



Letters to The Editor

Dear David

I don't often reply to book reviews, but your review of *Ordinary Ecstasy* (2nd Edition) was so misleading that I feel I must say something.

You say - "Humanistic psychology does not have a way of linking the world of the individual with the world of the large group. It is strong on individual identity without any notion of social identity. It is not surprising that John Rowan ignores this issue... To integrate humanistic psychology into society we need a good theory of how society works and how the transition to a person centred society can be developed and maintained ... It would be good to read his views on how humanistic psychology, which is very well described in this book, is developing as a part of our larger society."

This makes me think that you must have stopped reading at about page 140. After that there is:

* A chapter on sex roles, which makes some very strong points about the relationship of the personal to the political.

* A chapter on community development, which is all about the application of humanistic psychology to society at large.

* A chapter on the history of how humanistic psychology has spread and developed over the years, which shows how it has grown in its commitment to social action and social involvement.

* A major chapter, the longest in the book, on social aspects of humanistic psychology, which deals with all the things you say the book ignores.

Let me say a bit more about this latter chapter, because it is not only quite long, it is also significantly different from the corresponding chapter in the original edition. In it I say that there have been two phases in the way humanistic writers have spoken about society. In the first phase humanistic writers (Bay, Wright, Anderson, Hampden-Turner, Brewster Smith, Stein) talked mainly about humanity as a whole; while in the second phase there has been more awareness of the depth of the patriarchal split which has divided women from men. In discussing this second phase, I bring in the work of people like Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Raya Dunayevskaya, Donna Warnock, Hazel Henderson, Charlene Spretnak and Peggy Kornegger and try to make out a case for a valid way of looking at the very points which you say I am ignoring. At the end of the chapter there is even a discussion of the important question you raise of the transition from the present society to a better one.

So I really think you have misled the reader on this one, and I would like to set the record straight so that potential readers will not be put off by your words.

Yours sincerely

John Rowan

Dear John

What you say in your letter bears out what I was trying to say in my review. When humanistic psychologists write about society they tend to be naive about sociology.

In chapter 14 you refer to: The subjugation of females, destruction of the Earth's viability, competitive exploitation of people by elites, distortion of healing and personal development by the medical and educational systems etc. And on page 225 you list the shortcomings of the political parties which are active at the moment. However, the remedies offered by humanistic psychologists often seem a bit thin. e.g.:

◀Bay's belief that political systems can be replaced by value systems.

◀Wright's statement to the effect that it would improve things if people controlled society instead of the other way round.

◀Or, to quote you when you discuss Anderson, (page 224) "... each citizen can and should have genuine participation, which means having a direct say in the political decisions which affect her ..."

What are these statements supposed to mean in terms of social structures and the development of necessary rules for organisations that shape policy and implement it?

The chapter on society that you draw attention to suggests that overcoming patriarchy would improve society. The argument is partly a tautology because you define those things we do not like as being patriarchal. And again there is the problem of how rules and policy would be decided and implemented in a non-patriarcal structure.

The sort of practical discussion about humanistic psychology that I would value would include:

▶what structures should contain the medical and psychotherapy services - of which we form a part? How do we not perpetuate the very things we deplore in 'society' when we contribute to, say, the Rugby Conference or set up practices offering training and therapy as small businesses very much on Thatcherite lines (which we both deplore)?

▶why does humanistic psychology appeal mainly to the 'minor professions'? Are we not serving an interest group?

Closely linked to this is the general question:

▶how and when should resources be owned by individuals and what social structures should be developed to make them accountable to communities?

Readers of *Ordinary Ecstasy* will get a very good feel for the history, development, philosophy and practice of humanistic psychology. But we still need a good theory of how society works and especially how a person centred society would work.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Dear Madam/Sir,

I should like to take this opportunity to offer my appreciation for the brilliant article by Courtney Young in 'New Age Spirituality' which appeared in Vol XVI No 5. I felt it a great comfort to know that other people have very similar views to myself concerning spirituality.

Yours faithfully

Susie Webber West Yorkshire