

Letters to the Editor

Dear Vivian,

Professional Standards in the Growth Movement

Ever since the Growth Movement began to emerge, there have been misgivings and apprehension in the ranks of orthodox psychology. There is a justifiable fear that if there is no standard way of assessing the competence and ethical standards of a practitioner, then the way is left open for quacks and amateurs. It is essential that some way of overcoming this danger should be found as soon as possible; and John Rowan's proposal for a university degree in psychotherapy, which he introduced to us at the recent conference on Self-Renewal, is one possible way of doing this.

There are two outstanding difficulties in setting professional standards in humanistic psychology. The first is due to the enormous variety of methods available. The number of these is still increasing, since humanistic psychology is as yet a child and healthily growing. The problem is which to include, and how to leave the way open to include new methods later. The solution must be based upon a decision as to the effectiveness of the techniques; so the problem becomes one of assessment. How are they to be judged? Who is to make the assessment? Is it possible for anyone to assess the effectiveness of a discipline, who has not been thoroughly trained in that discipline? And if they have been trained in it, can they be unbiased?

The other difficulty is not so immediately pressing, but will rear its head eventually. That is the

assessment of the competence of individuals within each discipline. This will be necessary if only to choose the teachers on the new degree course. The answer that suggests itself is that the known members of each discipline should consult with each other and put forward the persons they think most suitable. Moreover, this could be seen as simply encouraging the 'old pals' network, and no way of assessing real professional competence.

Even if we do succeed in coming up with satisfactory solutions to all of the problems mentioned above, this will still not be sufficient to allay the misgivings that have been expressed within the British Psychological Society. A few years ago there was a very heated debate at their annual conference over the question of whether people who do not have a degree in psychology should be banned (by law) from practising any form of psychotherapy at all. This motion was defeated, but it indicates a strong feeling amongst psychologists that the required criterion for assessing individual competence already exists in this country, and it is the possession of a degree in psychology. However, many of the most able practitioners in the humanistic movement, and indeed many of the originators of the methods used, do not have degrees in psychology at all, and yet these are the very people who will be required to teach their own methods to others, including psychologists, if the proposed degree in psychotherapy materialises.

Now we, in the Growth Movement, all know that to acquire skill in the methods and techniques which we use, requires considerable training and practice, having first of all been on the receiving end of those same techniques. I do not know of any psychology degree course in this country which even mentioned the Growth Movement, let alone train people in any of its branches. At the university with which I am most familiar there is a strong behaviourist school, but the students are taught nothing of the works of Jung, Maslow or W. Reich, and if you mention archetypes, encounter groups, or peak experiences, they are liable to ask 'what's that?' (Yes, seriously!) To regard a degree in psychology as an adequate qualification for practising humanistic psychotherapy, is ludicrous; it is like saying that, because a dentist uses electrical tools, therefore a degree in electrical engineering is an adequate qualification for practising dentistry.

The apprehension which still exists amongst some members of the BPS, is due to a misunderstanding of the function of humanistic therapy. The word 'psychology' ought to mean the study of the psyche, but it has acquired a much more restricted meaning over the years. Where orthodox psychology studies human beings at all, it is either en masse with statistical analyses, or it is the study of the mentally sick. The study of normal, healthy individuals has no place in the established discipline. The Growth Movement has evolved to fill this gap. It deals primarily with the psyches of normal people, their everyday problems, relationships, attitudes, and minor neuroses. (Primal Therapy might be an exception in that it does handle deep neuroses.) The Indian yogi will not accept as a disciple anyone who shows

signs of being psychotic or severely neurotic; such a person would be considered not yet able to benefit from yoga training. * If we were to establish that the spheres of operation are quite different for psychology and the Growth Movement, that we are not trying to take away the psychologists' patients and mess them up, and that we, like yoga teachers, are concerned with helping able people to grow - something orthodox psychologists would not have time for even if they did have the training - if we were able to establish these principles, then I think much of the apprehension in the BPS would disappear,

Finally, if we are not to cause embarrassment to those of our members who are psychologists, and if we are to have any success in finding a university that will be willing to put into effect our proposals for a degree course in psychotherapy, it is essential that we should not be at loggerheads with the main body of academic psychologists in this country.

Yours sincerely,

Hazel Guest
London W2

*Chapter 6: 'Yoga and Psychotherapy' by Swami Rama, Rudolph Ballentine, and Swami Ajaya (Allan Wainstock), **Himalayan Institute, Illinois, 1976.**