

queens of the type who appear in "drag" in Christmas pantomimes and who in an earlier age would have been court jesters or clowns. Perhaps society needs to be reminded of such people as Peter Peers and Benjamin Britten, or of Edward Carpenter and his companion George Merrill, all of whom were able to lead happy and constructive lives until well into old age.

I have sometimes thought that there is a theme of homosexual contentedness behind the 1939 movie "Goodbye, Mr. Chips". Although this film features a "Mrs. Chips" she is a fleeting figure who dies and is soon forgotten as the rest of the story concentrates on Mr. Chips' Christ-like devotion to several generations of schoolboys. I am not suggesting that Mr. Chips is or should be gay, but I think that the type of character he presents is one worth pursuing by individual gays, namely that of the responsible man who is, in his own way, able to love and care for those in need of such love and care. His image is certainly very different from the type portrayed in the "Carry On" films!

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Philip Burnard

## THE HUMAN POTENTIAL MOVEMENT: A Personal Perspective

I recently wrote a letter to 'Self and Society' which was critical of the current status of the human potential movement in this country. In this article I hope to share some of my concerns about the current situation as I see it. I express them as my own feelings and I would be curious to know whether or not they strike a chord in anyone else.

I am a psychiatric nurse tutor and I have been interested in the theory and practice of humanistic psychology for about five years. I use experiential methods to facilitate learning in my work and use co-counselling as a tool for developing self-awareness. Currently I am undergoing another educational course which has enabled me to explore the field further.

As a relative newcomer to the human potential movement, as a branch of humanistic psychology, I will enumerate the various points that I wish to examine more closely and offer them for discussion:

1. The whole framework of the human potential movement in this country seems to be becoming too theoretically rigid. Negative value-judgements of other people's work are frequently offered in book reviews in 'Self and Society' in such a way as to suggest that there is an implicit 'party line'. Behaviourism and certain aspects of psychoanalysis are 'out': Wilhelm Reich and Bioenergetics are 'in'. My understanding of humanistic psychology sees the need to acknowledge a certain freedom of thought, feeling and action within a non-judgemental framework. I reserve the right to think, feel and act for myself, taking responsibility for those things and I acknowledge the other person's right to do the same. Neither of us is RIGHT - merely DIFFERENT. I find statements such as the following a matter of concern:

*'Whatever criticisms one may have of bioenergetics, it is at least better than behaviour therapy'.*

*(Rowan: 1983:157)*

I acknowledge Rowan's right to express an opinion but I question the appropriateness of his generalisation. From where I stand, I see dogma creeping into the movement and, further, a proliferation of 'oughts' and 'shoulds'. Fairfield (1977) has written on the tendency of every organisation to develop routinised patterns and codes of behaviour:

*'Anyone who has been involved in developing an institution - private hiking club, business, church or whatever - know that it is easy to apply some kind of rational system to persuade others to conform to recommended viewpoints, codes or rules. Hence, it seems that probably any institution advocating a liberal, radical or freedom-seeking end is virtually bound to reinvent autocratic reasons for **not** acting in accordance with its own goals.'*

*(Fairfield: 1977: 100)*

Is the growth movement creating its own set of rules, its own code of conduct at the expense of open-mindedness? Is it also finding ways of condemning ideas outside its own structure?

2. The amount of jargon being used within the movement is excessive. It is perhaps, further evidence of the institutionalisation of ideas that it seems necessary to learn a new language in order to feel at home within the movement. Such a language seems strangely dated and strongly reminiscent of the 1960's. Humanistic psychology often

emphasises the 'here and now'. Is the human potential movement able to adopt that position? The adoption of the language can breed a type of person who presents an inauthentic and strangely mannered sense of self. This can be particularly bewildering to the newcomer. Humanistic psychology, to me, is about developing that unique, authentic -presentation of self - as far as possible free of the introjections of others. I seem to meet a number of people who appear to be living their lives out of standard texts in humanistic psychology. Such lives are surely far removed from genuine, spontaneous presentations?

3. Certain aspects of the movement are taking on a 'cult'-like mantle. Co-counselling groups talk of 'welcoming fundamentalists' to their folds! Here the language seems to mimic that used by certain charismatic sects of the church. Nothing wrong with that, perhaps, but it is notable that, very often, those charismatic sects proclaim access to the 'truth'. They also have a tendency to become narrow or closed in their outlook. Already the fees for fundamentals courses tend to mean that only a small section of the community will be able to afford to become co-counsellors. It is perhaps important that the 'cult' element does not further close its doors either to people or ideas.

4. There seems to be an element of smugness within the movement. There is a feeling of 'we've got it right', that worries me. Whenever I start to believe that I 'know', I begin to doubt. Perhaps a little healthy doubting would not go amiss within the movement. There are many paths to enlightenment and awareness. I'm not sure that the human potential movement can claim the monopoly on these.

Having been critical, I must once again acknowledge that these are MY feelings - projections and all! I continue to find humanistic psychology theory and practice valuable within my life and in my work and I continue to use it. I would be interested to hear from others on any of the points that I have raised.

I close the article with a quotation from Carl Rogers:

*'I believe that the only person today who does not suffer the painful search for self is the person who voluntarily surrenders his or her individual identity to some organisation or institution that defines the purposes, values, the philosophy to be followed . . . Yet I suspect that the majority of young people prefer the more painful burden of choosing to be the uniqueness that is involved in discovering the real self. I know personally that is my choice'.*

*(Rogers: 1983: 34)*

## References

- Rowan, J. 1983 Bioenergy: Reality or Delusion? In **Self & Society**: No.3
- Fairfield, R.P. 1977 **Person Centred Graduate Education**: Prometheus Books
- Rogers, C.R. 1983 **Freedom to Learn for the Eighties**: Merrill
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### *A Brief Comment by John Rowan*

Just two things to say. First, there is indeed a party line in **Self and Society** and in the human potential movement generally, and I'm amazed at the naiveté of Burnard in not knowing about this. Humanistic psychology is normally defined as the Third Force in psychology, as distinct from behaviourism on the one side, and psychoanalysis on the other. I thought this was common knowledge.

Second, I think there is less jargon in humanistic psychology than there is in any other kind of psychology. In Rogerian counselling and therapy, in gestalt awareness, in psychodrama and encounter, and in all the academic work such as that of Maslow, Jourard, Buhler, Hampden-Turner, Grof, Torbert, Mitroff and so forth, I find very little jargon at all. Certain disciplines on the fringes of humanistic psychology, such as TA and NLP, do go in for a lot of jargon, and bioenergetics is guilty at times (though I think Lowen himself is admirably clear). Re-evaluation Counselling can get a bit cultish at times, but of course it denies all connection with the mainstream growth movement. So I would really reject the criticism that we use a lot of jargon as being not quite accurate.

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