John Rowan

Social Action and Community Development

Humanistic psychology has a real investment in the social and ethical implications of its work. It is not surprising, therefore, that virtually every one of the central figures in humanistic psychology has come out and said challenging things about society, as well as about the individual. All the time the emphasis is on change, real change, and not on adjustment to the existing order. Maslow, (1) for example, says this.

> If we were to accept as a major educational goal the awakening and fulfilment of the B-values, which is simply another aspect of self-actualization, we would have a great flowering of a new kind of civilization. People would be stronger, healthier and would take their own lives into their hands to a greater extent. Wit increased personal responsibility for one's personal life, and with a rational set of values to guide one's choosing, people would begin actively to change the society in which they lived.

Well, that sounds all very well, but how likely is it? And how do we perform this task of education? Do we have to do it individual by individual? Do we have to set up innumerable small groups? Do we have to pass laws in Parliament?

Some people who are seriously interested in politics see the whole approach of humanistic psychology as being diversionary palliatives which can only be illusory. Barry Richards (2) says of activities based on it:

> They are a means of drawing large numbers of intellectuals into active promotion of extreme individualism, hedonisms, and the psychotherapeutic ideology - the ideology of personal adjustment as opposed to political commitment and organization, self-fulfilment as opposed to social change, and of serving self and not serving others.

Let us check this out by seeing what activities have been initiated in the social field, by those who are identified with the position outlined in this book.

DRUG PROJECTS

Some very characteristic projects have been those set up around people who used to use drugs in largely self-destructive ways, and who began to want to stop doing this. Marilyn Kolton (3) and her associates carried out a study of 72 such programmes in the States, and found that the more humanistic programmes were those for young people. And one of the first things they decided was that it was a mistake to emphasize the 'drug addict' label, or any other label; it was better to regard the people as people with problems in living:

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> *If you focus in on one thing, if an adolescent goes into a Buddhist kick, if you then assume that's permanent and unchanging, he doesn't have a chance to get off that kick. Because you're relating so much to that. If he focuses on drugs, and then he stays on drugs, and you stay on drugs, and the structure of the community stays on drugs, well then that keeps him from shifting to something else.*

So there was little or no attempt at diagnosis, or of applying some kind of medical model to the person. Instead, there was much more of a real attempt to get with the person, and learn something from that, in a genuine two-way interaction. There was a genuine respect for the person's praxis: the underlying assumption about the behaviour of an individual is that her strategies are from choice, and are the result of decisions made to cope with certain situations.

But there is also a respect for the environment, and its power to impose very real sanctions on the person. Lester Gelb (4) gives this example:

> *Several years ago I was asked by a social agency to see a 13-year-old orphaned boy, depressed, failing in school and often truant. The reason given for his numerous transfers was that he was a 'severe behaviour problem' and 'unmanageable'. I.Q. was 79 at age 11. My attempts, through psychotherapy, to provide a 'corrective emotional experience' were to no avail. He complained continually about his difficult life situation. He improved after I was able to share with him my understanding of a truth that he had sensed or known all along - namely, that he had been the victim of poor teachers and a series of foster homes where he had been cruelly exploited. The several foster parents had suffered from poverty and had used the foster agency payments as a way to improve their own standard of living. Meanwhile the children were used to do chores and housework. Partly as a result of my joining my patient in his angry reaction, the agency reorganised its foster placement programme and provided family counselling. After my acknowledgement of the appropriateness of the boy's anger, he was ready to accept educational opportunities, including courses in photography. His I.Q. had risen to 129 by age 17. He is now a highly respected photographer at age 26.*

When one begins to see people's dilemmas as consequences of their positions within an oppressive environment, the solution involves direct intervention, creation of concrete alternative communities, and helping them develop a strategy of social change which will enable them to meet their legitimate needs. Rather than adjustment to a difficult situation with resignation, the goal might be to develop a sense of personal movement and change so that a new environment can be created.

