments” and that “engenders all mediated intuitions” (p. 7). Fourth, spontaneous intuition 2 is represented by a “gut feeling,” that is, “unmediated . . . awareness of the flow of action . . . [via focusing on a] specific activity and [using] the body itself as a subtle vehicle for . . . [recognizing and discerning] that [which is] valid in some immediate, essential way” (p. 7).

“Instinct, intuition, and supraconscious: De-alienating reflections” (Arons, 1993a). An extension of Arons (1990b). Applies the hermeneutic method to trace the intellectual history of Western thought that has “discounted or dismissed” intuition via “a skeptical rationalism which is a reactive pole to blind faith” (p. 158). Reexamines the
relationship of reason to instinct and intuition in light of transpersonal psychology’s “claim that surpaconsciousness is intuition” (p. 158) to demonstrate that the “kinship between reason and intuition may be far more intimate” (p. 178) than is espoused in “the assumptions underlying current rationalism” (p. 160). By “[de-centering] the debate about intuition from one of seeking proof for the validity of intuition or supraconsciousness to one of de-alienating a number of polarities we’ve been living as consequences of our centuries-old war between faith and reason” (p. 160), Arons “seeks to open the path for a more spiritual and vital rationalism” (p. 158).

Psi Phenomena

“A new look at the enemies of parapsychology” (Arons, 1990c). Abridgement of a talk given at the Gathering of Explorers, Consciousness, Wisdom, and Energy conference in Atlanta, 1989. Proposes “the possibly revolutionary idea” that parapsychology “represents, though in no way encompasses [emphasis added], the middle ground” between “Christianity and science,” which are “inherently related by their apparent opposition to each other” (p. 24). Explores the basis for which parapsychology is “the enemy common to both” insofar as they each “represent a monopoly of extremes” in their “division of a single territory of reality into two kingdoms of mind and matter” (p. 24). Suggests that the humanities “have been historically less antagonistic to psi phenomena” because they “stayed closer to the middle and not the extremes extrapolated out from the Platonic-Aristotelian debate” (p. 26). Therefore, they serve as “our culture’s ultimate friends” in that they acknowledge how “the spiritual [can] be implicitly disclosed through the tangibles of nature” and facilitate the realization of “potentials of the middle ground within ourselves” (p. 26).

“Letters: An open mind” (Arons, 1992b). One of several letters to the editor expressing concerns about McCarthy’s (1991) article, “Belief in Paranormal Isn’t OK, It’s Harmful.” Arons challenges the hubris of “psychologists who set out to use ‘science’ as a way to debunk anything that doesn’t fit into current science’s, their own, or their culture’s construed systems”—especially when such endeavors are “based on easily refuted popular excesses” and not on serious “open inquiry” of a “persistent cross-cultural, cross-temporal claim for a class of human experiences” (p. 4). Arons continues that during his lifetime psychology has “rejected many phenomena that later became quite legitimate or returned to a stage of legitimate interest and focus,” and concludes, “Psychology cannot at one time claim both to be a young science and to know everything” (p. 4). As justification for Arons’ sentiment, Cardeña’s (2018) meta-analysis recently published in American Psychologist “provides cumulative support for the reality of psi, which cannot be readily explained away by the quality of the studies, fraud, selective reporting, experimental or analytical incompetence, or other frequent criticisms” (p. 663)

“Memory of things: Convergence toward a plausible psi context” (Arons, 1986). Evocation of Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the body to present memory not only as “a package of recall” but also as “[engagement with] the world in a variety of intentions, each coextensive with the world it engages” (p. 2). Then, drawing “from diverse sources—Soviet psychology, phenomenology, classical philosophy, sensory and perceptual psychology, and creativity,” Arons suggests that these all “share commonalities beyond a stress on memory and things”; that is, “they all involve activity and a unitizing experience which makes memory coextensive with the world experienced” (p. 5). Accordingly, “that unity of subject-object is often made through” the body that also encompasses “the subject
lived in a certain way” (p. 5). Arons concludes, “The step further is to see the object, the thing, as having qualities of the subject, i.e., memory” (p. 5).

Human Science Research in Psychology

“Report on the 1984 Human Science Research Conference” (Aanstoos & Arons, 1985). Conference report emphasizes the diversity of both nations represented by the participants and qualitative methodologies represented by the presentations. “What was shared across all these differences was the fundamental insight that human existence is best approached on its own terms; that is, with foundations and methods appropriate to it rather than borrowed uncritically from other preexisting sciences” (p. 126). Whereas “it often has been observed that groups frequently emerge advocating radical alternatives, only to die out without having had much impact” because they “remain isolated” and “each must ‘reinvent the wheel’” (p. 126). Accordingly, the conference provided “a much-needed opportunity to communicate in depth... and thereby overcome that isolation” (p. 126).

