

John Rowan

SECULAR HUMANISM AND HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

There have been a number of pronouncements by important people recently about secular humanism, saying that it is a dead end, a spiritual disaster, a false doctrine and the gospel of materialism.

However true or false these accusations may be - and others like them - our withers are unwrung. We do not have to concern ourselves about them one way or another, because we in the AHP are not secular humanists.

It is one of the oldest confusions in the business. I remember when I first went to an AHP event, in some hall in Kentish Town, the caretaker told me it was a humanist meeting, and I thought at the time that it was run by some humanist group or other.

But in fact the two things are like chalk and cheese. Our main plank is the integration of body, feelings, intellect and spirit. This integration is the key to what we call self-actualization, and all our workshops touch on it in some way. The secular humanists, on the other hand, are not much interested in the body or in feelings, and actively deny any existence to the spiritual or transpersonal aspects of our life.

I actually joined the British Humanist Association at one time, to see whether any links could be made, but I found the people involved in it to be aridly intellectual and very narrow, spending a lot of their energy knocking Christianity, and some of the rest on issues like abortion and euthanasia. The level of sexism was very high at that time - I don't know whether it has changed since. I lasted a year and then walked out.

Now it may well be that secular humanism should not be judged by the activities of the BHA - or the National Secular Society, which it much resembles - because humanism itself is a much wider philosophy. Nevertheless the BHA are trying to represent it, and there must be some connection somewhere.

How we got our name is a story which I have never fully gone into, but I do know that at no time, not even in the very earliest days, did we take up the philosophical position of secular humanism. There was always a recognition of the spiritual side of human beings, particularly in the work of Abraham Maslow, who more than any one other single person was responsible for the founding of the Association for Humanistic Psychology.

The message then is not to worry about anything that may be said about secular humanism. Whoever they may be talking about, it isn't us.

The Affirmation

Yes!- yes!- say it Heart, say it
again and again: this word is your key - use it
turn it over and over- you are, these things
are- she is- we shall be- say it- oh
look up Heart- never again look lost, or scathingly
refer to this season's death. Winter is Spring: everywhere hidden
life renews its secret processes. Concealed
buried in earth all life must be: like Jesus
buried beneath rocks and stones, then like him
thrusting the insuperable barrier aside
crying out to the sentries- "Sleep now for a season:
then at midday reawake to your
Amazement! "

John Hands