And this has been pushed further in the field of community development, where we look beyond the individual and her immediate environment.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

We understand the word 'development' reasonably well by this time, having seen the concept applied in a rather precise way in so many fields. But the word 'community'

needs some explanation. It sounds so nice and so comforting, and yet it can be quite misleading. It seems that the beginning of wisdom here is to recognise that community is actually very rare and vanishing fast, and that if we want it we have in a sense to create it.

It hardly needs to be said that the effects of industrialization include the breaking down of local communities. Whether people live in tenements or the suburban semi-detached, in housing estates or in detached acres, in caravans or in bedsitters, they find neighbourly relations difficult to maintain and less than satisfying. This is part of wider process, as Orrin Klapp (5) has pointed out:

> *Such a malady is not just a failure of particular inter-actions and personal efforts but a blight on the forest of meanings which a child needs to grow up into a man, a grandparent, finally an ancestor. Many of its causes are difficulties in the way of a person in a mass society finding meaning to, for, and in himself: dehumanised work, extreme impersonality, destruction of places, social mobility, lack of identifying ceremonies, pile-up of objective (meaningless) information, mediocrity of bureaucratic and white-collar self-images, explosion of expectations from impact of mass communications and increasing leisure, and fragmentation of identity from multiplicity of personality models.*

So to even think of developing a community or a sense of community, we have in a way to believe in the community without being able to see it. We have, as it were, to have a faith that community is there somehow, even though it may be hard to see any signs of it. And this is very similar to the truth which we have already encountered, that in therapy, or counselling, or personal growth we have to assume or take for granted that there is a real self, before we can even dream of actualizing it. Just as humanistic psychology takes the view that the person is basically OK and to be trusted, it also takes the view that the community is basically Ok and to be trusted. As William Biddle (6) says in his basic text:

> *The attitudes that a worker with people has toward them contributes substantially to their development or lack of development. People respond to their perception of attitudes as these are expressed in gesture, word and deed. If the worker acts as though he believes people are unworthy, not to be trusted, or selfishly motivated, his influence is not likely to awaken generous initiative. If he acts as though he believes people have constructive ideas (often despite evidence to the contrary) and potentialities for development beyond their present limitations, he is likely to prove more encouraging.*

The case studies given in his book make it clear that these are neither pious hopes nor sly tricks - they actually tell us something about the way of working which was adopted in reality. One of these studies was rural and one urban, and in both projects local people emerged as leaders with initiative, originality, ideas of their own. This leadership was not discernible before the projects began and some knowledgeable onlookers had predicted that it would not be found. Futhermore, when certain emergent leaders proved inadequate or had to step aside, other leaders developed out

of and were refined by the process.

Out of this work, Biddle arrived at a definition of community: *community is whatever sense of the local common good citizens can be helped to achieve.* This is clearly a view which assumes that local conflicts are ultimately reconcilable. To put it another way, it makes the assumption, which we also found in considering organizations, that high synergy can always be aimed at.

Now it is precisely this assumption which most often upsets those who are more politically committed. As the anonymous authors (7) in *Rat, Myth and Magic* succinctly say:

> *The essence of all 'participation' schemes is the re-inforcement of structures of class-collaboration . . . The re-creation of a more docile work force . . . and the abolition of 'difficult' communities - to avoid the recurrence of localised 'No-Go' areas or total rent strikes (as in Ulster or Liverpool).*

My own view is that this analysis is too one-sided. It takes opposition as the only thing that matters, as if the only decision which had to be made was which side of the barricades to be on. This is wooden-soldier politics, where the main virtue is not to listen to the enemy. And it produces a certain syndrome within the left party itself, where the members are also not able to listen to the enemy within. And so within the left party member there grows up a secret fifth column of which she is quite unaware. In spite of her conscious wish to be democratic or equalitarian, and in any case adult, she unconsciously treats the party, and in particular its 'fathers' as a feared but loved parent. She becomes dependent and unable to fight intelligently for changes in policy. She becomes a 'child' in relation to its parents, or a 'hack' in party terms. So we do not get away from class-collaboration by merely wishing to.

