
NEW RIGHT - NEW RESISTANCE

by

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Humanistic values are today under attack in a way we have not seen before in this country, at least not since the end of World War Two. The present Government is leading the way in an orchestrated attempt to undermine and destroy autonomy, individual dignity, and the evolution of a caring society. The Baker Education Bill seeks to turn schools even more into institutions aimed at crushing creativity, imaginative inquiry, and the development of human potential on both an individual and collective basis. The proposal to test children throughout their school careers will inevitably produce schools in which fear and anxiety become the dominant emotional experiences of most pupils, and a sense of failure the most enduring memory.

The new Social Security arrangements will separate even further the haves from the have-nots. Resentment, despair, anger and rejection will become even more a way of life for millions. The cynical manipulation of the personal taxation system to benefit the new generation of Tory Yuppies demonstrates how far the New Right is prepared to go. It is dedicated to defending its economic interests against the

needs of the less fortunate in this society, one of the richest in the world. If anyone had any doubts, last budget day saw the final nail in the coffin of 'one-nation Toryism'. The Tory version of paternalism died with hardly a murmur.

It seems the traditional opposition parties are unable, at least at present, to make much impression, nor to provide any alternative which has mass appeal. Those who have some concern with the futility of the destruction of the earth for monetary gain are turning to various Eco-politics available to them, but others are dispirited and disillusioned.

But, fear not. This is not a party political diatribe. I want to trace some of the ways in which the 'psychological establishment' has not only succumbed to the New Right, but has actually contributed to its present supremacy. And I want to see if Humanistic Psychology has anything to offer in the way of providing a radical, even revolutionary alternative 'way of being'.

It is not an uncommon contention that traditional "second force" psychology as represented typically

by Freud (and others of course) provides a rationale for the necessity for authoritarian government. The psychological models of the person advocated by the Freudians, and to some extent the 'depth psychologies' suggest, that human beings are best viewed as in need of social control - otherwise the dark forces of the unconscious mind will be unleashed with chaotic results. William Golding's book, 'Lord of the Flies' can be seen as a kind of parable in which highly socialised young boys revert to savage-like behaviour once their social controls are removed. Another way of looking at it however, is to conclude that their increasingly destructive, confused behaviour was a RESULT of their social conditioning, one which never allowed or encouraged them to access their own humanity or to develop an inner recognition of themselves as persons independent to some extent of their environment. Alice Miller might argue that their behaviour was the inevitable outcome of the poison they had absorbed from their parents' and others' behaviour towards them. Take away the controlling, repressive influences of their society and all the pain they had experienced became played out - projected - on each other.

Freudian and behavioural psychology, or some versions of them, have pervaded all our social institutions and social organisations. 'Freudianism' provides a rationale to explain and JUSTIFY certain actions. Further, the adherence to Freudian psychology CAUSES certain actions. It causes, or underpins, much of our behaviour

towards our children, the ways we relate to them and 'rear' them. A confused, vague awareness of the importance of defecation and 'potty training' is one example among many. It obviously informs the attitudes and behaviours of psychoanalytically oriented therapists who, however they wrap it up, assume control of their 'patients'. The behaviourists avoid any confrontation whatsoever with the 'unconscious mind', excluding any subjective data and the possibility of gaining some understanding of intention, meaning and value as aspects of human experience.

Freudian psychology provides a rationale for the labelling, and thus depersonalising, of individual people. It pigeon-holes them into categories of 'mental illness'. At its best it is a patronising attempt to explain psychological dysfunction and to provide a treatment for it. At its worst it is an exercise in overpowering the individual disguised by a veneer of pseudo-scientific posturing.

An example of how psychoanalytic theory mystifies human interaction can be found in one of the central tenets of Freudian psychology - "Transference". This is now such an embedded piece of conventional wisdom that to question it at all is at best seen as ignorant, and at worst heretical. Transference happens when a patient in analysis behaves towards the analyst as if the analyst were some significant person from the patient's past - usually a mother or father. Emotions like love, hate, fear, warmth, when expressed by the

patient towards the analyst are regarded as transferences, throw-backs to some past, unresolved or repressed feelings. The analyst is therefore absolved of any responsibility for having actually elicited these emotions in the present as a direct result of his behaviour. These 'transferred' feelings become the primary source data on which the analysis proceeds.

