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Consciousness, Integration and Responsibility

Mark Matthews

Concerns about some of the practices and the direction of the growth or human potential movement and the role of the Association for Humanistic Psychology have been with me for some time. An accidental typing error - *humoristic* instead of *humanistic* - crystallised the issues in my mind. I resigned from the executive committee of the association and resolved to write this article.

The choice of the title deserves explanation. I believe in the concept of consciousness - not in the sense of levels but as facets of a crystal. A crystal which includes both ideological and physiological dimensions. Consciousness leads to integration, the sense of making whole for the individual and also for the individual as a member of the community, a fragment of the living process. It is in this sense as a member of the community that I wish to introduce a view of responsibility which goes beyond that common in the movement.

Just what the movement is cannot be defined. It must include all who are involved with growth, self realization, therapy or consciousness and it probably includes those who take as their task a process orientation. The extent to which it is a cultural group or view with its own values as against a group who have experienced a process is the dilemma with which I am faced. It appears as both.

It is this dilemma coupled with the fact that there are skills and financial considerations also involved that has lead to such confused thinking and a lack of social awareness. It is certainly not within my ability to resolve the complexity but hopefully these ideas will encourage others and some initiatives will emerge. To make my point I confess to being over dramatic. It is human to err.

The association has under three hundred members, and most of the 'accepted leaders'

play no active part. This is a ridiculous situation. If growth or any of the other terms have something to offer to our stressed and troubled society then the association should have thousands of members playing an active part in getting more emphasis for a humanistic view in society. The fact that individuals are doing what they can is ignoring the reality of pressure groups and the power of representative opinion. The fact that there are very obvious humanistic points of view that can be put, and which do not involve special 'growth' language is clear. The methods of doing so and the organisation is straightforward. The reasons it has not happened and will not happen is due to the mystifications and confusion that surround the movement. This needs changing and fast.

In order to remove the obstacles to growth there is a real need for the association to make itself clear on the various growth, consciousness and therapy processes. The problem of standards is extremely difficult to resolve but there must at least be a basis for categorisation. And if the association is to present itself as a responsible body there must be some form of protection or at least guidance for the general public.

We are all gullible to some extent and open to suggestion. An individual experiencing a crisis and seeking growth or therapy is even more so. I do not believe it is enough to claim that individuals are responsible for themselves. In such circumstances the individual is lost and has little choice if told of a way to be found. The opportunities for individuals to take money without providing anything in return are many. The possibilities for psychic harm are also too obvious to need detailing not to mention the fact that a dependency on a certain type of 'process' can be easily created.

Some of the promotional blurbs in the past would have put the detergent ads to shame.

Let the buyer beware is no longer as commercially acceptable as it used to be - surely in our approach to others the movement must show some features of care and concern. This care is needed at the point where the individual has to suspend his or her critical faculties and is still unfamiliar with the implications.

I think the Association for Humanistic Psychology is the right organization to play a generalised role and possibly not the one to deal with standards. It could be the initiating force and must provide some guidance of an objective kind - for example stressing the low cost of peer counselling compared with the many other alternatives.

While there are political implications in a humanistic movement I do believe that politics in the sense of competing systems should be kept separate.

I feel deeply disappointed at the small contribution I have made and wish that instead of being critical I had managed to introduce change. The thought of an Association for Humouristic Psychology restored a sense of humour to the mental block which prevented my subjective and objective reasoning getting together.

It is so easy to forget that living is the object - not self realisation, growth or consciousness. Perhaps we all need a good laugh before continuing the inevitable search to fulfil the next need.