I don't believe in a revolution which is only about structural changes in social institutions and says nothing about how we live our lives and run our own organizations. I see the real social change which I am interested in as basically about better social relationships, and as being achieved through better social relationships, which in themselves force structural change. As Jerry Rubin (8) has said recently:

> *My definition of 'political' has now expanded to include the food we eat, the excitation in our bodies, how we raise our children. People out of touch with their bodies cannot make a revolution. The political battles of the 1960's included too many crazy meetings, bureaucratic hassles, ideological wars because people were not aware of their own need for personal growth. In the 1970's we are going inward and discovering that we are the creators of our experience. Soon the spiritual and political revolutions will be joined: the inner and the outer.*

It is in community development that we can most clearly see the tensions appearing which we have ultimately to deal with, in all their aspects.

One particular approach has become codified well enough to be described in some detail, and applied in some 70 different communities. This is the so-called 'Charrette' programme developed by Barry Schuttler (9) and his associates. It has five stages - preparation; conference design; fact-finding task forces; intensive problem-solving conference; and implementation.

The preparation stage consists in some person or group in a community or would-be community taking the initiative to call in an experienced 'conference manager'. This person is a humanistic facilitator with some kind of organization development or similar background, and experience in handling community development projects. This manager helps the sponsors to set a realistic budget in terms of time and money, and if necessary to get further support to make the work possible.

The conference design stage consists mainly in setting up a steering committee to work out what the community needs and resources are. It is important to get a fairly neutral and respected person to convene this committee, and someone similar to be the first chairperson, elected by the committee once it is operative. This steering committee is open through the whole process, and permits all groups to be heard; if it gets too big, an executive subcommittee may be set up. At this stage everyone is wary and watchful to see if there have been any predecisions or political alignments set up. Specific interests begin to emerge, and the issues which are going to be important start to come to the surface. Fantasy and fact intertwine, but the issues are sorted and tested within the group and the objectives of the forthcoming conference begin to take shape.

During this stage, too, the budgeting starts. This consideration of costs sharpens the debate, and as it becomes clear that practical questions are being considered, other groups in the community, who had remained outside, now begin to want to participate. The committee enlarges, and the leadership tends to shift to those who are happy working in an open situation like this. At the same time it becomes clear that certain groups or individuals have to be invited to join, if certain issues are to dealt with in any adequate way. The committee will also probably decide to pay a local coordinator to handle the increasing amount of administrative work.

The fact-finding stage begins when it seems clear what the main issues are, and those issues are properly represented on the steering committee. A task group is set up to consider each of the issues.

> *At this point several things begin to happen. The members of the committee are forced to declare themselves by identifying which issue is most important to them. The steering committee management checks its assumptions about the priority of the issues and notes which issues have strong or weak support. And the members of the task groups now can see who their allies are.*

The groups collect data which bear on their particular concerns, usually with the help of local officials or other bodies with access to the relevant facts and figures. Such groups usually run for three or four months, and may involve action research, desk research and just plain talking to a lot of people. Another task of the groups is to select technical consultants who may be useful. During this stage, the steering

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committee sets up a sub-committee to handle publicity, so that everyone in the community can know what is going on and feel fully informed. At a certain point a deadline for the conference is stated and held to.

The intensive problem-solving conference runs for between five days and two weeks (partly depending on the size of community) and may be held for something like sixteen hours a day. It can, however, also be run in evenings and weekends. Normally it is best, however, to have a full working day, and then an evening forum with public participation. The agenda is very flexible, but the process is controlled by a tight system of deadlines, to ensure that whatever emerges is properly worked out and feasible.

> *The participants are free to caucus, bargain, scheme and realign their interests, but they are taken through a series of steps that includes goal definition, problem clarification, solution analysis, program planning, feasibility analysis and then a final push for consensus, commitment and an implementation strategy.*

Where possible, it is an advantage to have a graphical presentation, with charts and diagrams, at the evening meeting, to make clear what the outcomes of the day's work are. Architectural students are often very good at doing this task. They can also be asked to make physical models at the end of the conference, where that is appropriate.

