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## Reply to Blackler and Brown

The article by F.H.M. Blackler & C.A. Brown *Behind conventional wisdom in organizational psychology* (June/July 1976) seems to me one of the most important pieces to have appeared in *Self & Society*. It raises issues which are of the utmost significance for a humanistic approach to the psychology of organizations.

The authors raise four main objections to such an approach, and it may be as well to set these out in their own words.

1. It appears, then, that the self actualising model may encourage an image of man as a pleasure seeking organism using and overcoming his environment in a quest for the fulfilment of his potentials. The title 'consuming man' well describes the implications of this model.

2. A system of organization built on a vision of people as pleasure-seeking organisms exploiting their surroundings, almost unnoticed reduces people to the status of 'objects'.

3. Present institutional arrangements have a strong tendency to prevent the development of mature, morally responsible people. They achieve this by encouraging individuals to abdicate their moral responsibilities to anonymous mechanistic processes . . . It is also apparent how crucial hedonistic models of man are in the continuation of this state of affairs.

4. Perhaps the most pervasive and insidious aspect of the cultural power of organizations is that they limit our horizons both of what is available and what may be possible. In this very real sense they hamper our attempts to see beyond the present social organization of society. By their lack of attention to this and other issues, organizational psychologists are implicated as agents in the restriction of alternatives. In failing to make any systematic contribution to the question - what are we organising for? the aspects of theories in organizational psychology which appear to be concerned with *revelation* in human affairs may more correctly be viewed as directly serving the cause of *regulation*. (My emphases.)

Let us deal with each of these criticisms in turn, and see what we can make of them. If they could be sustained, the whole approach of humanistic psychology in organizations would be seriously questioned.

### 1. CONSUMING MAN

This point, that going for self-actualization is implicitly going for a vision of man as a mere consumer, is obviously very important to the whole argument put forward in the article under consideration, and comes in again and again as it progresses. It is of course a criticism which has come up many times over the years - I remember John

Southgate in about 1970 saying that the letters A.H.P. really stood for the 'Association for Hedonistic Pursuits'. Hedonism is the philosophical doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole end in life, and that all else is illusion - Mark Twain wrote a very nice little book supporting this position, which used to be published by the Thinker's Library. It is closely allied to the doctrine of egoism, which says that the only way in which it is possible to behave is to pursue one's own interests - if we think that anything we do is done for any other reason we are merely deceiving ourselves. Both doctrines are, of course, selfish in the most general sense of that word.

Now it is certainly true that a great deal of therapy and growth work is devoted simply to enabling people to allow themselves to know what happiness is for them. They have spent many years punishing themselves and putting themselves down, and now at last they can hope, and want, and go out after what they need. Not for nothing was Lowen's book called *Pleasure* and Schutz' book *Joy*. As someone said recently - 'I feel more open and relaxed, much more in touch with my feelings and more able to stand up for myself and go for what I want.' That is a pretty typical outcome of growth work.

And this seems to me to be socially desirable on a large scale. When the Volvo workers in Sweden refused to do assembly-line work on the grounds that it was too boring, and forced the company to abandon assembly-line methods, that seemed to me a good example of ordinary crass hedonism in action. I'd like to see more of it about.

But as Blackler & Brown rightly say, that is not enough. Hedonism basically works on a homeostatic, deficiency-motivated model, which means that as soon as you get what you want, you stop. As soon as the homeostatic variables are back within their normal limits, as soon as the deficiency is made up, there is no more reason for action. And so it can be rather narrowly selfish, and can easily use manipulative means along the way to the goal.

However, Maslow's theory adds a particular insight to this crude version of hedonism. Maslow says that as soon as our needs are satisfied on one level, this leaves us free to go on to the next higher level.

HIGHER LEVEL	GROWTH
MIDDLE LEVEL	RELATEDNESS
LOWER LEVEL	EXISTENCE

Using Alderfer's simplified version of Maslow, which actually has rather better factual backing, when our existence needs are satisfied we go on to relatedness needs, and when our relatedness needs are satisfied we go on to growth needs.

Now what neither Maslow nor Alderfer point out very clearly is that when we switch from relatedness needs to growth needs we also tend to switch from deficiency motivation to abundance motivation. As I have said elsewhere at greater length, it is possible to have either deficiency or abundance motivation at all three levels, but the

tendency is for deficiency motivation to appear at the lower and middle levels, and for abundance motivation to appear at the higher level.

Under abundance motivation, we do not search for the fulfilment of a need - we act from overplus of energy, and are proactive rather than reactive. If we love someone, it is *agapé* rather than *eros*. Our approach to the world is essentially aesthetic, in the fullest sense. We act so as to enhance ourselves. We talk about wanting things rather than needing things or people. We say we 'could' do something rather than that we 'should' do something. We act spontaneously, but not impulsively. We are in the present, rather than in the past or future. We are acting out of praxis rather than out of patterned habits. And in organizations, we are more interested in revelation than in regulation.

So if self-actualization is, as I am suggesting (being part of the higher level) typically abundance motivated, it is not hedonistic. In other words, growth needs are not needs so much as wants. We want to know about the side-effects of our actions, we want to take long-term considerations into account, we want to explore our selves and our situations openly and freely. And this is not a driven thing, a deficiency thing, but rather something which is freely chosen.

