

AHP Activities

WHAT IS HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY?

Recently the AHP held a discussion meeting on this topic. There was a good amount of agreement reached by those present. What seemed to be agreed was that humanistic psychology did stand for a specific set of values - including such things as openness to experience, flexibility, effortlessness, aliveness, playfulness, and so on - but that these particular values could not be aimed at directly. The only way to aim at them was by concentrating on something quite different - the attempt to believe in and do justice to someone's real self.

This means that there is no mechanical way of setting up goals, or a programme for reaching specific goals. They have to be by-products of a real willingness to be aware of one's own experience and to meet someone else's.

There is something paradoxical about this, and there are other paradoxes too. This 'real self' is not to be identified with the ego, if the ego is our culturally bound self, the residue of the major roles we have played. Cultivating or working on this ego is a waste of time - we have to be willing to turn our backs on it in order to be even facing in the right direction.

This was an interesting meeting. It is hoped to hold another one, perhaps in April, on the topic - 'What is the AHP?'

ASSOCIATION FOR HEDONISTIC PURSUITS?

A seminar on Therapeutic Communities and Crisis Centres was held by the AHP in February, at the Institute of Education, and aroused a lot of interest from people working in this field. Only a few members of the AHP turned up, however.

There does seem to be a real danger that the AHP really will falling into the trap of becoming, as John Southgate warned (in Vol.1 No.10 of *Self & Society*), an Association for Hedonistic Pursuits. The phrase '*I do my thing and you do your thing*' has somehow got twisted into the message that one only does something for some immediate kick. One comes to an AHP seminar if it sounds novel, or sexy, or popular. One hopes to meet other beautiful people like oneself.

Yet one of the important values which humanistic psychology stands for is bridging wider distances between people. Putting aside one's existing thought-structures in order to experience some reality oneself, in the shape of another person. I am not just I, I am you as well.

Put in its worst terms, this was a seminar about addicts and failures. But which of us is not an addict in some sense, a failure in some form? Which of us can not learn something from facing that, and experiencing it for a while?

But further than that, the AHP needs much more active support if it is to do the job which needs to be done. There is a real danger that behaviourism is going to take over in the area of psychological treatment. It needs all our efforts to try to ensure that as far as possible it is humanistic psychology which takes over, with its existential commitment to the autonomy of the person. As the meeting put it, change not adjustment is our aim.

IS THERAPY A GOOD THING?

'The role of a patient, who is most likely female, is to be subservient, dependent, passive and submissive to an authority, who is most likely to be male. Chesler rightly sees the connection between the institutions of therapy and marriage, in that they place females in similar double binds. Feminist literature has shown how therapy, with its Freudian tradition of lack of positive self-image for the female, plays into the social game of channeling women's anger into self-hate, depression and guilt. The rise of consciousness-raising groups with no established leader or therapist, and the positive changes reported from them, casts doubt on whether the techniques of therapy are as essential as simply sharing one's feelings and cares with another human being. In comparison with such groups, therapy is frequently reactionary, with its tendency to turn emotions inward and to search within the psyche for the roots of one's difficulties, rather than outwards to one's environment and ways that one can change it'. (Dennis T. Jaffe, A counseling institution in an oppressive environment, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Fall 1973).

THE INTERNAL SOCIETY

John Rowan is doing some research on the sub-selves, sub-identities, sub-personalities with each person, and would like to hear from anyone who is or has been interested in this area of work. Write to him at 28 Redbourne Avenue, London N3 2BS (or phone 01-356 2295).