But transference is even more pervasive than this. Transference is said to occur to some degree in all human relationships. Thus there can be no real, here and now present, authentic feeling. It is all contaminated by the past. There can be no certainty that the love I feel for a person is 'real' or merely an expression of some deeply buried emotion I once repressed towards my mother, or my father, or my grandmother, or someone. If I am an analyst, my feelings towards my patients, whether they be of love, or sexual, or coldness or whatever, are not real feelings either. They are counter-transference. Hey presto! A 'scientific' explanation exists to absolve me of all responsibility for my present feelings for my fellow persons. This is not to say that Transference, or something like it, does not exist at all, though this is the position taken by some.

In J. Shlein's paper 'A Counter-theory of Transference' (Person Centred Review Vol. 2 No. 1), Shlein makes the following statement:

"Transference is a fiction, invented and maintained by therapists to protect themselves

from the consequences of their own behaviour."

And later, in the same paper,

"The therapist is responsible for two fundamental behaviours - understanding and misunderstanding - which account for love, or for hate, and their associated affects. These, as well as other behaviours and the situation and personality of the therapist may account - should first be held accountable - for the whole of what passes as transference".

Of course, not everyone would go as far as Shlein does in his total repudiation of the concept of transference. But he points us in a novel direction. Transference is part of the 'scientific' mystique that has grown up around analysis. It is hypothesis turned fact, and as such it has become almost indisputable. In Encyclopaedia Britannica (18, 1944 Psychoanalysis: Freudian School) Freud, having hypothesised the existence of transference, then uses his theory as proof of everything else:

"Transference is proof of the fact that adults have not overcome their former childish dependence..."

Transference is a dangerous and poisonous concept when it is used as a scientific justification for absolving therapists from responsibility for the consequences of their own behaviour towards their clients. I am with Shlein when he holds that therapist behaviour should be the first port of call in

the search for understanding clients' emotional responses to their therapists. We can accept that sometimes we behave towards people in the present as a result of our experiences of others in the past, and if left at that, transference is a useful concept, but the concept is used much more powerfully than that. As I said earlier, transference is said to pervade all present day relationships, and S. Maddi (Person Centred Review Vol. 2 No. 2) points to the negativity of this claim:

"If you cannot trust your reactions to things in the present, then you have no decision making grounds to stand on. You also have no basis for taking the present seriously. This major thrust of psychoanalytic theory is towards skepticism, self-preoccupation, inertia, nihilism and finally, meaninglessness."

This is not, though it may seem like it, a digression from the starting point of this article. Wherever we turn we are faced with power. The power is always used to inhibit us, to justify the need for authoritarian control, or for 'expert' treatment. This is so overpowering that we, most of us, believe it, accept it as inevitable and necessary. It is everywhere. It finds expression in racism, sexism, religious intolerance, dogmatism and totalitarianism. And this sort of power, as we well know, 'tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely'.

We are moving closer and closer to an ethically corrupt and morally

indefensible social organisation. Many would argue that this process has been under way for hundreds of years, that it is an inevitable outcome, even necessity, of economic power relationships inherent within capitalism. Psychoanalysis grew out of middle class, male-dominated capitalist Vienna, and it provides not a critical analysis of human relations, but a justification for the strengthening of capitalist constructs. It has been estimated that Freud had probably only forty or so patients during his lifetime, almost all of them bourgeois Viennese, and yet from these experiences grew the dominant form of psychology as we know it today. The psychological establishment, (in which I would include all schools of behaviourism along with Freudians and neo-Freudians), is actively collaborating in the construction of the New Right society; not necessarily as individuals, but as a result of their consistent failure to see the social antecedents of their theories, and the ways in which they have been absorbed into the New Right philosophy of selfish individualism.