“Are qualitative methods always best for humanistic psychology research? A conversation on the epistemological divide between humanistic and positive psychology” (Franco, Friedman, & Arons, 2008). An e-mail exchange between the three authors on humanistic philosophy of science. Arons’ contributions cover: (a) the distinction between explanation and understanding (pp. 172–173); (b) Ricoeurian hermeneutics as allegorical of Maslow’s proposal for humanistic psychology’s place in science as “not replacing the old models but completing them” (p. 175); (c) the distinction between humanistic psychology’s focus on intersubjectivity as distinct from solipsistic subjectivity (p. 176); (d) clarification of Comte’s role in science compared with that of his followers (p. 179); (e) the contradictions in “sense-based” natural science’s failure to account for wisdom and intuition (pp. 181–183); (f) the problems of modern science claiming sole propriety of validation, knowledge, and explanation (“Don’t you think that homo-habilus ‘knew’ he came up with something new or unique when he turned a rock into a useful tool? Or when one of our other ancestors drew a symbol that joined the sky and the earth, life and death?”; p. 184); (g) while prediction and control make methodological sense, they limited the scope of science to meeting utilitarian ends (p. 187); (h) the importance of scientific inquiry using “appropriate method for appropriate questions” (p. 188); (i) clarification of the place of empirical science methodologies in humanistic psychology (p. 194); (j) his disagreement with Maslow’s take on existentialism (p. 194); and (k) his personal experience with the “abuse to my humanness of empirical science in psychology” (p. 196). Franco reflects that Arons (a) provides “a philosophical perspective challenging the fundamental assumption of objectivity in the practice of science, noting that even the most systematic research efforts are replete with examples of unexplained insight, personal creativity, and intuition” (p. 199) and (b) “cautions against using intuition inappropriately to anchor weak assertions while simultaneously reminding us that traditional science has neglected to address areas of human behavior it cannot yet (or would prefer not to) measure” (p. 199).

Humanistic Ethics

In these papers, Arons addresses the ethical crises posed by the war in Vietnam (Arons, 1972b) and by the absence of emotions in Western rationalism (Arons, 1993b).
“A Humanistic Psychologist’s View of Our Government’s Action in Vietnam” (Arons, 1972b)

Psychologically healthy, or fully functioning [humans are] obliged from the center of [their] being to resist . . . assaults on basic human values. . . . I, as a psychologist, a humanistic psychologist, but particularly as a human who refuses to lose touch with his humanness, . . . ask that the government recognize beyond its clever and effective neutralizing techniques, that all of humanity is having its psychological bones crushed, and that no preservation of personal or national pride, no military victory, can compensate for the spiritual destruction its actions in Viet Nam are wreaking. (p. 4)

“Philosophy, Psychology, and the Moral Crisis: Reflections on Compassion ‘Between Tradition and Another Beginning’” (Arons, 1993b)

Arons dialogues with Werner Marx’s writings on compassion, purposive rationality (that which “puts emotions in the service of ends, not the kind that opens, by insights, . . . to the expressions of the emotions,” p. 315), and postconventional morality to “inquire if reason and faith cannot be resurrected in intrinsic and holistic form” to facilitate the “transition between failed modern and ethically vulnerable postmodern paradigms” (p. 296).

Arons’ Final Musings

Below are three papers that Arons composed during the last decade of his life, each of which set the stage for the subsequent one as he prepared his Standing Up for Humanity project (unfinished book but published in briefer form in Arons, 2007). First, Arons (1998a) explores the value of tolerance of ambiguity and openness to experience for optimal functioning. Second, he discusses how going out on a limb provides platforms for new outlooks of consciousness (Arons, 1999c). Third, Arons (2001) culminates the themes from throughout his career to apply the platform experience to the upright body posture.

“A Cook’s Tour of the Edge” (Arons, 1998a)

Arons uses the resurrection of the human pyramid by the Flying Wallendas as a metaphor for the wisdom of insecurity, of living on the razor’s edge, in the here and now. “For Socrates, human best—the excellence of excellence itself, wisdom—is to constantly encounter the gods on all fronts. The greatest and most enduring advantage to the mortal soul is where it doesn’t know the outcome of anything” (p. 8).

“The Platform Experience: Eidetic of Posture, Perspective, and Leveraging Our Way Home” (Arons, 1999c)

A precursor to Arons (2007). Arons reflects on how his experience of building a deck behind his wooded home—and the affordances it provided for “a new lookout which sparked a new outlook” (p. 9)—contributed to him developing “a different understanding . . . on science . . . and its changing status, consequent to newly seen relationships to the presciences, its own ground in creativity and language, and the developing human sciences” (p. 2). Applying numerous metaphors from baseball to staircases to the Riddle of the Sphinx, he traces the circumstances by which modern science managed to outsource itself to outer space via the adoption of a linear, vertical view of progress in the same way.
that, by way of technology, humans have outsourced themselves to automation (Carr, 2014; F. Foer, 2017).

