

- (11) Clare, S.W., op. cit. page 51.  
(12) Rotter, J., Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs*, 1966, 80, pl-25.  
(13) Sue, D.W., op. cit. esp. ch.4.  
(24) Ferguson, M., "The Aquarian Conspiracy", Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980's, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1981. Reprinted by Paladin, 1982.
- 

## THE SELF-AWARENESS MOVEMENT —A REBUTTAL

by

John Rowan

Chris Scott's article (Counselling, May 1985) was so anxious and angry, with its talk of "potential dangers", "self-indulgence", "social irresponsibility", "assault upon reason", "political insensitivity", "counter-productive to social change", "evangelicalism" and so forth, that I wondered what sort of dreadful people it was warning about, and where I might have met one. And then I realized I had met one in the mirror this morning. The article was supposed to be about me.

It's true I have never used the words "Self-Awareness Movement", but when I have referred to the Human Potential Movement or the Growth Movement or to Humanistic Psychology I have been talking about many of the same things that Chris Scott mentions. It actually seems safer to me to talk about humanistic psychology, because this has a history and a location and an identity in a way that the other labels do not. After all, Roy Wallis (1985) says - "At the core of the

Growth Movement is the field of **humanistic psychology**". The advantage is that there are books and journals and newsletters and organizations actually representing this field in a quite explicit way, and we do not have to guess at its scope and limits.

When I started to question myself as to whether the accusations in the article were true or not, what struck me again and again was their datedness. Scott says that this country is ten years out of date - his own article certainly is. He has managed to criticise a movement without quoting any of its proponents' statements less than ten years old.

This ignorance about the recent work is compounded by the erection of a number of straw men and aunt sallies which are easily knocked down. Such an easy walk-over must have some strong motivation, and this motivation is not hard to find. Scott says at one point:

*Those of us who argue that feelings do not exist in a vacuum but are related to particular objects, situations and people are invariably accused of being defensive and intellectualizing, and incapable of understanding since we have not made the experiential journey to find the 'real me'. Meanwhile a focus on feelings is exalted to the level of a creed, and is offered as a panacea for everything from ulcers to international conflict.*

This brash statement reveals at least three things: first, the real reliance on personal experience which Scott rightly brings out as being important in humanistic psychology is distorted into a reliance on feelings, and even (a few lines earlier) on "feeling our feelings"; second, the real deep interest in the social and political implications of self-awareness, so clearly evident in Carl Rogers' and David Ryback's article (immediately preceding this one in the Journal, a beautiful juxtaposition!) is distorted into the peddling of panaceas; and third, the motive for the whole thing is revealed when it appears that Chris Scott has not yet been in touch with his "real me". (Actually, it is the "real I", and to call it the "real me" is already to show an important misunderstanding). It must obviously be hurtful when people keep talking about something, and you don't understand what it is, because you haven't experienced it yet.

The experience of contacting the real self, which I have written about at length elsewhere (1976, 1983), is one of those experiences, like the

colour purple, the taste of strawberries or falling in love, which you can't understand from someone else's explanations - you have to experience it. Once you have experienced it, the apparent contradictions or difficulties in the accounts of the thing evaporate, and you get the point. In the present case, Chris Scott hasn't had the experience, and has a sort of red rage at people who claim to have had it, like me.

Scott even objects to the notion that the here and now is important. There are two points to be made about this. One is that all forms of counselling find the here and now to be extremely important. At one time, it was seriously mooted that the words HERE AND NOW should be carved over the entrance to the Tavistock Institute, and of course the behaviourists work almost entirely in the here and now. I don't know where on earth Scott can be coming from in the whole field of counselling if he doesn't recognise this. The second point is that people in humanistic psychology like myself have in recent years been saying that the here and now is not the only or the sole important thing. The work of Frank Lake, Stan Grof, Arthur Janov, Bill Swartley, Ronnie Laing and others has all been focused on the importance of very early traumas, and this is another important aspect of the whole matter to me personally.

