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Peggy Thornborough

The Age of Aquarius - Its not all Chaos

I thought John Rowan sounded very depressed in his report ('Self and Society' March 1977) and felt sorry about this as I feel on the contrary that humanistic psychology is slowly penetrating into many traditional fields and bringing about gradual change. In fact, I feel it is the healthiest and most hopeful sign amidst the greed and violence and alienation of our world.

I was talking to a friend of mine who is a psychotherapist of Jungian training, very open to new things, and who is a member of the Joint Working Party considering the registration of psychotherapists. She told me - which is not clear in John Rowan's report - that if a register is set up it will not debar people working as therapists even if they cannot claim to be registered. This seems to me an important point to remember. She also told me that it is proposed that on the Council there should be a number of laymen which would make for a healthy balance with those of a more traditional mould.

It seems to me a pity to polarise the new and traditional forces, and this springs out of my own experience. In the growth movement there appears to be a general denigration of anything to do with the Tavistock Centre. My own 'waking up' commenced in 1955 when, as a working probation officer, I had a year off to do the Advanced Casework Course at the 'Tavy'. Looking back, I can see that it was somewhat rigidly based on Freudian and Kleinian lines, but at that time for me it burst the horizons of my mind. Through it, it became clear to me that I needed analysis, but I was much more inclined to Jung than Freud. I was helped through the Tavy to contact the Society of Analytical Psychology who enabled me to enter into a Jungian analysis as a clinic patient at reduced fees. I can never be thankful enough to my analyst for the way in which she led me through a journey into myself - a journey in which often I felt as if the self I knew was disintegrating all around me, often painful, yet discovering riches, and which enabled me to go on growing.

It was in 1969 in the United States that I first discovered the growth movement and which I got into in the following year when it started to flourish in London. I have

found the good, the bad, and the indifferent in that movement, just as I found the same in the more orthodox field of therapy. Isn't that life? No movement or organization is perfect. But I feel that the growth movement took me on from what the Tavy and analysis had given me, and again I owe so much to it. All these experiences have contributed to my journey - a journey of growth which still goes on in my sixties and which will, I hope, go on to the end of my life and perhaps beyond.

What I have found so rewarding is that I have been able to use what I have learnt not only in my personal life but professionally. This started before I retired, but since my retirement as a probation officer in 1975 a tremendous amount of freelance work has opened up to me into which naturally I take the 'me' which has benefited from these experiences. I have a small practice for individual therapy in which I am very eclectic, using whatever seems appropriate for the needs at the time, but my main work is in staff development courses for probation officers. One I call 'Freeing Yourself for the Job' and is aimed at them working on their own anxieties and stresses. In these Monday-Friday residential courses I and two colleagues work in small groups using the sort of methods which have come out of the growth scene, and they are tremendously rewarding. We also do a similar course on Family Therapy in which probation officers are enabled to work not only on how to work with whole families but also at their own family experiences. In Inner London I am doing workshops and seminars for probation officers on this same subject, and also leading three-day workshops of probation office teams where they look at their own inter-action and how this affects their work together.

I have been greatly struck in all these many contacts with probation officers to see how the approach of humanistic psychology and the growth movement has made a considerable impact on them. There is a growing openness and willingness to be themselves which I think is an inheritance from all that is happening in these movements. I can't speak for many other fields but I have done some work with local authority social workers and with the Citizens' Advice Bureaux and hopefully spread a few seeds!

So, though I feel depressed as I gaze at my television news, I feel strongly there is this counter-element of openness and humanness which is working alongside the alienation and finding roots perhaps more than we tend to think. We are told this is the Aquarian Age where chaos and confusion reign with a breaking-down of old values; this is apparent, but the other message of the Aquarian Age is that this is part of building up of something new. Humanistic Psychology and growth are part of this, too, and in my experience (John Rowan, please note!) it has even penetrated the Tavy! My contacts with them show that there have been many departures from the Freudian rigidity of the past and I think quite a few battles are being fought out there. So I don't feel despairing. I think what we have to do is to go into all the fields we can, be ourselves, and perhaps realise that seeds don't grow to trees in a day.
