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# *Nursing and the ANISA theory of human development*

by Harlen D. Whitting, B.S.N., M.S.N.

## **Introduction**

The ANISA philosophy of human development was conceived by the American National Institute for Social Advancement, an organization "devoted to the development of problems that tackle some of the critical needs of our time."<sup>1</sup> This philosophy is unique in that it incorporates a view of mankind which addresses human growth and development in relation to environmental interaction based on the concepts of knowing and loving as primary characteristics in the nature of mankind. Upon this basic philosophy, a theory of development is built.

## **Philosophy of the ANISA Model**

The ANISA philosophy criticizes current theories of human development as being based on borrowed concepts from the physical sciences. In many of these current theories development of the individual is seen as a predetermined, complex series of events which can be understood and predicted by examining the lower processes that make them up. This implies that all human actions can be explained by immediately preceding events which, in turn, can be described as the laws of nature acting on particles.<sup>2</sup> Examples of these theories cited are Gestalt Psychology, the philosophy of B.F. Skinner, the concepts of improper rearing as a child as the cause of adult maldevelopment, and the theories based on reductionism to the level of neurophysiological processes as explaining all human behavior. The ANISA philosophy takes issue with these materialistic theories by envisioning *Homo sapiens* as a higher organism than any other, transcending the physical world to make the individual uniquely human, and stating that any theory of human development must take this uniqueness into account. It sets forth its position that the spiritual nature of human beings is the central determinant in the course of their evolution. This spiritual nature is their capacity to know and to love, their consciousness, their will, and their creativity.<sup>3</sup> Mankind's potential is actualized through thoughts and feelings expressed in action under the direction of purpose. Each actualized capacity further enhances potential thus causing the individual to develop and evolve. Human beings are therefore immanent and transcendent. They exist and develop within their limits, but are also able to rise above them. It is this capacity that uniquely distinguishes human beings from the animal.<sup>4</sup>

## **ANISA Theory of Development**

The ANISA theory of development based on this philosophy examines human beings in the sense of their being and becoming.<sup>5</sup> Each interacts with his or

her environment; in so doing, based on their purpose, they actualize their potentials into powers. These accumulated powers attain structure with mankind due to the ordered nature of development, and are thus transmitted as attitudes and personalities from generation to generation. The collective attitudes and personalities of the society make up the culture. Potentialities are classified as basically biological or psychological, and the environment is classified as (1) the Physical—everything but humans; (2) the Human; and (3) the Unknowns—that part of reality of which we are not aware. A fourth environment is also mentioned, the Self, which incorporates the other three, and is described as the most constant aspect of the individual's total environment.<sup>6</sup>

Human development is this process of being and becoming that implies movement, and has a rhythm to it. The ANISA theory looks very carefully at this concept and breaks it down into pattern and timing, the essential aspects of rhythm.

The pattern of development denotes the passage of the person through consecutive stages or basic units of change. The stage is mastered when differentiation and integration occur, and this happens on both biological and psychological levels.

The timing of development denotes the unique timetable all beings have to pass through a stage. Sensitive and critical periods are recognized, within which stages must be achieved, if health is to be maintained. The society of the individual, and the helping professions within that society, must be sensitive to these stages in order to maximize human potential.

A key factor in the ANISA theory of human development is the notion that development never stops, neither for the individual nor for the society. Both are created to be ever-advancing, and advancement is seen as increased fulfillment of purpose, the one bestowed by the Creator. The knowing and loving aspects of this purpose are key, and are the objects of the developmental tasks and stages. Actualization of the knowing potential is seen in the ability of individuals to be aware creatively of their environment, and actualization of the loving potential is seen in the ability to interact positively with that environment and create a lasting effect upon it in true service. Development also continues eternally as the physical and human environments are left behind at death, and the self continues on into the Unknown. The purpose of the self—of the true person—remains the same throughout: to know, to love, and to serve.

## **Nursing and the ANISA Theory of Development**

I will now attempt to discuss a philosophy of nursing that I am evolving, based in part on the ANISA theory of human development, but also based on other personal theories of what is, or ought to be.

Nursing clearly has something to do with health, so a working definition of health is the starting point.