So when Blackler & Brown say that our image is one of consuming man, this is true, and importantly true, at the two lower levels. But it ceases to be true as we go up into the growth level.

GROWTH LEVEL	ABUNDANCE MOTIVATED
RELATEDNESS LEVEL	DEFICIENCY MOTIVATED
EXISTENCE LEVEL	DEFICIENCY MOTIVATED

In terms of this model, we are actively encouraging people to be better and more demanding consumers at the two lower levels - and don't forget that consumerism in general and Nader in particular have shown us that there is nothing necessarily passive or object-like about being a consumer-- but also encouraging them to see that this is not all there is, and that they are entitled, not only to their just dues, but to ecstasy too.

And I think it is clear enough in Maslow that self-actualization is very much a matter of letting go, rather than of striving. Maslow was appalled at the idea that self-actualization could be gone after as a pursuit, and insisted that one must always be 'surprised by joy'.

There is of course a paradox here - the paradox which runs through the whole of the growth movement and also through the Eastern approaches of meditation and so on - that by going to a group we are *striving* to learn how to *let go*. Nevertheless, when we do finally get it, it is letting go that does the trick, and it is necessary for the letting-go to be genuine.

And letting go is not consuming.

## 2. STATUS OF OBJECTS

Sticking to the same distinctions made in the previous section, we can give two answers to this second question.

Firstly, at the Existence and Relatedness levels, people may well be regarded as 'pleasure-seeking organisms exploiting their surroundings'. But does this reduce people to the status of objects? I think not. If people are really seeking their own interests in a self-confident way, they are hard to control. A good example at the Existence level is the character of Fletcher in *Porridge*. His whole endeavour is simply to survive in quite a narrow, self-seeking way, and yet he manages to do so with style and grace, and is certainly not easily exploited by those in power. It does not seem at all clear to me why a person going out for his or her interests in a direct way, and refusing to be derailed or put down, should be easily reduced to the status of an object. Certainly I think Fletcher would react very badly to such an imputation.

Secondly, at the Growth level, people are actually *not* just pleasure-seeking organisms - this was the whole burden of the argument in the previous section. They are in most cases abundance-motivated and therefore not seeking anything.

So in neither case, though for rather different reasons, can we agree with the criticism.

## 3. ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY

It is certainly true that 'present institutional arrangements have a strong tendency to prevent the development of mature, morally responsible people'. As I have written elsewhere, this seems to me true of the family, the school, the company, the hospital and most of our organizations. But it seems to me that organizations do this by inculcating conformity. People are encouraged to think of the organization's good ahead of their own. They are encouraged to think in terms of the structures and routines of the organization, as though they were fixed realities.

Someone who genuinely went after his or her own interests in a hedonistic way would be much less likely to be taken in by the basic conformist protection racket - 'Be good, and we'll look after you'. And if, in line with his or her relatedness needs the person combined with others to pursue their common interests, he or she would be even harder to keep in line.

And again, self-actualization is something much more than this, and quite out of the hedonistic bracket. So this argument again must be rejected.

#### 4. REVELATION VERSUS REGULATION

Now it is clear from what has been said already that humanistic psychologists who work on organizations - and this includes most of the major management writers over the past 30 years - want to be, and believe they are, on the side of revelation (opening up new horizons of possibility) as against regulation (preserving the status quo at all costs). But Blackler & Brown's point is that whatever they may *want* or *believe*, in *practice* what they are doing is precisely to preserve the status quo.

At the level of the individual organization, I don't think this is true; I have seen enough case histories to make me reasonably confident that organizations really can be made more human places, where relative autonomy can take the place of relative alienation.

But it seems that Blackler & Brown might well concede this - what they are talking about is more the general set-up of organizations and the relationships between them. And here, I think, they have a much more persuasive point. It is true that humanistic psychologists have had very little to say about the *system* of organizations as such. The average book on organization development, or whatever, will stick to the *single* organization as its subject-matter, and will be mainly interested in giving that organization its place in the sun. What it does after that is its own business.

With any other type of psychologist, there would be nothing funny about this - one would never expect him or her to go beyond the bounds of the brief. It is only because humanistic psychologists are obviously interested in removing *all* the limitations to the development of human potential that they get expected to go further. Unfortunately, they have no particular expertise in these larger areas. When it comes to political matters like whole social systems, and relations between large numbers of major organizations, they have only the same resources to draw on as any other citizen. They can only draw on whatever political insight or outlook they have acquired as a result of their general experience of the world.

On balance it seems to me that it is better for humanistic psychologists working with organizations to do what they know how to do, and move the organization in the direction of being more proactive, more innovative, more flexible, and so forth, rather than retreating to a position as observer/critics, where they can be right at the expense of being effective.

Obviously it is desirable that organizational psychologists, like anyone else, should be concerned citizens and political participants. But it is not only models of man which are necessary for this - and as I have indicated, I think the humanistic model of man is basically OK - but models of society. And this of course needs a humanistic sociology to be developed, rather than a humanistic psychology. At present this hardly exists. A beginning has been made, in such books as Glass & Staude's *Humanistic Society*, but there is a long way to go. I believe that Blackler & Brown's own paper is in fact quite an important step in this direction, and deserves careful reading for that reason.