But I suppose the main thrust of Scott's article is his emphasis on social conditions. He objects that the self-awareness movement fails to tackle society, and continually comes back to things like "abject

poverty and misery, homelessness, starvation and ill health", "socio-political aspects of health, illness and well-being", "the grim reality for many is that basic needs - food, shelter, warmth simply are not met", "the disabled, chronic sick, the poor, the elderly", and so forth. These objections apply, of course, not only to his target, but also to nearly all forms of counselling and therapy, of whatever persuasion. As I have again argued at greater length elsewhere (1984), this is a completely misconceived criticism. Counselling is a perfectly legitimate activity; the fact that it is not politics is simply a fact, not a drawback or a condemnation.

In any case the falsity of Scott's accusations is shown up in sharp relief by his reactions to the political aspects of humanistic psychology. He pours scorn, for example, on Marilyn Ferguson's exciting book **The Aquarian Conspiracy** by saying that it is "totally devoid of empirical data - it is nothing but accounts of what people are saying, doing, feeling, thinking and achieving all over the world. It has a lot to say about power - a political issue if ever there was one.

And of course he betrays total ignorance of the other work on politics coming out of humanistic psychology. One of the best writers is Christian Bay, who has written a number of pieces, the best known of which is the book **The Structure of Freedom**. He was a political scientist, and wrote:

*I am convinced that our profession will never help us advance from*

*our wasteful, cruel, pluralist pseudopolitics in the direction of justice and human politics until we replace **political systems** with concepts of **human need** and **human development** as the ultimate value framework for our political analysis. (1967)*

He made an important distinction between politics, which is all about the power to satisfy real needs, and pseudopolitics, which is all about satisfying the vocal demands of pressure groups, no matter how narrow the interests being served. The crucial thing is not to obstruct human development:

*How can people construct a society so as to provide for maximum growth opportunities and satisfaction of their needs? (1965)*

Bay argues that only a society in which people are positively encouraged to reach Maslow's self-actualization level can ever be truly free. People at this level actually have a capacity to co-operate voluntarily, and not to demand controls all the time. At this level social freedom is possible, because people can set up a structure which allows the necessary opportunities to act or refrain from acting as they desire. (Bay 1971)

Another writer who has written along these lines is David Wright, a sociologist much influenced by the research of Jane Loevinger (1976) on ego development. Her well-researched and empirically grounded work ties in, in a remarkably strong and apt way, with the more speculative work of Maslow. In

particular, the final stage which she calls **Integrated** fits in very well with Maslow's (1970) self-actualization level. Wright says of people at this level that they are autonomous and genuinely individual:

*Yet "autonomy" and "individuality" should not be mistaken for "individualism". (Thinks: I hope Scott is listening to this!) There is a social context to their independence that is implied by their ethical principles. By taking everyone's perspective into account in any particular situation, they are explicitly "other-oriented" (though not "other-directed") and view their selves within a larger context of mutual interdependence. Moreover, these people have a deep feeling of identification, sympathy and affection for human beings in general and they view their selves and others as part of a common humanity. (1972)*

Wright makes an important distinction between indoctrinated control and voluntary co-operation as a basis for social order, and argues that the former comes essentially from the middle levels of development, and holds people back at those levels. (Charles Hampden-Turner (1971) is excellent on the whole process of psychosocial development and its problems).