I envision the concept of health on three levels which are closely related and hierarchically conceived. First I will clarify some terms I use in these definitions.

**Body:** That part of us that is physical and is directly observable by our five senses. It includes our brain as a complex physical organ which is also the connecting point to our minds.

**Mind:** That part of us which attains consciousness and directs our interaction with our physical world. It is the intermediary between our body and soul, and contains aspects of both. It is uniquely human.

**Soul:** Our true eternal existence endowed with the capacity to know and to love, the repository of all our attributes.

**Free will:** Our ability to choose our actions in certain situations of time and place to direct our own and others' life events.

Health is then understood on the three levels of Spiritual Health, Mental Health, and Physical Health.

Spiritual Health is the highest attainment of health, and is seen as the fulfillment, in reality, of the true purpose of our soul: our knowing, loving, and becoming. It is manifested in action in our attributes and deeds of service, and is subject to the limitations of this world.

Physical Health is the optimal functioning of our bodies as facilitators of our ability to exercise our free will. Physical Health is necessary for complete Spiritual Health, yet individuals can have Physical Health and use their ability to choose—in the ANISA theory their ability to become—a lifestyle that is not spiritually healthy.

Mental Health is the optimal functioning of our minds as facilitators of our ability to exercise our free will. Those who are mentally healthy are not hindered in their ability to choose by unresolved feelings and conflicts, past guilt, or neurotic or psychotic manifestations. Mental Health is also required for Spiritual Health but is probably more dependent upon Spiritual Health than is Physical Health. Dr. Daniel Jordan, co-developer of the ANISA theory, defines mental illness as an anxiety state caused by being out of touch with one's true purpose.<sup>7</sup>

An important part of this concept of health is that human beings are seen as eternal beings, that their souls continue after the body's death, seeking greater Spiritual Health. This process is, in fact, enhanced as the body is no longer hindering the soul's attainments. Health is, therefore, an eternal concept, and the ultimate goal of our existence.

Nursing's purpose is to help the person attain and maintain health. Nursing refers to those caring and nurturing behaviors carried on by a professional nurse trained in arts and sciences of the body and mind, for the purpose of enhancing the individual's ability to act in their world within their own set of unique limitations. Nurses help people in their being and becoming. Nursing promotes the overall health

of individuals by helping them minimize the external limitations that prevent them from exercising their free will.

Nursing is unique in this respect. Nursing as a profession should stand independently as well as interdependently with other health disciplines, and pursue, as its unique contribution, the promotion of the overall health and well-being of the people it serves. It should work with individuals, families, groups, and nations in health as well as in illness.

In contrast, the discipline of medicine is currently preoccupied mainly with the treatment of disease of the physical body. Even psychiatry, which addresses mental disease, relies heavily upon brain- and body-acting drugs and treatments. Other health disciplines such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, nutritional therapy, are mostly physically oriented, while psychology and various forms of psychotherapy treat only the mind.

The difference in my philosophy is that nursing addresses the whole person. It is concerned with the broad definition of health and interacts with people to help them achieve and maintain it. By being and becoming more expert in all three levels of human health (for nursing, too, is in the process of development), nursing can achieve the recognition it seeks and stand side by side with other health professions. Then, perhaps, this sibling rivalry, which so often occurs among the health professions, can be replaced with mutual recognition and respect for the needed contribution each makes; thus the goal of good health for all can be actively pursued. It is to these concepts and this end that I am committed.

In conclusion, my philosophy of nursing envisions this profession as a unique and dynamic discipline, addressing the needs of all people on all levels of Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Health, in specific sickness, and in promotion of better health. Nursing is interdependent with other health disciplines and must work cooperatively with them. Nurses must set, as their goal, the facilitation of free-will choices for all people, and focus on the knowing and loving aspects of people and their drive for being and becoming. Nurses, in so addressing the needs of humanity in the spirit of true service, are fulfilling their own reason for being, and are themselves in the process of becoming by exercising their own true purpose to know, and to love.

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Harlen D. Whitting received his B.S. and M.S. in Nursing from the University of Rochester (N.Y.) He is presently a family nurse practitioner at the Min-no-ya-win Clinic on the Fond du Lac Indian Reservation near Duluth, Minnesota.



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