

AHP Activities

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Some people have complained that this magazine is full of pieces on various aspects or applications of humanistic psychology, but nobody ever says what humanistic psychology actually is.

In the Spring of 1949 Abraham Maslow and Anthony Sutich met for the first time. Out of their discussion emerged an agreement to work together on developing a psychology which would get away from the current emphasis on less-than-fully-human behaviour. Maslow had already published his first paper on self-actualization, and Sutich had written one on growth experiences, which was published soon after.

In 1954 Maslow organised a mailing list for the purpose of circulating duplicated copies of articles that could no longer be published in the official journals because of their commitment to the behaviorist orthodoxy, or on the other wing, to the psychoanalytic orthodoxy. These papers dealt with the wider possibilities of the human person, with areas like creativity and autonomy, and with topics like love and growth.

In the summer of 1957 Maslow and Sutich agreed that the time had come to launch a journal. What should its title be? Suggestions included: *Journal of Growth Psychology*, *Journal of Ortho-Psychology* appeared. It was sponsored by Brandeis University, who helped with the costs. Within three months, more than 150 letters had come in, suggesting that an Association be formed. A committee on organization was formed, and took a year to drum up possible members, write a constitution, and organize a founding meeting, which took place in 1963. The Association began as a subsidiary of the Journal and was directly responsible to the Editors. This enabled Brandeis University to help again with the expenses.

In 1965 the Association severed its link with Brandeis and became a charity, and in 1969 the control of the Journal was transferred to the AHP, which in the same year dropped the word 'American' from its name, and became an international organization. In the same year the British AHP commenced operations in London.

There has in recent years been an important connection between the AHP and growth centres like Quaesitor and Community. The US organization produced in 1968 the first list of growth centres, with 32 entries: in 1970 this had risen to 121 entries, and in 1972 to 177, in five different countries. The AHP has also produced a list of humanistically-oriented schools, and education is another area in which a great deal of

work has been done - see for example the current AHP booklist, available free to members (50p to non-members).

This account does not do anything like justice to what we may call the 'pre-history' of humanistic psychology. The work of Moreno on psychodrama, for example, was used a great deal in the first growth centres, but little acknowledgement was made to his influence. The work of Kurt Lewin gave rise to the T-group, which again has been a continuing source of action and reaction in the development of humanistic psychology. The work of Reich has been very influential in a number of ways. Much has come from Zen, and Tao, and Tantra.

But somehow it has been through action that humanistic psychology has woven these strands together, incorporating with them the existential insights of Sartre, Laing, Cooper and others. And the action has been to do with a willingness to 'work on oneself'. This process of working on oneself is hard to define precisely, but it certainly involves self-exploration, and usually a form of self-exploration which takes place in the presence of others, and which is helped by those others. The sometimes lonely practices of the Eastern mystics and the existentialists have been opened up and made into a much more social way of working, reducing the chances of self-deception considerably. The effects of working on oneself in this way are to increase spontaneity, flexibility, self-direction, creativity, awareness of self and others and a general ability to take responsibility for one's own life. This whole process has been called 'self-actualization', because it seems that what is happening is not something being added from outside, like a new norm of behaviour, but rather of a release of what was there already. (If this seems philosophically difficult, see Ralph Ruddock's essay in his book *Six approaches to the person.*)

It seems true to say that all the workers in humanistic psychology have been interested in some aspect of this process, whether it is on fairly straightforward psychological concepts like self-disclosure, or on more hard-to-pin-down topics like dreams, responses to art, altered states of consciousness or extra-sensory perception. As time has gone on, workers in the area of humanistic psychology have become more and more adventurous, constantly extending the boundaries of what is *normal* for human beings.

One implication of this is that humanistic psychology is not value free, as one version of science says that science has to be. We do not avoid question of choice and preference, and are critical of social structures which seem to work in the direction of making people move *down* the spiral into alienation and anomie, rather than *up* the spiral of self-actualization. (The idea of the spiral is fully described in Charles Hampden-Turner's book *Radical Man.*) It is frustrating to see people making some gains in self-actualization, and then sinking back again under the pressure of social roles which reverse the process; in schools, in work, in the family.

So humanistic psychology is perforce interested not only in self but in society: hence the title of this journal.

John Rowan

You are invited to find out how humanistic psychology helps to generate a way of life, not only for the person himself in his own private psyche, but also for the same person as a social being, a member of society.

The subscription is £6 per year, which includes a subscription to Self & Society, or £4 for mailing members. Mailing members receive Self & Society and all communications from the AHP and will be entitled to attend all meetings but without discounts.

To: The Treasurer, Association for Humanistic Psychology,
82 Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 0AU.

I would like to join the AHP in Britain, and enclose my first year's subscription.

NAME

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| Couples: 9 November, £5. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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