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Criteria for evaluating Growth-Movements

I have evolved the following set of criteria for evaluating contemporary growth-movements. It may be of some interest to readers in the field of humanistic and transpersonal psychology. Taken as a whole the set of criteria is an outline of a meta-growth-movement or, more generally, a blueprint for the values of a new type of society.

By a growth-movement I mean a more-or-less identifiable school of thought and practice offering a particular approach to human growth. Sometimes such a school is clearly definable in terms of a name, a theory, a range of techniques and an organisational structure. In other cases there is just a number of people adopting a roughly similar approach who are not in any formal association with each other as, for example, many leaders of eclectic encounter groups working through growth centres.

There is no expectation underlying the list of criteria given below that any given contemporary growth-movement should meet all or even most of these criteria. That would be quite unrealistic and unreasonable. The exigencies of life being what they are, it is only possible for a movement to meet a relatively small number of these criteria. But the list may help to prevent myopia through over-identification with an approach which, though worthwhile, can be seen from a wider perspective to be restricted.

The growth-movement offers a rich field for what I call experiential research - testing out a theory about human nature and its capacity for change by applying its associated techniques to oneself, in association with others who are doing the same. But one of the problems of such experiential enquiry is that of consensus collusion among those who subscribe to a particular school of theory and practice. Since any really thorough-going experiential exploration of a growth method involves a substantial investment of the total personality over a significant period of time, there is the danger that the enquirer will find it convenient not to notice the respects in which the methods he has practiced fail to deliver the goods the theory anticipates or, more probably, will fail to notice the respects in which the theory, the method and their effects simply leave out of account certain valuable possibilities for individual and social fulfilment.

Dogmatic certainty in varying degrees of intensity is one of the prevailing diseases of the spirit among some contemporary growth movements, including those with both an oriental and an occidental origin. Building internal brotherhood, purifying and redeeming the self, reaching out to help the rest of afflicted humanity - as soon as these things lead to rigidity of doctrine and inability to undertake discriminating

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appraisal of the fundamental assumptions of the school, they become in part at any rate insidious moral delusions whose very force of apparent righteousness blinds their adherents to their stultifying effect.

Dogmatic certainty is simply a defense against deeper, wider and as yet unacknowledged forms of individual and social growth. It goes hand in hand with a righteous proselytising tendency; the more people we can persuade to join us in organising their lives according to our dogma, the more powerful our collective defense against the unacknowledged elements of life.

John C. Lilly, in the Epilogue to his book *The Centre of the Cyclone,* London, Paladin, 1973, gives an excellent brief seven-point programme for the experiential researcher. See also Charles T. Tart on 'state-specific sciences' in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* Volume 3 No. 2, 1971; my paper 'Experience and Method', Human Potential Research Project, Centre for Adult Education, University of Surrey, 1972; Joseph T. Hart, 'Beyond Psychotherapy - a Programmatic Essay on the Applied Psychology of the Future' in *Biofeedback and Self-Control 1970* New York, Aldine Atherton, 1971.

These four contributions, among others, all give overlapping accounts of the concept of experiential research. And it is the progressive creation of the field of experiential research which will I believe expose the combined naivetes of dogmatic experientialism and dogmatic intuitionism - a combination which may be caricatured in the formula 'We know from experience that method X has made new people of us, so we just know for certain that method X is the only effective way of changing people'.

Of course many people do explore growth-movements in the spirit of experiential research. Here, then, is the set of criteria given in more-or-less random order. It is offered as one possible guide to enable the experiential researcher to examine the comprehensiveness of the range of assumptions in terms of which the school he is currently exploring operates. Individual criteria are posed in the form of questions and are grouped under five basic assumptions about the conditions under which human beings grow as persons.

By 'growth' I mean movement towards a state of individual and collective human flourishing in which a wide range of polar values are dynamically related: autonomy and mutual aid, hierarchy and democracy, self-transcendence and self-expression, conservation and innovation, and so on.

1. Social Change

Assumption: People grow by commitment to theoretical and practical activity in creating, changing and maintaining social forms and structures.

> (a) Alternative institutions: Is there any planning and setting up of new social structures - alternative family/marital/sexual forms, alternative educational and mental welfare programmes, alternative recreational programmes, communes of various kinds, industrial participation, new financial/

commercial/trading systems and so on? Is the growth-movement itself internally organised in new, participative and non-alienating ways?

(b) Internal organisational development: Is there any explicit practical commitment to ways of changing existing institutions from positions within or as consultants to those institutions - from the family to the state?

(c) Challenging oppression: Is there any explicit commitment to ways of confronting and interrupting oppressive social structures and practices?

(d) Social conservation: Is there any concern to take steps to identify and maintain those established social structures and practices which are life-enhancing?

(e) Macro-analysis: Is there any theoretical address to a social, political and economic analysis of the large structures and processes of society to determine the wider constraints within which individual growth is set?

(f) Sociodynamics: Is there any opportunity for the systematic theoretical and experiential study of group processes, intragroup and intergroup, both in pure process groups and in institutionally embedded task groups?

(g) Psychosocial analysis: Is theoretical attention paid to the way in which psychodynamic blockages and distortions sustain rigid and oppressive social structures and practices?

2. Face-to-face change

Assumption: people grow by developing their capacity for immediate interpersonal transactions.

(a) Intensive group or pair experience: Are there opportunities for people to find new degrees of open human caring and sharing in a group or pair context?

(b) Interpersonal lifework: Is there practical commitment to action plans for working directly on everyday interpersonal relations - sexual, domestic, professional?

