

AP Activities

EUROPEAN MEETING

The l'Arca Centre in Milan is organising a European meeting on *The Present and the Future of Humanistic Psychology* on the 11th. 12th of October this year. There will be papers and small group discussions, and there is still the possibility of contributing further material. Anyone who would like to go, either to present something or just participate generally, should write to l'Arca, 20136 Milano, Via Col del Rosso 4, Italy. Also inform Vivian Milroy so that if enough people apply they may make some common arrangement for travel.

GOOD NEIGHBOUR PROJECT

We had a very good meeting addressed by John Enright and George Pransky. Not all of it has been transcribed yet, but here are some extracts from what John Enright said:

'It started a little under three years ago, when I agreed to give a talk at the Esalen Institute, called Releasing People-Helping from the Money Economy. This is the way I often work – setting up a title which interests me, and then looking around to see what it is I want to say. What I found myself saying was that some time over the last hundred years the natural social networks of people, of being useful to each other has been broken. The function of people helping each other has been taken over by professionals. And the helping professions become self-perpetuating. The natural capacity of people to be useful to each other is interfered with. The existence of the professions becomes a barrier to re-establishing that ability.

So if we take a Taoist look at mental health, we might say– If you think you're part of the solution, you're probably part of the problem. The very existence of the helping professions confirms the notion that there is something called 'mental illness', and you may have it, or you may get it if you don't have it now, and if you do get it you'd better watch out, and a professional might help you. And everything gets linked to this – all sorts of behaviour gets labelled as 'neurotic' or 'maladjusted', so that it is not dealt with by ordinary social means, but handed over to the professionals.

I was a member of Synanon for four years, and I saw for myself how ordinary people–if anything less able to cope that most–developed in two or three years a rather remarkable ability to be helpful to others. Some of them became far wiser, more humane, more adept at helping people than almost any psychiatrist I have ever met. There are some of them I would definitely send a friend to, rather than telling them to go to the best shrink I could think of. And this proved to my satisfaction that people basically didn't need professionals except in the most unusual cases; they could help each other..

Well, when I gave this talk, 60 people cornered me afterwards, and said– ‘Why don’t you DO IT, instead of just talking about it?’ And eventually I agreed to do a meeting in 3 weeks time, to carry some of these ideas into practice.

When I got home, the first question that occurred to me was the problem of selection. Obviously training takes time and trouble, and I couldn’t handle more than 10–20 people at a time, could I? That meant a waiting list, and so on. How was I GOING TO SELECT PEOPLE, I couldn’t work it out.

And then I woke up in the morning and realised that it’s exactly that point of view which is what is wrong with the existing system. Universities are based on selecting something like 1% of the applicants, and turning them into an elite. Professional helpers too are selected from a small proportion of the population and are turned into a mental health elite. Then they are supposed to treat the other 99%—part of whose problems in life are about being rejected! We take an undifferentiated mass of people. turn most of them into human garbage and the rest into garbage-collectors. And we are now treating larger and larger groups of people as garbage. Older people, for example, are now often treated as a mental health problem! We are defining more and more people as OUT and training others to take care of them.

This kind of thinking made me drop all notions of selection. I felt– ‘if we can’t train everybody, we won’t do anything’. And that turned out to be one of the most valuable things about the whole programme.

By the time we met three weeks later, there were 120 people—the 60 had it seems each brought a friend! And later there were over 200. And we just developed exercises, mostly in pairs, which could be handled with those numbers. We just stumbled along for about six meetings, making it up as we went along. Every third week we would have a large group meeting, in some place we could get free, and in between we would have two small group meetings, with about 6 or 8 people, where we would give very precise structured exercises— exercises in responsibility, exercises in listening. We would teach the exercises in the large groups, and the small groups would work further with them.

The small groups gradually became known as ‘families’ and they would sometimes meet socially outside the regular working meetings. Some of them became very close. Each group would have a convener. the first among equals, who would be responsible for seeing that the exercises were carried out fully. And the evenings would build on each other.

During this period I met George (Pransky) and we did a great deal together. He became a kind of troubleshooter, going round the small groups and seeing that they worked.

This was a very exciting meeting, where we carried out a number of the exercises to see how they worked, and found that they were indeed very simple yet very effective. The enthusiasm was such that a follow-up meeting was arranged for the 1st. September, George Pransky still being in the country on that date, to see whether it might be possible to start something similar in this country. Further report on this in the next issue.

THE OPEN DOOR PROGRAMME,

A subcommittee has been set up to consider a TV broadcast on this programme and it would welcome anyone with experience of TV to help make basic decisions on approach and content. Contact Vivian Milroy about this.

NEW EVENT

A new and possibly unique event is being put on at Eastbourne House (Bullards Place, Morpeth Street, Bethnal Green, E2) on the 27/28 September by John Southgate and John Rowan—a workshop on *Dialectics as a Felt Experience*. It is a pity that it clashes with the AHP event on the 28th, but the latter is more for newcomers, which the Dialectics event is more for those who already have some group experience or some knowledge of dialectics. Marx, Hegel, Mao and the Tao will all be represented, but the emphasis will be on the experiential approach.

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,
62 Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 0AU.

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