Much of the work is done in small groups, and it is for each of these groups to decide if and when it needs or wants to combine or consult with other groups with different interest, different issues. Half way through the conference, there is a presentation to the local officials, at an open meeting where radio and TV are also present. This pulls the deliberations together effectively, and trial solutions are put forward here.

> *The officials' forum is a turning point in the process. Much of the rhetoric and early confusion disappears, and a core of determined community leaders begin to take charge . . . An air of excitement begins to grow . . . What seemed to be an amateur effort doomed to defeat now begins to look like a professional planning conference with a scope of solutions and new concepts never expected and seldom, if ever, seen in a community setting.*

This leads up to the final presentation, also public and attended by the relevant officials and the media. Politicians are invited to endorse key aspects of the plan which have won community support. This opens the way to implementation by the local authority during the coming months.

The implementation stage is particularly difficult. Officials may leave office or back out of their public commitment, committees may change their composition, funds may disappear and community enthusiasm sometimes wanes. What counts now are the community leaders and the network of allies they formed during the earlier stages. They have to make sure that the final report is printed and published, that a time schedule is drawn up including all the meetings of the relevant committees, and that appropriate pressure is put on to make sure that decisions are not forgotten. If this is

done throughly, much more can be achieved than if everyone just sits back and congratulates themselves.

These are the five stages, then, of this particular plan. It is only one way of going about the matter, and has only been quoted at length because it is reasonably detailed and specific - much more so in the original than in the brief summary given here.

What it brings out, more than most accounts, perhaps, is that community development is a process of bringing out creativity. Humanistic psychology has always been certain that there is more creativity in people than they normally allow to emerge. This is connected with the 'repression of the sublime' which we have alluded to earlier.

And humanistic psychology has been in the forefront of attempts to consider creativity as a normal attribute of ordinary people. Again there is a big difference from the approaches of other psychologies. For Kris, for example, creativity was 'regression in the service of the Ego', and this view has been widely accepted by Freudians and others. It means, in crude terms, that the creative person got his new ideas by, as it were, plunging into the Id and coming back with the goodies. It was Schachtell (10) who pointed out the error in this. He showed that far from *losing* oneself in the boiling cauldron of the Unconscious, one *finds* oneself in the object, idea or problem which is the focus of the creative endeavour. And he went on to say:

> *What distinguishes the creative process from regression to primary-process thought is that the freedom of the approach is due not to a drive discharge junction but to the openness in the encounter with the object of the creative labour.*

This is an important difference, because it enables the humanistic psychologist to assume that people only need a slight twist, in the form of a situation which gives them permission to be creative, and that they will then have such capacities available and on tap. The experiments of Liam Hudson (11) in this country are very striking here - he only had to ask schoolboys to pretend that they were a bohemian artist or a successful computer engineer, and the quantity and diversity of their responses on a creativity test went up sharply

Due to the efforts of people with a humanistic bias over the years, it is now possible to teach people very directly how to be creative, and manuals are now available which are easy to follow and very stimulating: for example Koberg & Bagnall's *Universal Traveller.* (12) There are other more erudite volumes, such as Stein's, (13) which tell you all about the research and extant knowledge about creativity without actually being in any way creative themselves.

And there is an interesting relationship between creativity and peak experiences. A peak experience can be the turning point in letting someone believe that she is indeed creative; but also an experience of creativity can itself be a peak experience. Indeed, every breakthrough in problem-solving or art work feels like a mini-*satori.* The 'Aha!' experience is not far from ecstasy, be it mild or intense. And as Carl Rogers (14) says:

The mainspring of creativity appears to be the same tendency which we discover so deeply as the curative force in psychotherapy - man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities ... *This tendency may become deeply buried under layer after layer of encrusted psychological defences; it may be hidden behind elaborate facades which deny its existence; it is my belief however, based on my experience, that it exists in every individual and awaits only the proper conditions to be released and expressed.*

What we are saying, then, is that community development can be a way of getting people to get in touch with their own functioning, and awaken their perhaps long dormant belief in themselves.