(c) Interaction analysis: Is there any theoretical and practical study of all the elements of communication and categories of intervention/interaction/encounter between people face-to-face?

(d) Child-raising: Is any attention given to new and enlightened methods of childbirth, infant care and relating to growing children?

(e) Death: Is any attention paid to ways of relating to terminal patients and the dying?

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(f) Unseen mentors: Is any consideration given to the relevance, possibility or meaningfulness of relating to unseen mentors?

3. Environmental Change

Assumption: people grow by caring for, subsisting from and creatively transforming their physical environment, organic and inorganic.

(a) Planetary resources: Is there any explicit concern for the conservation of planetary resources, the diminution of pollution, a rational agricultural policy, the reduction of profligate use of raw materials, population control, the development of new forms of energy and technology?

(b) Architectural, urban and landscape planning: Is there any address to the forms of building, town, city, landscape appropriate to provide a setting for new styles of individual and social fulfilment?

(c) Local beauty and order: Is there any practical commitment to transform and reshape aesthetically and functionally persons' immediate domestic and occupational surroundings - buildings, equipment, decor, furnishings, gardens?

(d) Cooperative subsistence: Is there any concern to build up subsistence skills in horticulture and farming, building, technology and applied science and so on.

4. Intrapsychic Change

Assumption: people grow by working directly on their intrapsychic life in its manifold aspects and on the blockages and distortions that restrict that life.

(a) Catharsis: Is there adequate provision for the cathartic release of blockages, distortions and rigidities of energy, attitude and behaviour due to unresolved emotional trauma? Are nonverbal body methods used as well as verbal ones?

(b) Psychodynamic analysis: Is there a coherent and comprehensive theory of the structure and possesses of the human psyche-soma in all its aspects?

(c) Transpersonal change: Is there a theory and a method for the expansion of awareness, changing levels of consciousness, entering 'inner spaces', cultivating unitive states of being?

(d) Extrasensory capacity: Is any attention paid to the relevance of, or to methods for cultivating, telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, out-of-the-body experiences and so on, whether in relation to the physical realm or any other

(e) Bodily arts: Are the methods available for systematic bodily relaxation on the one hand and for the dynamic, effective use and exercise of the body on the other?

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(f) Diet: Is there any theory and practice relating to food and drink?

(g) Active imagination: Are the powers of phantasy used in increasing self-awareness and intrapsychic growth? Is imagination harnessed to envision new possibilities for living and to influence the course of inner and outer events?

(h) Art: Is attention paid to the symbolic expression of human experience through all the arts - in creative, interpretative and spectator roles?

(i) Sexual change: Is there a satisfactory sex positive theory and practice about the life-enhancing expression of human sexuality? Is there a persuasive account of, and method for overcoming, the blockage to and distortions of sexual expression?

(j) Intelligence: Is appropriate attention paid to the cultivation of intellectual competence, the exercise of rational judgment, the application of appropriate canons of validity? To the role of divergent or lateral thinking in learning, creativity and problem-solving? To action-planning in the long and short term? To self-analysis? To the emergence of spontaneous insight into intrapsychic processes and their relation to personal history?

(k) Special skills: Is any attention paid to the high-level cultivation of special abilities in art, science, technology, medicine, crafts, organisation, education and so on?

(l) Breathing: Is any attention paid to the conscious use of breathing as a means of regulating intrapsychic processes?

5. Authority Change

Assumption: people grow through becoming more and more self-directing in cooperation with other self-directing people and less and less other-directed by authority figures.

(a) Movement leader status: Does the leader or founder (i) retain power indefinitely (ii) claim divine (or corresponding secular) sanctions in favour of his status (iii) issue teachings and organisational policies that are not open, either tacitly or explicitly, to review, comment, evaluation, critical appraisal and discriminating judgment by experienced members of the school in question? Is so, beware, *however impressive the charisma.*

(b) Group leader practice: Does the group leader deploying a particular growth technique practice exclusively one-way therapy on members of the group, retaining exclusive hold upon his special skills, and thereby in some measure creating dependency, or does he also train group members to use these skills on a cooperative self-help basis with each other?

(c) Peer self-help: Does the school encourage its members to combine self-direction and mutual aid in pairs and/or in groups in the absence of appointed and directive authority figures?

(d) Consultation: If the movement is hierarchical in structure, is *genuine* consultation practiced by those higher in the hierarchy *before* they make significant decisions affecting other people? How adequate and extensive is the consultation? To what extent is there arbitrary and unjustifiable exercise of power through unilateral, non-consultative decision-making?

(e) Consensus: To what extent does the movement have space for grass-roots participative decision-making on a consensus model?

(f) Openness: Is the movement open to theoretical, methodological and organisational change and innovation from within its own ranks? Is it truly a forum for experiential research, for technical or organisational development?

Final Comment

I espouse in principle all the five main assumptions given above. I see them as irreducible to each other yet also mutually enhancing and involved and involved in each other. Again, I consider all the individual criteria to be, ideally, necessary: no one of them wholly includes or renders unnecessary any other.

The criteria can be used as a questionnaire for evaluating the growth movement with which you are currently involved. I suggest that if it meets in some really significant degree at least 10 of the 35 criteria and that if of these ten or more at least two fall under each of the five main assumptions, then the movement in question will already be impressive.

If there is a low or zero score under any one of the five basic assumptions, then it is reasonable to look for rigidity or dogmatism under one or more of the other assumptions where there are higher scores. To any individual or group starting a growth-movement, my recommendation is that a conscious attempt is made to build in some kind of explicit commitment to each of the five assumptions.

I would be glad to receive any critical comments on this paper and any suggested additions or modifications.