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HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY AND THE REVOLUTION

I don't believe any more in a revolution which is only about structural changes in social institutions and says nothing about how we live our lives. I see the revolution as basically *about* better social relationships, and as being achieved *through* better social relationships, which in themselves force structural change. The revolution I want is both inner and outer, and I see it as happening now. So this means I am just as interested in social relations as I am in the socioeconomic structure of the social system.

And since social relationships involve people, this means that I am interested in human nature (my nature), and the scope and limits of human potential. If anyone is trying to bring about social change, I want to know about their model of man. Because if our model of man is basically conservative, then our revolution is going to be basically conservative too.

Humanistic psychology has a model of man which is oriented around change and growth. It is a proactive model, derived in part from the change and growth toward certain desirable states (what Rogers calls the fully functioning person) achieved in successful psychotherapy, and in part from the findings of research on relatively healthy, self-actualising people and on ordinary people undergoing peak experiences, carried out by Maslow. Perls talked and acted in terms of non-adjustive therapy - a kind of therapy which would make people stronger in themselves, more able to say 'No'.

It was found that this kind of growth, towards greater self-determination and greater liberation from the effects of socialisation, could be achieved not only in psychotherapy and peak experiences, but also by certain kinds of planned and structured group experiences.

These experiences first began to become available through the National Training Laboratories at Bethel, and later, in much more adventurous ways, through the Esalen Institute at Big Sur. There developed a whole 'human potential movement', propagated through growth centres all over America, and now in the Pacific, the Far East and Europe as well. The experience of encounter groups, T-groups, sensitivity groups, theatre games, marathons and so on is now fairly widespread.

What has been happening here is genuinely adventurous. There has been total disrespect for the old psychological orthodoxies, and an openness to experience which has led us into quite new fields - meditation, bio-energetics (vegetotherapy), drug experiences, dreams and fantasies, creativity, race and sex relations, control of alpha waves, and a whole variety of other approaches and methods - sometimes with an anti-intellectualising bias which was far from the intentions of the founders.

This outburst of free-ranging activity is an example of abundance motivation in action. Abundance motivation is a key concept in humanistic psychology, as that part of our behaviour which is actively concerned with seeking fresh stimulation and new experiences. It is sometimes called

tension-seeking or tension-maintaining behaviour; Woodworth calls it outgoing motivation. With abundance motivation, we go out to change things rather than merely trying to understand them. Abundance motivation is tied in with the B-values which Maslow has described so well. And we can now see that people who go along with humanistic psychology not only talk about abundance motivation, but act it out too. This consistency between opinions and behaviour is something very characteristic of the way in which the methods and techniques of humanistic psychology work; it makes a bridge to the ideas about authenticity and praxis found in Sartre and existentialism generally. David Wood has said that authenticity consists in self-respect and self-enactment.

There is another link with existentialism in the approach to madness where humanistic psychology comes very close to the existential psychiatrists like Laing, Cooper, Berke and Schatzman. The 'psychotic' is seen as a person to be treated with the respect one owes to any human being, and as exhibiting behaviour which any of us might use in the same situation. Schlien says that his kind of therapy 'is founded on the conviction that man should be free, and to this end makes freedom a major means in the therapeutic experience'. Again there is this refusal to separate the 'psychotic' from the 'normal' and to see the one as totally distinct from the other.

In its emphasis on unity - unity of opinion and behaviour, ideas and emotions, unity of mind and body - humanistic psychology links up with much of what Marcuse says in **Eros and Civilisation** and Norman Brown in **Life against Death**. What for Marcuse and Brown could only be speculation - the way in which the whole body can be resexualised, rather than identifying the sexual with the genital, as bourgeois society teaches us - has become reality in the sensitivity group. And, as Reich says, this wider sexuality can be very political; it has now spread far beyond the group.

This again links with the whole movement towards a politics of experience - a politics which is concerned with the whole way we live, rather than with dogmatic theories and army-type organisation. And this is where we came in - the junction of the inner and the outer revolutions.

So there seems to be a case for saying that humanistic psychology offers a rationale for a number of things which are actually happening in the revolutionary movement. Charles Hampden-Turner has certainly taken this view, and in **Radical Man** has spelled out a whole series of further connections, showing with a lot of evidence that the student activists of the new leftist movements in the USA are closer than most of us to Maslow's self-actualising person and Rogers' fully functioning person.

So what is the problem?

