

Arnold Abramovitz

## Articles of Doubt and Articles of Faith:

### A HUMANISTIC APPROACH TO THE MEANING OF MENTAL HEALTH

- (1) I do not believe in approach to mental health which aims to be purely rational and scientific.
- (2) I do not believe in an approach to mental health which can be 'taught' (or in which 'research' can be done) within the present (intramural) academic structure of our universities.
- (3) I do not believe in professionalism in mental health, which means that I do not see the psychiatrist or clinical psychologist as an 'expert in living' to whom I must defer.
- (4) I do not believe that it is helpful to categorise a person as belonging to a certain class, whether defined in psychopathological or any other terms. In other words, I do not believe in diagnosis.
- (5) I do not believe in psychological treatment or psychology or any other mode of activity whereby one person (called the doctor or therapist) subjects another person (called the patient, client, etc.) to certain procedures, techniques or devices designed to bring about changes according to some pre-designated model or blueprint or paradigm.
- (6) I do not believe in institutions that are pressured into impersonally 'processing' people, by whatever device, no matter how 'efficient' the processing is shown to be in terms of patient turnover, 'rehabilitation' or any other extrinsic criterion.

I believe in an approach to mental health in which non-rational and non-scientific considerations (such as care, responsibility, creativity) are at least co-equal to and even superordinate to rational and scientific considerations (such as adaptation and behavioural efficiency). This emphasises man as *creator* (active mode) rather than man as *creature* (passive mode).

I believe in an approach to mental health which can be apprehended largely through experiential learning involving the emotions as well as the intellect. I cannot learn about mental health except through undergoing certain experiences which involve my own mental health.

I believe in an approach which will result in the gradual de-professionalization of clinical psychology and psychiatry. Some of the things done by psychologists and psychiatrists will still be done; but they will be done in a different setting and they will have a different significance.

I believe in an approach in which the temptation to categorize and diagnose the other is resisted and is replaced by an attempt to achieve a mutual acquaintanceship. I believe that concentrating on what you and I are doing and experiencing here and now is a useful way to resist this temptation.

I believe in an approach in which a person in distress seeks out another person (or other persons) whom he trusts and in whom he places some confidence; and between whom there is a mutuality or reciprocity of self-disclosure and of seeking and being sought. In this approach the roles of 'helper' and 'helpee' are fluid and interchangeable.

I believe in communities. In particular, I believe in the concept of an open, supportive community from which no-one need be barred no matter what categorization from the larger society he carries; whether it be race or colour or psychiatric diagnosis or even judicial conviction. I believe that such a community could be developed from, or emerge from, interactions and experiences in a variety of micro-communities or groups - such as those organized by so-called growth centres - which are largely the product of the human potential movement. I do not believe in growth centres on their own because they too have a tendency to 'process' people, and I do not believe in communes or communities that are based solely on a mutual desire for love and brotherhood and have not confronted the reality of the negative, so-called destructive propensities and emotions that are present in you and in me. I do believe in the value of participating in communities even when they fail: only through learning, however painfully, of the forces (especially within myself) which militate against the formation of a viable community, can I get in touch with the meaning of mental health.