*Thus, to emphasise the contrast, one basis views meaning and action as derivative from the social order; the other sees the order itself as derivative from the people's meaning and action. One postulates the society's creation*

*and control of members; the other postulates the people's creation and control of their society. (Wright 1974)*

In a major effort at theory-building, Wright uses Maslow's ideas to build a synthesis between the conflict perspective of people like Marx and Dahrendorf, and the equilibrium perspective of people like Parsons and Smelser. He points to the necessity for social transformation involved in taking Maslow's ideas seriously:

*In sum, we have presented support for the view that people located at stage 6 and the self-actualization need-level tend to actively respond to situations of perceived injustice. Thus, people at earlier need-levels will struggle to become self-actualizing and, once there, will tend to act on their universal moral principles. As a result, change is ubiquitous and continuous, no matter where people are located on the need-hierarchy. (Wright 1972)*

Wright therefore argues that it is worth contending for a society where this happens more readily - a society where the positive nature of human needs is better recognised:

*Therefore we affirm the process whereby most humans strive and struggle for maximum gratification of their needs and thus change conditions towards this end. And we affirm the process whereby self-actualizing people actively respond to perceived injustice, thus providing for permanent protest and attempts to effect change. (Wright 1972)*

A third writer who has spoken of these things is Walt Anderson. He again speaks of the higher levels of human development, and of what happens when the social scientist reaches those levels:

*Scientists will no longer think of themselves as detached from nature, as disembodied intellects in the sense Hannah Arendt (1958) meant when she described the rise of modern science as the discovery of the Archimedean point, the place to stand **outside** the world. Rather, they will understand and feel that they are a **part** - the conscious, deciding and **responsible** part - of the very evolutionary process they study. (Anderson 1973)*

So he, too, comes out in favour of a society where more people are encouraged and allowed to reach the higher levels of development - Maslow's self-actualisation, Loevinger's Integrated stage, Kohlberg's level of conscience and principle - and he sees this as definitely possible.

*I believe that the drive toward self-actualization is, as Maslow insisted, species-wide and not peculiar to any race, culture or sex. The predominance of white males among the historical figures considered to be examples of self-actualized people is not so much a flaw in Maslow's research as evidence of the inadequacy of a society which offers such a narrow spectrum of its members the opportunity to reach their fullest development as human beings. I would argue, therefore, that ~~the~~ ~~middle-class~~ bias is*

*relatively superficial, and that humanistic psychology is in fact a comprehensive set of ideas relevant to the needs of **all** people. (1973)*

It is this sense of important possibilities being ignored which runs through all the arguments we have been looking at here. Society as organised at present has little notion of human development in the Maslow sense, and holds people back to the levels at which they can play fixed and predictable roles most efficiently.

*When we look at politics this way we naturally turn our attention to the things which obstruct human development. And I believe that the most important single limiting factor is the idea that any society has about what the possibilities of human development actually are. A stunted or narrow conception of the human potential, especially when deeply built into cultural norms and reinforced by a society's art and science and philosophy, is as narrow a form of tyranny as any political institution. (Anderson 1973)*

All this, of course, makes us ask the question - "What do we do about it?" This is the question I have tried to answer in the last chapter of my (1978) book, where I go into the question of social power, and how it can be used in productive or self-defeating ways. The whole question of sexual politics comes in very much here, because it is the feminist analysis of patriarchy which comes closest to making the points urged here. I would not presume to comment on what feminism means

to women, but I am very interested in what it means to men, and have been involved in the anti-sexist men's movement for a number of years, helping to produce the magazine *Achilles Heel*. At present I am writing a book on men's consciousness which is highly political in this sense. It also brings in the whole question of spirituality, which was largely ignored by many of the earlier writers, but is now having to be considered in the centre stage, after extraordinary books like Spretnak (1982) have come into our minds.

The combination of humanistic psychology with spirituality seems to be more powerful than either separately, and one of the most interesting expressions of this in recent years has been the work of Joanna Macy (1984) dealing with the nuclear threat and other expressions of our present troubles.

