

**THE WHOLE CHILD—
SELECTED PAPERS ON
EXISTENTIAL–HUMANISTIC
CHILD PSYCHOLOGY**

BY EUGENE M. DEROBERTIS
CreateSpace, 2012, 195 pp.,
\$28.95, ISBN 1477635750

**HUMANIZING CHILD
DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY
—A HOLISTIC APPROACH**

BY EUGENE M. DEROBERTIS
iUniverse, 2008, 244 pp., \$19.95,
ISBN 978-0595449245

**EXISTENTIAL–PHENOMENO-
LOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY
—A BRIEF INTRODUCTION**

BY EUGENE M. DEROBERTIS
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Reviewed by Barbara U. Jones

Have you ever felt you lack a holistic picture of how a self develops through life? Have the myriad choices of reductionist theories about child development left you with a feeling of dissatisfaction in trying to sense the world of the child? Did you wonder if a holistic theory of child development exists by which one can establish a firm base of reason for how and why one makes the counseling interventions one does?

If your answer to any of the above questions is yes, you will be very interested in and rewarded by reading Dr. Eugene M. DeRobertis' writings in existential–humanistic child psychology, which include his comprehensive theory on how a self develops. Through his books you will be exposed to an ongoing tradition of holistic, humanistic thought in child development that you may

not have known exists. He illustrates how this tradition moves beyond need-reduction and adaptation in its worldview and attempts instead to get into the world of childhood on its own terms, without the prejudices of adult, scientific, or clinical agendas.

Most surveys of child and developmental psychology texts would not disclose the vital, historically grounded, and growing body of literature on child development that is not only holistic, but explicitly humanistic in nature. For example, Thomas Aquinas, with his emphasis on mind–body holism and the vital functioning of the person led the way for developing a new manner of thinking about early development. Likewise, the work of other well-known writers of psychology theory such as Charlotte Buhler, Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and Carl Rogers on developmental psychology has been rather neglected. Yet when put together with other writings in the field, their work yields an approach to child development that is highly relevant to contemporary child psychology.

Dr. DeRobertis' passion for humanistic child development and development of the self throughout one's life led him to spend much of his career excavating relevant literature and writing numerous books and articles on these topics. Sometimes he seems like the Indiana Jones of humanistic developmental theory as he makes his archaeological digs

into long lost and obscure writings by little-known authors such as Ernest Schachtel, William Stern, and Richard T. Knowles. These works, along with numerous others, led him to conclude that there is an entire tradition of humanistic developmental thought that has been buried in time yet yields a disciplined, philosophically rigorous alternative to positivism. Through many twists and turns he discovered and developed the lost ark of developmental psychology—*Existential–Humanistic Self Development Theory* (EHSDT).

EHSDT offers a more open-minded approach to human experience than the reductionist metaphors previously offered which largely compare us to animals and machines. As a result of his extensive research into holistic, existential, phenomenological, and humanistic thought, Dr. DeRobertis concluded that an integrative process appears to unfold throughout self-development that

has four basic, intrinsic motivations: the motivation to achieve homeostasis; the motivation to adapt to one's surroundings; the motivation toward self-enrichment; and the motivation toward self-transcendence. Personal integration of these is never a complet-

ed process, nor is it ever absolutely free of conflict.

EHSDT is a dynamic theory that Dr. DeRobertis considers an innovative restatement of previously existing ideas rather than the creation of a new one. It is subject to expansion and revision as new



theoretical insights and research data come forth. In his current work he is synthesizing and digesting ecopsychology in order to better understand how its literature on child development might offer additional insights. Ecopsychology, or eco-psychology as it is sometimes called, is situated at the intersection of a number of fields of enquiry, including environmental philosophy, psychology, and ecology, but is not limited by any disciplinary boundaries. At its core, ecopsychology suggests that there is a synergistic relation between planetary and personal well-being; that the needs of the one are relevant to the other. (<http://www.ecopsychology.org/>)

In order to understand Dr. DeRobertis' existential-humanistic approach to child developmental theory, one is well-advised to start with his first book on the topic, entitled *Humanizing Child Developmental Theory—A Holistic Approach*. Its aim is to introduce readers to humanistic-developmental self theories and phenomenological descriptions of childhood. These are the building blocks of his unified humanistic-developmental self theory, which is rooted in existential-phenomenological psychology.

In this first book, the reader is given a tour of the journey Dr. DeRobertis took that led him to discover EHS DT. In addition, he or she is given thorough understandings of other valuable topics such as the evolving process of personal integration beginning in infancy and how time and space are experienced and lived in childhood. Especially interesting to me was his explanation of how public time (clock time), which is necessary to learn in order to be in synch with society, has a tendency

to draw one's attention away from the experience of personal time, which is omni-present in childhood. Habitually interpreting time in terms of the clock bears with it the danger that children will grow to lose touch with lived-time, time that is personally meaningful, in favor of pragmatic time. He suggests children should not be trained to grope toward tomorrow at the expense of the here-and-now.

Dr. DeRobertis' latest book, *The Whole Child—Selected Papers on Existential-Humanistic Child Psychology* is a collection of articles, many of which were previously published in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and *The Humanistic Psychologist*. These comprise additional contributions he has made to the field of developmental psychology, principally child psychology. The ideas developed within each chapter are succinctly presented, well-reasoned and -substantiated, as well as admirably summarized. Thus the reader can enjoy the journey through such topics as the centrality of the imagination in human science psychology, the convergence of the horizons of humanistic and child psychology, humanism and selfishness in America, and a critique of the consumer cultural context from the viewpoint of EHS DT.