The problem is that many people in humanistic psychology describe themselves as unpolitical and even anti-political, holding that individual liberation is all there is, and that people can be free or unfree in any social system. Here are some other worries and pointers that all is not well. Betty Friedan quoted Maslow with enthusiasm in **The Feminine Mystique** a book which is now regarded as merely liberal by radicals in today's Women's Liberation Movement. Industrial consultants like McGregor, Argyris and Likert have used Maslow's theory of personality to make work more interesting, in ways which may challenge hierarchical organisation, but do not challenge in any way the principle of ownership. The American Association for Humanistic Psychology's Newsletter recently carried a main article: **Humanistic Capitalism: Alternative to Big Brother?** (And some strongly critical replies in the next issue.) The Esalen Institute and other growth centres seem often to work as a service organisation for boosting the middle class - returning them ready for work on Monday morning, all braced and sensitive and integrated. In these and other ways, as can be seen all through the second half of Frank Goble's book, it seems all too easy for the theory of the uncontainable person to be itself contained.

So what is it really?

And does that question make sense? I don't go for the idea that a theory has to be 100% perfect, or else we have to reject it. Like George Kelly (another humanistic psychologist) said, each theory has a range of convenience, and we use it outside that range at our peril. I tried once, in **Red Rat No.3**, to extend Maslow's theory to make it more in line with political reality (mainly by going beyond the individualistic emphasis which it has at present), but in its original form it is certainly very unpolitical - except in the sense that everything is political. And yet at the same time it is genuinely important for anyone who wants to go past the old psychologies into something which

makes a bit more sense. Unless I have properly seen the length and breadth of the human potential, my radicalism (leftism, anarchism, socialism etc.) is going to be narrow and restrictive. Unless I have really experienced the trustworthiness of my own deepest self - for myself - I am never going to believe in the trustworthiness of other people. That is a basic humanistic statement which I do believe is true. And if I don't believe that people in general can be trusted to do what is right for them, the only revolution I am going to be able to make is a palace revolution.

But this only brings us face to face again with the basic dilemma: how come that the most important world-wide centre propagating the humanistic ideas is a training-ground for *industrial* psychologists and T-group trainers, committed to helping the ruling class make more profits through greater efficiency? There are four points which seem to need making:

1. Sometimes the people who say they are using Maslow's theory are doing nothing of the kind. For example, a lot of research has been done on self-actualisation in industry. Now Maslow said that self-actualisation comes very rarely in industry, but when it does come it comes through *commitment* to an *important* job. But none of the research does any kind of justice to the two italicised words - the 'operational definitions' have little or nothing to do with the ideas which Maslow is contending for.

2. Any theory can be made oppressive. There is no set of ideas, no matter how beautiful or true or good, which has been proof against this process.

3. Humanistic psychology has not moved far enough away from the expert-client relationship. No matter how much the humanistic 'change-agent' tries to come down off his pedestal, the role difference is still there. The co-counselling movement is probably the nearest that humanistic psychology has got to breaking this down. But as long as the expert-client relationship is kept up, there is bound to be an element of maintaining the system and reinforcing its established ways of acting.

4. Most important, humanistic psychology can be oppressive just by concentrating on liberating people who happen to be oppressors. Here is a typical example of this process in action:

When the course started in 1957, John K. Boyle intended to teach the poor and the social misfits. He soon discovered that, although his fees were then nominal, these men were not interested in the programme. The name of the organisation was changed to Institute for Executive Research.

I believe this should be read in a spirit of tragic irony rather than scornful cynicism. What do you do when the people you want to liberate refuse to respond? You start wherever you can - and that means what New York psychiatrists have learned to call the YAVIS: the young, above average (in social class terms), verbal, intelligent and successful. And we can now see the depths of this criticism, because this description applies to many of us too. The Women's Liberation movement has spelled this out - one of the most oppressive creatures on this earth is the white middle-class male.

If this is true at the very basic level of automatic and almost unconscious reactions, how much more true must it be of the manager busy acting out his role? No matter how nicely he does it, what he is doing is upholding the ownership system of this society, and thereby hindering change which might threaten that system. But the difference between him and us is still only a difference of degree.

So I don't knock self-actualisation, and I don't knock awareness; and I don't knock encounter groups which can be very valuable in helping individuals and groups to explore their own potentialities in a very effective way. I have found the need to go beyond self-actualisation to a much more historical awareness of what social forces are pressing on all of us, and of how they work, and of how we can resist them by joining together with others in collective action.

At the moment, humanistic psychology is dangerous, both because it can strengthen the oppressor and because it is possible to sidetrack people into exploring themselves as a way of avoiding any conscious political involvement. But I see these as necessary dangers, which we can totally avoid at the risk of talking and acting in the old dogmatic terms. If we want to understand and create the new kind of revolution, we have got to go through the fire-break of humanistic psychology.