
BLEAKLEY'S EMBRACE

by

John Rowan

*This is not a review of Alan Bleakley's book **Earth's Embrace** (Gateway Books 1989) but rather an attempt to examine some of the issues which he raises in his Chapter 5, which is entitled 'Humanistic Psychology: a Religion Without Gods'. Although this is only one out of six chapters, it is the only one which speaks to the subtitle on the title page of this book **Archetypal Psychology's Challenge to the Growth Movement**.*

Now anyone who speaks or writes about the growth movement, or about humanistic psychology, must know what these things are. But the gentle reader may not always be so clear, and it may therefore be as well to do a little map-making before we start. The basic map which I use comes from Ken Wilber's (1980) book *The Atman Project*. He outlines there seventeen different states of consciousness which a person may pass through in the course of their development. Some of these states we are familiar with, and these are the earlier, psychological, states; while some we are less familiar with, and these are the

later, spiritual, states. But Wilber's especial virtue is to put these two on the same continuum, and to show how we are talking here about one single process of psychospiritual development.

To simplify this whole enormous story, let us just take three of the states he talks about, which form a small continuous segment of the whole curve which he is describing. In doing this we shall also be following Banet (1976) who came up with the same idea some years before Wilber. If we put them together, we come up with Figure 1 - on the next page.

FIGURE 1

A comparison of methods of personal change

	<i>Psychotherapy</i>	<i>Personal Growth</i>	<i>Transformation</i>
<i>(Wilber level)</i>	<i>(Mental Ego)</i>	<i>(Centaur)</i>	<i>(Transpersonal)</i>
<i>(Rowan level)</i>	<i>(Ego/persona)</i>	<i>(Real Self)</i>	<i>(Higher/deeper self)</i>
<i>Self</i>	<i>I am defined by others</i>	<i>I define who I am</i>	<i>I am defined by the Other</i>
<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Need</i>	<i>Choice</i>	<i>Surrender</i>
<i>Personal goal</i>	<i>Adjustment</i>	<i>Self-actualization</i>	<i>Union</i>
<i>Social goal</i>	<i>Socialization</i>	<i>Liberation</i>	<i>Salvation</i>
<i>Process</i>	<i>Healing - ego-building</i>	<i>Development - ego-enhancement</i>	<i>Enlightenment - Ego-reduction</i>
<i>Traditional role of helper</i>	<i>Physician (analyst)</i>	<i>Teacher (Facilitator)</i>	<i>Priest(ess) (Guide)</i>
<i>Representative method</i>	<i>Hospitalization Chemotherapy Psychoanalysis Directive therapies Transactional Analysis (Cognitive therapy) (Rational-emotive therapy)</i>	<i>T-Group Gestalt therapy Encounter Sensory awareness (Body therapies) (Psychodrama) (Co-counselling (Regression) (Existential)</i>	<i>Zen Yoga Arica Altered states Mysticism Monasticism (Psychosynthesis) (Jungian therapy) (Hillman)</i>
<i>Focus</i>	<i>Individual (group)</i>	<i>Group (Individual)</i>	<i>Supportive Community</i>

Source: A G Benet (1978) with added items in brackets from Rowan.

It can be seen from this table that we can refer to the Mental Ego (this is where a great deal of counselling and therapy remains, simply concerned with adjustment to the status quo), the Centaur (this is the area with which humanistic counselling and psychotherapy is mainly concerned and particularly expert) and the transpersonal (this is where we are concerned with the soul and the collective

unconscious and with the more spiritual material generally). I would emphasise that these are just three out of seventeen levels, and that there are several stages to go beyond the transpersonal.

What I now want to say is that Alan Bleakley is speaking from a standpoint which is within the Transpersonal level as we have defined it. I have said more about it in

Chapter 6 of **The Reality Game**)

It is one particular version of this (because there are many varieties, here as at every other level) which depends a great deal on the theorising of James Hillman, and also leans on the occultist Gerald Massey and of course on Jung, who was Hillman's original mentor.

And what Bleakley does, pretty consistently, is to criticise humanistic psychology (at the Centaur level) for not being archetypal psychology (at the Transpersonal level).

Archetypal Psychology

Let us have a look, then, at archetypal psychology. The first thing we notice about it is that it is nothing much to do with psychology as generally understood. We don't find archetypal psychologists belonging to psychological associations, or going to psychocal don't find archetypal psychologists belonging to psychological associations, or going to psychological congresses, or contributing to psychological journals, or in fact having much to do with anyone except other Jungians.

In a way, archetypal psychology is nothing more than a play on words. Hillman says (1983) that 'psyche' means 'soul' and 'logos' means 'reason or speech or intelligible account', and therefore psychology means: reason or speech or intelligible account of soul. This enables him then to embark on a wide-ranging and very fascinating voyage of discovery around images and archetypes and gods and

goddesses which impinge on or relate to human beings at various points, But he never tries to treat the soul in a scientific way; he quite explicitly says - 'The soul is a deliberately ambiguous concept resisting all definition in the same manner as do all ultimate symbols which produce the root metaphors for the systems of human thought.'