And what about Psychiatry today? In the main, as Szasz has said many times, it consists of locking people up who prove to be a nuisance to their neighbours, or who (worse still) interfere with the means of production through their behaviour. (Although I agree with Thomas Szasz when he reminds us that this is often the best we can do when confronted with people who are a danger to themselves or others). Latterly it consists of collaborating with a cost and

corner cutting government in the move to return the 'mentally ill' (the casualties of an insane system) to the 'community' with little or no hope of any substantial community based support. Presumably this implies, at least, a recognition of the failure of institutional psychiatry to make any impact on the treatment of the 'mentally ill'. Depression, anxiety, obsessional behaviour, alienation etc. are treated by psychiatry AS IF THEIR CAUSES WERE PSYCHOLOGICAL, rather than the real result of struggling to live in an alienating and depressing social environment. Thus psychiatry, instead of pointing the finger at the power groups who dominate and manipulate other peoples' lives, absolve them from responsibility by individualising 'mental illness' - making the victim the architect of his own suffering.

Psychiatry is guilty of providing a treatment for the alienation and anxiety to which it contributes by playing a classic con-trick. The patient experiences life as alienating BECAUSE IT IS, but is led to believe that his/her experiences are the result of something wrong with his/her psychological functioning. The treatment is analysis, and if the patient gets angry with the trickster, this is transference. If you can't afford analysis, then the alternative is Valium or some other drug that alters your way way of perceiving and experiencing. Thus you are either persuaded that your anxiety is your fault, (because you repressed your sexual feelings for your mother), or your ability directly to experience your own alienation is

chemically manipulated.

Humanistic Psychology has the potential capacity to provide a critique of 'traditional psychology', and to construct a fresh set of values and theories which aim towards the celebration of the person as a creative being who needs liberation, not oppression. And, of course, this process is well under way. Maslow, Rogers, Alvin Mahrer etc. from a humanistic/existential perspective, and Jung and latterly Alice Miller (along with many others) are providing a revolutionary, alternative psychology, one which exists at present more as a collection of complementary perspectives than a coherent 'school'.

Hope for the future does not lie within academia, or in the hands of those who currently have the power. Instead it resides within those people whose search for a more meaningful existence has led them to become suspicious and even rejecting of the old power relations that have grown up around traditional psychology. And these people are not, in the main, populating academic, research based institutions, or the offices of the psychiatric establishment. They are a growing number in the helping or caring professions, in community and social work, and they can be found among those young people who have not been seduced into the Thatcherite dream. They can be found among those who work among drug abusers, those setting up helplines and counselling centres for survivors of child abuse, and among the gay and lesbian com-

excesses of some of the early personalities have long been left behind. Similarly, Humanistic Psychology needs to demonstrate, perhaps repeatedly, that it is as interested in the pursuit of 'the truth' as much as in any traditional, empirical science, but believes that truth can better be served by researching in ways that maintain human dignity rather than in ways which objectify and manipulate people.

Humanistic Psychology must also demonstrate that it is as concerned with the way people act and think as it is concerned with the way they feel. Therapy isn't politics, but there are political implications present when we talk about the process of EMPOWERING people, and therapy is only a part of Humanistic Psychology. Growth groups are as much about relationships between people as they are about personal issues, and this is political too. Humanistic Psychology is already involved in unravelling the destructiveness of

sexism, and should get more involved in combatting racism, perhaps as a start by looking at its own institutional racism and by examining more closely the racist content of its developing language,

There is more scope for Humanistic Psychology to get involved on an institutional or organisational level. Recent moves to establish interest groups among Social Workers is an example of how this might be done, and there is room for more contributions to be made in the field of Education, inspired perhaps by Rogers book 'Freedom to Learn for the Eighties' and the largely undervalued work of the 'alternative educationalists'.

Whatever choices we make about how to be or how to act, there are always political implications. Doing nothing has political implications. We talk a lot about empowering people. I hope we have empowered enough to form part of the new resistance.

Photocall at the Hanwell Day centre

No doubt they would call you casualties
in receipt of indefinite welfare: not deviants
so much as victims: unfortunates
they had better not consider too closely.
For if we really look at you smiling
through the confusion of your wavering lives
in between the camera's eye and our own
we might recognise our image
and weep to feel ourselves
so vulnerable and distant.

John Hands