This more or less brings us up to date. Perhaps not only Chris Scott, but other people too, have not considered these writers. It seems to me that they are worth considering and placing on our mental maps. The import of all that they say seems to be that work has to be done on a number of different levels, and that no one campaign, no one change, is going to be sufficient in and of itself. As Ferguson (1981) also suggests, at this particular moment in history the best and most effective efforts may still be at the level of the individual person:

*The really important things we can do in relation to other people are to open doors for them, reveal new possibilities for their lives,*

*break down the barrier of roles and the group fears that often maintain them, encourage them to be who they really are: and in doing so, to make genuine social change easier and more likely. (Rowan 1978)*

Counsellors are in a very good Position to do this kind of work. They can help to empower others, who can then form networks, crossing organizational boundaries, reaching through conventional walls. Such networks fit with the new way of thinking better than fixed structures do. They are more adaptable, more innovative; they respond more quickly to events. As Ferguson (1981) says:

*The proliferating small groups and networks arising all over the world operate much like the coalitional networks in the human brain. Just as a few cells can set up a resonant effect in the brain, ordering the activity of the whole, these co-operating individuals can help create the coherence and order to crystallize a wider transformation. Movements, networks and publications are gathering people around the world in common cause, trafficking in transformative ideas, spreading messages of hope without the sanction of any government. Transformation has no country.*

Macy (1984) also draws our attention to the importance of networks in the kind of political thinking we have been looking at here. But she also warns of a kind of too-easy optimism expressed in the phrase "the hundredth monkey" - the view that once a critical mass of people are

thinking and acting in the new way, transformation happens of itself. The best critique of this idea which I have seen was published in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. Maureen O'Hara (1985) shows very clearly what a harmful notion this is. So again what I have to say to Scott and people like him is that they are behind the game - the people within the field of humanistic psychology itself are much more critical and

much more tough than he thinks. They don't swallow a load of guff any more than he does. The field is not a static one, fixed for all time. It is changing and developing all the time. One of the great intellectual achievements within humanistic psychology, the great leap forward of Alvin Mahrer (1978), only became available quite recently, and I don't suppose Scott has even heard of it. But that is another story.

---

### References

- Anderson, Walt (1973) *Politics and the new humanism* Pacific Palisades: Goodyear.
- Arendt, Hannah (1958) *The human condition* Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Bay, Christian (1965) 'Politics and pseudopolitics: A critical evaluation of some behavioral literature' *American Political Science Review* 59:39-57.
- Bay, Christian (1967) 'Needs, wants and political legitimacy' *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1: 241-260.
- Bay, Christian (1968) *The structure of freedom* New York: Doubleday.
- Bay, Christian (1971) 'Freedom' as a tool of oppression' in Benello & Roussopoulos (eds) *The case for participatory democracy* New York: Viking.
- Ferguson, Marilyn (1981) *The Aquarian conspiracy* London: RKP.
- Hampden-Turner, Charles (1971) *Radical man* London: Duckworth.
- Loevinger, Jane (1976) *Ego development* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Macy, Joanna (1984) *Despair and empowerment in the nuclear age* Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.
- Mahrer, Alvin (1978) *Experiencing: A humanistic theory of psychology and psychiatry* New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Maslow, A.H. (1970) *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed) New York: Harper & Row.
- O'Hara, Maureen (1985) 'Of myths and monkeys: A critical look at a theory of critical mass' *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 25: 61-78.
- Rowan, John (1976) *Ordinary ecstasy: Humanistic psychology in action* London: RKP.
- Rowan, John (1978) *The structured crowd* London: Davis-Poynter.
- Rowan, John (1984) *On the personal/political* Connect Paper No.1, Poole, Dorset.
- Spretnak, Charlene (1982) *The politics of women's spirituality* Garden City: Anchor Books.
- Wallis, Roy (1985) 'Betwixt therapy and salvation: The changing form of the human potential movement' in R.K. Jones (ed) *Sickness and sectarianism: Exploratory studies in medical and religious sectarianism* Aldershot: Gower.
- Wright, David (1972) 'Images of human nature underlying sociological theory: A review and synthesis' American Sociological Association Conference.
- Wright, David (1974) 'On the bases of social order: Indocinated control versus voluntary cooperation' American Sociological Association Conference.
-