

THE HISTORY OF FEELINGS

I'm sure John Rowan is being partly provocative in his choice of title - "Against Feelings" (**Self and Society** XIII,4), although I agree with his statement that feelings have been given too much prominence as against intuition, sensation, thinking and so on. There are many people whose major "block" is against the use of the intellect, for example.

But I think John's two suggested reasons for the emphasis on feelings in humanistic psychology ignore the crucial **historical context**. First, we have experienced three centuries of rationalism and scientific development, which has tended to emphasize the intellect and its ability to analyze the universe. Secondly, when psychology began to emerge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it naturally took shape largely within the womb of empirical, positivist science, which tended to play down the reality of feelings, and the emotional life. Thus humanistic psychology has tended to react against this.

But thirdly aren't we also seeing a reaction against the "cult of gentility" in Britain and in other cultures? This again seems to be tied up with the splits in sensibility that began in earnest in the seventeenth century: the Puritan ethic began to disapprove of enthusiasm of any kind. Energy was to be frustrated and dammed up and utilized in work and thrift and commerce. Feelings began to be seen amongst the growing middle class as dangerous and subversive of the social structure. One has only to read Jane Austen's novels to see how feelings became highly regulated in that level of English society.

Thus we are still engaged in the painful task of unravelling the constrictions and paralysis that were imposed on the emotional life. I agree with John however that intuition, sensation, imagining, are also constricted in our society - but again this has a historical development. I have a completely unsupported (intuitive!) hunch that feelings and sexuality have been the most dangerous threats to the "cult of the genteel", and hence perhaps, subject to the greatest emphasis in the counter-gentility culture.

I think the historical approach opens up an amazing Pandora's box - for example, the denial of the spiritual can also be traced back for centuries; and in our culture it is very difficult for some people to come to terms with transpersonal images, visions, and so on, which they may be experiencing.

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