

Tom Sargent

From Humanistic Psychology - A look at R.C. and A.A.

Re-evaluation Counseling works. It works because it works. It does not work because some theory says it works. It does not even depend upon the theories of Harvey Jackins.

R.C. has made changes in the lives of hundreds of us. These changes go far beyond the expectations of any theoretical explanation.

Most of us have heard professionals, who have been trained in a non-humanistic orientation, belittle, deny or decry the results of R.C. In spite of their opposition, the process goes on doing its fine work, without knowing that it offends the laws of behavioral science.

It is to this point that I would like to focus some attention. Our experience in the field of human behavior is that growth, change, health or recovery occurs without much regard for our best theories. I would take this to be the starting point of humanistic psychology. We are pragmatists first and theorists second. We are theorists in order to find other ways to apply what we observe, but too often we get caught by the theory. We seem to have a need to understand or control, which leads us to focus on the theory instead of the human. Then we may disregard the pragmatic results.

I would like to make a plea to humanists. The plea is that R.C. be protected from attempts to 'improve' its theory or practice. That there be no admixture of other methods. That, perhaps most of all, it be protected from extension, codification and officializing of what R.C. is, by its own hierarchy.

R.C. often looks for the 'right way'. Through a very traditional hierarchy it speaks its official theory and practice. Teachers present the 'official' version. Writers are expected to check with the hierarchy before publication. The result has been a tragic loss - the loss of hundreds of needing people to the communities.

The processes we enjoy in the world of humanistic psychology work differently in each person and at each moment of life. They work in spite of our best theories. They do not need to be codified and officialized. They only need to be put to work.

There are some interesting parallels with Alcoholics Anonymous. Both A.A. and R.C. are suspect in the non-humanistic world. Both are non-professional. Both are not supposed to work, and both are accused of distorting and exaggerating their results.

I am one of thousands of professionals that can attest to the results of both A.A. and R.C. We have seen many unexpected recoveries. We have heard the defensive explanations from professionals and have often found them to be contrary to the

facts. The kinds of human recovery found in R.C. and A.A. are not supposed to happen, but both movements have grown on a pragmatic base. They have worked. They have grown because they do work.

They are also some interesting contrasts between A.A. and R.C.

A.A. has survived and worked largely through one fact - it has always belonged to the people. Neither Bill Wilson nor Dr. Bob, the founders of A.A., would ever speak for A.A. The people have preserved it from distortions and from theoretical development. It has spread through use and its effectiveness in human life. There has never been a hierarchy protecting and preserving A.A. theory and practice.

There is another contrast with A.A. that R.C. might well regard. A.A. glories in differences. There are, you will hear at meetings, as many ways into alcoholism as there are alcoholics. No two people will find the same way out. A.A. works differently for each person. It does not work for all. It follows that no A.A. member ever speaks for A.A. Even the founders did not. Each speaks for himself and for his own recovery process.

This is a magnificent description of the humanistic approach to the human process.

Each time we attest to the results of A.A., R.C., T.A., Gestalt, you name it, we see the effect in one human life. Each will be different in another human life.

Somehow, when we focus on theory we get trapped. We expect sameness and confirmation of our theory. In the process we lose track of the human. My sense is that it is effective to focus on the human, and discover whatever will work for that person at that point in life.

R.C. is at present shifting its focus away from people to codification and purity. The need to control is typical of non-humanistic approaches. It has no place with those whose focus is the individual human person.

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