And so the important thing is not the actual achievements, which may be large and impressive or rather small and seemingly minor, but the process by which people become more competent to live with and gain some control over local aspects of a frustrating and changing world. This is a process planned by the participants to serve goals which they progressively choose. And in and through this process people grow and develop their capacities and their confidence and their self-esteem. So it is about personality growth through group responsibility for the local common good.

The people who have been through such a process, just because they are now more creative and more sure of who they are, are in a better position to decide whether what they now want is conflict or cooperation. And this is the answer to the political arguments we looked at earlier. It is not a question of having a preconceived commitment to conflict or social harmony; it is a question of getting to a place where the people involved have a real choice. It is not a question of deciding to be in opposition before we start, but of finding out what we really want, and in the process finding out what opposition there is to that both inside and outside ourselves. It is only in this way that our choices can be genuine ones based on reality and taking into account all that which genuinely needs to be taken into account.

There are now huge numbers of community development projects going in this and other countries, and some of them are run with the kind of perspective we have been outlining - but many are not. Because of the extreme dislike of the British for theory, many people working in this field do not even know that it is humanistic psychology which is at the back of the ideas and methods they are using, even when they are using them.

This may now be changing, and there are some signs that workers are becoming more conscious of what they are doing. Recently the SCM started a training scheme for community development workers which combined the approaches of Saul Alinsky and Gestalt therapy, and this looks very promising. Ultimately it seems that some combination of political awareness and the awareness of personal growth must be more effective than either of these alone. As Jerry Rubin (8) says:

To love your body, to accept yourself, to know your own personal rhythm, to go inward, gives you better control of your own life, and makes you better able to change the oppressive economic and political structure. Awareness of

self is the first step to awareness of cultural oppression.

In fact, true self-awareness leads to the realization that full self-growth is impossible in a corrupt, repressed and polluted society. Therapy by itself can become very narrow and result in an overwhelming absorption with one's self. The final therapy is a social revolution.

What humanistic psychology is asking for, all the way through, in field after field, is for all of us to exchange the pain of alienation for the pain of awareness. And this is a hard thing to ask. It is hard because it is possible to switch off the pain of awareness, once we have awoken to the realization that we are responsible but unfree. There is nothing for it but to go all the vay. As Julian Beck (15) once said:

When we feel, we will feel the emergency;
When we feel the emergency, we will act;
When we act, we will change the world.

This is an extract from ORDINARY ECSTASY by John Rowan to be published in Spring 1976 by Routledge and Kegan Paul.

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Nina Winter

The Still Point

Take a slow deep breath. Let the chest and belly fill up with air and then breathe out, slowly, fully. Now just wait for the next breath to enter the body. Don't do anything. Just wait and see how that breath, ever-so-subtly and *of its own* makes its way into your system. If you do this a few times with real attention you may experience what feels like a moment of suspension *(after* the exhalation and *before* the next in-coming breath); a moment in which it seems that NOTHING IS HAPPENING. This moment of suspension or pause before the inspiration is actually a moment of deep stillness and peace. It is the second or split-second when we are most with ourselves, most contained (that is if we surrender to it and really permit ourselves to experience it). It has been called by the Chinese 'the creative stillness' and in a poem, *Burnt Norton*, T.S. Eliot refers to it as ' . . . the still point of the turning world.'

When you try this exercise, you might also feel something else just after you exhale fully and before the next in-coming breath: You may feel - instead of comfort and tranquillity - something more like restlessness . . . a kind of impatience for the next breath or perhaps even a vague fear that it won't happen! We call this fear *anxiety* and the feeling behind it is that the next event - be it our breath or some other event that '*should*' take place - *won't happen of its own.* We will have to help it (we think) by gasping or grasping or sucking in; by *doing something.*

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