“Standing up for Humanity: Reflections on the Heuristics of New–Old” (Arons, 2001)

An expansion of Arons (1999c). In addition to being a compendium of notes he prepared for a string of conference presentations, this 91-page document also was an early draft of his ultimately unfinished book on the connections between upright body posture and human freedom, creativity, reason, consciousness, language, and growth. Arons reviews and revisits threads, themes, and vignettes that constituted the crux of his writings throughout his career, situating them in the context of a dialectic between progressive (vertical, distal) rationalist science and what its proponents regard as its regressive (lateral, proximal) critics. He concludes by emphasizing (a) both the importance and the possibility of transcendence and inclusion (i.e., creative integration) of both worldviews (“[rejoining] consciousness with body . . . without reducing one to the other,” p. 88) in the emerging era and (b) the role of qualitative research for that reconciliation (“standing as go-between the natural attitude of science and the prereflective calls of experience, in the way Ricoeur stands between philosophy and the instincts and following the admonition of Merleau-Ponty to join fact and essential structure,” p. 88). “Given our reflections on the upright body posture, are these really different formulations of the human condition and human dilemma—or two sides of the same coin? I’ll stand up for the latter. But to check this out, a phenomenology of wisdom is awaited” (p. 91).

Conclusion

Psychology has transformed in the half-century since Mike Arons arrived at West Georgia in 1968, partially by way of the presence and influence of humanistic psychologists including himself. His genius was to simultaneously introduce lived experience to the field and provide impetus for it to live out its greater intellectual heritage and potential as a nonexclusive science in the tradition of William James (see Taylor, 1991). Arons frequently pointed out that originality has two vectors: one pointing toward origins (that which is already there) and the other pointing in the direction of beginnings (the new and unique). He genuinely embodied this dialectic of new—old in the same way that folklorist Izzy Young described Bob Dylan as writing songs in the 1960s that “sounded current and . . . 200 years . . . old at the same time” (in Scorsese, 2005).

Today, Arons’ nondualistic insights on epistemology/methodology and his emphases on interdependence, on transcendence and inclusion, on differentiation and integration of self-in-lifeworld, and on creatively making best use of our human and ecological potentials and resources provide essential guidance for our current era. They not only provide a cautionary tale against polarization and antintellectualism but also demonstrate both the necessity and possibility of reconciling the paradoxes that underlie our personal and societal problems.

Radical as they may have appeared in their time, Arons’ commentaries and proposals astutely anticipated comparable observations made by contemporary psychologists. For just a few examples: (a) the sociocultural conditions that set the stage for posttruth society and proposals for its constructive resolution (Wilber, 2017); (b) the perils of psychological polarization (Schneider, 2013); (c) the need for mindful use of technology and cautious-
ness (but not alarmism) about its problematic effects (Schneider, 2017); (d) psychological flexibility in optimal health and development (Wilson, Bordieri, & Whiteman, 2012); (e) existential and phenomenological approaches to learning ("something about a person’s life circumstances [is] changed such that he or she cannot go on as before," DeRobertis, 2017, p. 43); (f) Sternberg’s (2018) triarchic model of creativity (defying the crowd, oneself, and the zeitgeist) and his proposal for using assessments of creative abilities in lieu of standardized tests for college admissions (Sternberg, 2013); (g) reconciliations of the humanistic and cognitive revolutions in psychology via phenomenology (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012); (h) Cardeña’s (2018) aforementioned meta-analysis recently published in *American Psychologist* that supports the validity of psi phenomena; and (i) Walsh’s (2015) synthesis of emerging psychological literature on wisdom in *Review of General Psychology*.

Furthermore, Arons’ predictions about the future of science and his calls for nondichotomous relationships between science and the humanities in psychology, education, and society bear striking resemblance to recommendations made by today’s economists about 21st century careers. These include the needs for creative thinking, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, empathy and emotional intelligence, appreciation for and adequate background in the humanities beyond science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, sense of fulfillment in leisure, and so forth (see Pinsker, 2016). Arons’ work also anticipated Ito and Howe’s (2016) advice for individuals and organizations in the current era to strategically embrace risks instead of mitigate them; to draw inspiration and ideas from existing networks; and to focus on compasses over maps, practice over theory, systems over objects, diversity over ability, and resilience over strength.

Although Mike Arons has been deceased these 10 years, his spirit shines on. As I wrote when he died:

Mike’s are powerful shoulders to stand on. He was a passionate and compassionate presence who invited and inspired us to celebrate our uniqueness and our humanness as inextricable. Mike lived for the extraordinary in the ordinary. He discovered possibilities where others may only have found realities, and realities where others may only have found possibilities. He dared to articulate the unsayable, to illustrate the unexplainable, to cut through the boundaries of convention, revealing genuine traditions which bind and sustain us. Mike stood up for what is worth living for. A torch has been passed. Thank you, Mike. (Bland, 2008, p. 9)

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