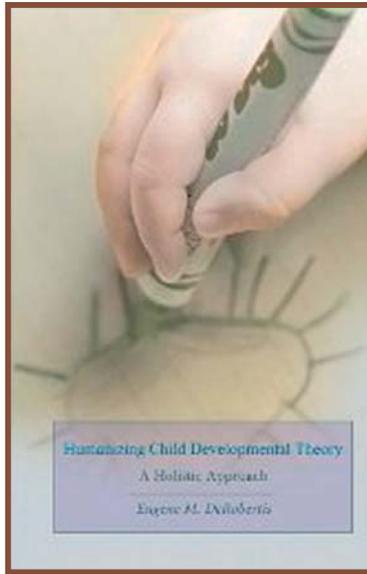
In his chapter on the centrality of imagination in child development, imagination is understood as a creative-productive power rather than just a way in which a

child creates fantasies. According to Dr. DeRobertis, a child is always already physically, affectively, and imaginatively involved in the world prior to conscious, reflective awareness. The space a child lives

within is basically an inspiration and invitation to imagine and creatively disclose possibilities for existing. Perhaps because of the cultural preoccupation with logical, calculative thinking at large, a sufficient appreciation of the role imagination plays in child development has been lacking.

However, it is a proper human accomplishment to live both logically and imaginatively. Dr. DeRobertis helps us to understand how this is done.

Another chapter that provides ample reason to read this book is "Child Development within a Consumer Cultural Context: A Critique from the Perspective of Existential-Humanistic Self-Development Theory." As I read this chapter, I was reminded of the Sufi story entitled "When the Waters were Changed." In this story, a prophet has warned the people that on a certain date all the water in the world would be replaced with different water that would drive men mad. After the appointed date, all those who had drunk the new water would be thinking and talking in an entirely different way and yet have no memory of what had happened or of having been warned. Similarly, with regard to consumerism, Dr. DeRobertis demonstrates how the socio-cultural and historical



process of making the child a conspicuous consumer has created a world that is not conducive to optimal self-development in important ways, ways of which we may not be aware. He is providing the memory and the warning. All who have ears, let them hear.

Though many of us have recognized that the dualism between mind and body is no longer a viable construct, perhaps we don't know how to access important mainstream thinking that is in line with a more humanistic view. Dr. DeRobertis reports on the important developments within psychology that are embracing organismic and social interaction theories, many of which mirror those of the humanistic psychologists. The reader will be encouraged and interested to know that he has found humanistic thought in such developmental ideas as auto-bio-cultural achievement, childhood world openness, creative discovery, and child development as meaning-laden, situated, and unique. The linear, two-dimensional picture of the child created by mind-body dualism suddenly blossoms into one colored by imagination, creativity, and relationship when it is fleshed out with Dr. DeRobertis' many discoveries.

Up to this point in time Dr. DeRobertis has avoided developing clinical applications within the field of counseling because he finds the developmental field to be always on high alert for theories that are biased from the outset by clinical agendas. However, Shawn Rubin of Saybrook University has successfully used the EHSDT model to train clinicians. He finds that the theory provides a smooth rapprochement between the two schools of thought, analysis and humanism, which have made the

most influential contributions to psychology by way of clinical intervention.

There is a need for first-hand empirical data in order to substantiate the claims of any clinical interventions which develop out of EHSDT. One example of a possible study would be to look at how emotional difficulties can arise due to a frustration of any one or a combination of the



fourfold motivational tendencies central to Dr. DeRobertis' theory. Another useful study would involve validating the continuum of disturbed self-development that appears in a table on page 208 of his second book, *Humanizing Child Developmental Theory*. He has also created a list of ten parenting skills he believes are needed for optimal child development (p. 202). It would be a worthwhile research project to understand what happens when one or more of those skills are not applied in the process of childrearing.

Advances in existential-humanistic psychology are most often supported with phenomenological research. If feel you

are lacking sufficient comprehension of Existential-Phenomenological Psychology and would like to support your own research methodology with it, you will find Dr. DeRobertis' book *Existential-Phenomenological Psychology* helpful. It is an easy-to-read resource to begin the process of becoming acquainted with the language of phenomenology, the philosophical basis of humanistic psychology. For example, if you aren't certain how a phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis works, the author provides excellent examples of such research taken from a study of the psychology of verbal aggression.

I only found out about Dr. DeRobertis and his books this past summer when I responded to an appeal to AHP members to review a book or two for the *Perspective*. *The Whole Child* jumped out at me because I write a newspaper column on parenting skills for the *Taos News* and have a regular radio program on positive psychology. I also teach parenting skills classes in which I like to introduce parents to relevant information I have found in my related readings. So I am always on the lookout for new material. While reading *The Whole Child*, the importance of Dr. DeRobertis' groundbreaking contributions to the field of child development theory were so compelling that I ordered his other two books in order to completely understand them. As a result I have been supplied with ample, high-quality material for several columns, shows, and classes, and the way I view the children I teach and the clients I see has been utterly transformed from one of primarily dualism (by default) to that of an informed holism.

These books are primarily intended as texts for upper division and graduate courses.

REVIEWS

However, you don't need to be an academician to be rewarded with a personal understanding of existential, phenomenological, humanistic child development by reading them. Perhaps for you that understanding will be one that you always wished you had without knowing that it could actually be obtained. It was for me.

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1975. She is a self-actualization coach, has a regular newspaper column on parenting skills, and a Positive Psychology radio program. You can find out more about her at www.barabarujones.com