

Letters to the editor

Dear Sir,

I would like to share some thoughts on and around Psychotherapy. Having noted the comments written by readers in the March edition (Vol. III, No.3), I will endeavour to avoid jargon or (ultra-personal) head-or-heart-tripping!

Psychotherapy functions as a technique for helping individuals/ groups of individuals readjust to more 'integrated' people who can at least cope with their (appropriate) roles in modern society. In applying this technique, whether Jungian, Kleinian, or Freudian, the therapist holds himself aloof from his client, being careful not to respond spontaneously or 'genuinely' to him. He believes that to function efficiently he must separate his professional being from his total self (this is carefully ensured by his training).

I believe that mental dis-ease is often the result of a person acting such roles and denying and thwarting other parts of himself to a degree that his integrated 'self'—identity shatters. Now surely, for such a person to be shown HIS path of re-integration (only the individual can heal himself—the therapist must help him to do this)—he must be shown and learn from an integrated person. I am sure this is of top priority in therapy. The irony of '*role-play is therapy*' results in certain common distortions in the client-therapist relationship which in turn makes the therapist more in need of defences, and a circle of insensitivity is established which no need or demand of the client can break.

I must add that I find Rogerian client-centered therapy, with its emphasis on the here-and-now, and spontaneity and honesty of therapist as well as client, has cut across this problem. So too has Re-Evaluation Co-Counselling, which I am sure could make a very valuable contribution to Psychotherapy for the less severely sick. As I said above, it is the individual who best understands himself, but this is clouded by a variety of 'congestions' of the mind. Hence the best provision for a client is attention. The client must trust his therapist or

co-counsellor to accept and gain from this attention, and so the therapist or counsellor must be genuine. Integration, awareness of the order as well as of the self, and reciprocity is stressed in Co-counselling and the counsellor becomes the counselled for an equal length of time.

I find myself increasingly aware of the need for a particular form of therapy, namely Family Therapy. While it probably suffers from the same symptoms as one-to-one therapy I think there is a special need for it in our society. The importance and power of the family as primary environment for the rearing of children is being underestimated, indeed undermined. Most of us experience our formative years as members of a nuclear family for good or bad, and often bad. Of course there are many factors, notably sociological or socio-economic. Nevertheless I am sure there is much therapy can do; for example one feeling often experienced with mental sickness is loss of identity and/or the sense of belonging, which if the whole family can be treated could be dealt with as a group process.

If started early enough family therapy can create a better environment for the children. Family therapy is not only child therapy but also conjugal therapy. As the children cannot be considered isolated from the parents, and an improvement in child/parent relations can also contribute to an improvement in parent/parent relations. Many individuals receiving psychotherapy are members of families, and many of their symptoms are common to the family or as a result of the position of that individual within the family 'changing' that individual may create more conflict between him and his family. An alternative would be to promote awareness and understanding between all members of the family who can then go on to learn from each other and provide the love and support enabling them to function more fully as individuals.

Lorraine Bell
Dorset

Dear Editor,

The trouble with the editorial in Vol.III, No.5 is that it has just the same sort of woolliness as that which afflicts so many of the articles in the mag. You've got to come out and say in your definition of humanistic psychology that you know perfectly well it's open to misunderstanding, because conventional psychology has clouded the issues while asserting that only *it* has a right to define what the issues are. (Humanistic, mumbles the neophyte to himself, well, isn't *all* psychology about human beings, doesn't it only study rats and chimps even, just to find out more about human beings?)

I'd put the cards on the table. Humanistic psychology recognizes that the materials it seeks to understand, man's emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social behaviour, are unsuited to the methods of study which rational psychology uses. Traditional psychology imitates the methods of natural science, based upon the use of the strictly controlled experiment and the principle of falsifiability. Its materials (the *important* ones: how and why do we love and hate, feel humble and exalted, fall into inexplicable apathy, etc etc etc), however, can rarely lend themselves to the use of controls and each unit, so to speak, of behaviour is unique and unrepeatable. Therefore in principle the results of any 'experiment' are neither provable nor unprovable. (*Self and Society* is full of *assertions*, not demonstrations.)

Practically everything which psychology-imitating-natural-science can do has been done, I think (the classic learning experiments, the counting of heads to discover 'normal' and 'deviant' behaviour in a variety of life situations). Not only that, so successful a brain-washing has been carried out on most people that they are unable to see that value judgments are involved in assigning qualities such as normal and deviant (for my part, I think that 50 million Frenchmen *must* be wrong . . .) on the basis of the methods used.

Humanistic psychology is groping toward some method or combination of methods of understanding ourselves which takes in both the humanities approach, where that is applicable, and the scientific approach, where that is applicable. I haven't had time to think this out any further, but it is not in dispute, I think, that the *methods* of literary criticism and art criticism, for example, are indeed suited to their materials and that it is possible to discover whether or not they are being mis-used, or show bias, *even when only one work is being discussed*. Explication is possible, because *internal* logic is recognized as something that really exists. On the other hand, you can't judge a book unless you've read another book and doesn't this meet the objection that human experience is unique and no controls are possible?—for the fact is that we *do* evaluate and discriminate our own and others' behaviour on the basis of experience and observation, and that we *do* have shared values.

Back to *Self and Society* as it is: I don't think many people/possible readers would object to it on the grounds that what its writers are talking about is neither fish or flesh or good red herring. What fills the hopeful reader with doubt and induces scepticism is the sheer quantity of padded waffle. It is a great pity if the only people who can be found to write articles—no, not the only, that's hardly fair!—are those who are unable to communicate intelligibly either because of plain inability to write clear English prose, or because they do not really know what it is they are trying to communicate.

To say something positive, I think *Self and Learning* Conrad Lodziak et al (*Self and Society* Vol.III, No.5) is on the right lines. It doesn't go as far as one would like, but it *does* say, we *can* find a valid method.

May Roberts
West Kensington