

Review of: "Jan Smuts' Theory of Holism as an Uplifting Philosophy for Philosophical Counseling"

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Review of Du Plessis' article on the theory of holism

It is praiseworthy that Du Plessis brings forward J C Smuts' theory of holism to a broader audience as it is of interest for philosophical discussions in science. It is valuable to look at a theory advocating wholeness instead of only focusing on the parts in view of current challenges with not only climate change, energy shortage, and rising prices but also problems within the healthcare systems. As the theory of holism includes a large range of subjects this review will only focus on some of the weaker parts in Du Plessis article.

Although some parts of Smuts' theory are highly advanced, especially when it comes to physics and evolution, other parts must be regarded as flawed due to contradictory statements (Jorgenfelt and Partington, 2019). For this reason, it is necessary to consider 'Holism and Evolution' in its entirety and not by some extracted sentences with nice sounding words in them. It is easy to fall for Smuts' ability to express himself by appealing words which is why Dubow calls him "the great phrase maker" (Dubow, 2008).

Smuts theory is highly influenced not only by his well-documented hierarchical but also anthropocentric view of both society and reality. Still, Du Plessis do not seem to consider how these parts of his personality affects his theory. Smuts was a complex person, highly gifted in his intellectual ability but still holding on to the traditional cultural norms of South Africa and therefore the supremacy of the white Western society based on Christianity (Anker, 2004, Dubow, 2008, Marks, 2001, Tsokhas, 2001). In footnote (v) Du Plessis goes against the opinion of Smuts holding on to racism. This statement must be questioned as Smuts compares African people with children claiming it to be the ethical responsibility of more advanced people "to look after the more backward" (Smuts, 1942 as cited in Dubow, 2008). According to Smuts cultural adherence and anthropocentric view it is further highly doubtful if Du Plessis statement that the theory does not have any "religious undertones" is correct.

The article, mainly written for philosophical counsellors, highlights the influence of Smuts on psychology and refers to among others Adler's individual psychology and Pearl's Gestalt psychology. Still, it should be noticed that the main influencer of holism within psychology it is not Smuts but Carl Jung (McMillan et al., 2019).

When it comes to Du Plessis conclusion of freedom being the primary goal for holism it must be noted that Smuts also

refers to selflessness, “the principle of sacrifice, of the subordination of the parts to the whole, of the individual to the race or type” as a main principle (Smuts, 1926 p. 83). It is also a question of freedom for whom and Smuts leaves no doubt that it is the aim of evolution but only for the very few who have advanced to the hierarchical top level of personality. In addition, Smuts is split about the ultimate personality and describes it in one place as self-controlled and superior while in another as relaxed, sincere, and creative (Jorgenfelt and Partington, 2019).

Before using Smuts theory of holism as a guide for personal development my suggestion is to further explore in what way the personality is related to health as it is the equilibrium of the organism as a whole that truly matters. “Individual abilities of self-maintenance and adaptability concerning the impact of mental, social and environmental stressors determine the progress of evolution” (Jorgenfelt and Partington, 2019).

Finally, the article would benefit from a more exact reference of page numbers in ‘Holism and Evolution’.

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