This is deeply illuminating at its best, but it is not psychology in any normal sense of the word, and to try to steal a perfectly good word in the dictionary and in common usage and to use it for such violently different purposes is not in my opinion a good idea.

Be that as it may: what Bleakley does is to use this standpoint to attack humanistic psychology in a very unfair way: what he persistently does is to lump it together with the Mental Ego level. Now of course, if you are standing on Transpersonal territory and have firmly staked out your claim there, it may well be that the Mental Ego and the Centaur look much the same from that position. But they are really very different in a number of very real ways, as the table in Figure 1 makes clear.

Bleakley's Embrace

Let us then take a few of Bleakley's statements to see this process in action.

1. 'However, the move to 'realise human potential' compulsively focuses upon the 'I', the ego, the personalistic, at the expense of the world, the collective,' (But from Figure 1 we can see that realising human

potential is about actualising the self, not about boosting the ego, and this is a crucial difference.)

2. 'Of course the ego must have its place, but I am questioning its authoritarian dominance. If we offer the crown, ego will never deny itself kingship - it is by nature self-obsessed, self-referential.' (This is something which every humanistic practitioner would go along with, and it is not a criticism of humanistic psychology.)

3. 'Humanistic psychology' is a misnomer, for this approach is not a logos of psyche, of soul, but of person and personality, of ego.' (What a cheeky statement this is! And quite inaccurate, too, as we can see again from Figure 1.)

4. 'Humanistic psychology is herculean through its primary concerns - personality, self-image and self-esteem.' (Those of us who spend a good deal of our time weaning people away from their self-images can only wince at this misunderstanding.)

5. 'Humanism's therapies become workouts for the ego, jogging for the personality . . . and so one could go on.

There is a persistent desire here to merge together the Mental Ego and the Centaur level, and to see no difference between them, rather in the manner of the white man who thought all Chinese looked alike. In the latter case we detect the stain of prejudice, and in Bleakley's account the same stain seems to appear.

This can be seen most clearly in his mis-readings of specific therapies. He claims to have been to workshops in all the new therapies, and to be familiar with them from personal experience. How then can he say things like this:

'For example, bioenergetics sees depression as symptomatic of a depressed energy system, and tries to immediately raise body energy, in the same way that a naive counsellor would try to raise the 'spirits' of the depressive, rather than attending to the voice of soul.' (This is quite untrue, as anyone would know who had seen a bioenergetic analyst in action, or even read Lowen's book **Depression and the Body**.)

(in Gestalt therapy) we are asked to see every part of the dream as an expression of personality. Every bit of the dream is in us, rather than us being in the dream. When we then act out each part of the dream as a component of personality, we are bringing dayworld ego to bear on the previously raw and untainted image. In this process we both manipulate and distort the image for our own personal ends (an imperialism of the image) and assume that it is our personal or private property (a capitalism of the image), as opposed to respecting its source and place in soul'. (This is far from the truth, as anyone will know who has seen a good Gestalt therapist in action or read any Perls. I particularly think of some of my own experiences where the dream image turned into something trans-

personal, and in the literature there are examples of this, such as in pages 154 - 157 of Ernst & Goodison (1981) and in pages 188 - 194 of Perls (1976). Gestalt pays great respect to dream images, and lets them speak for themselves, just as recommended by another Jungian, Robert Johnson (1986): it does not manipulate or distort them.)

But this ignorance of what goes on in humanistic psychology is even worse. Bleakley makes many of his more damning points by quoting things which are not part of humanistic psychology at all:

a. 'Rebirthing (or "Conscious Connected Breathing') is currently catching my attention because I have recently counseled people who are casualties of the technique.' (Rebirthing is not part of humanistic psychology, as can be seen from the very full discussion in Albery (1985).

b. 'And an explicit secular and self-indulgent arrogance (now called 'assertiveness') has grown with the 'me' generation,' (Assertiveness training is carried out by a few humanistic practitioners, but it is mostly done by non-humanistic people, and does not come out of the humanistic tradition at all: it is very much at the level of the Mental Ego.)

c. 'That which gleams the most is instantly attractive - hence the magpie syndrome of humanistic psychology, its turn around of fashion, both therapists and clients keen for the next tech-

nique. Last month, neuro-linguistic programming: this month, rebirthing.' (Neuro-linguistic programming, usually better known as NLP, is not part of humanistic psychology, and in one or two of its books explicitly sets itself apart from humanistic psychology. It is mostly concerned with adjustment.)

I think what upsets me most about this chapter is the cheapness of some of the gibes. He says that humanistic psychology comes from a variety of sources (this is perfectly true) and adds that the founders are 'all men, where Jung inspired a solid core of women analytical psychologists'. I don't know whether he has heard of Virginia Axline, Charlotte Buhler, Helen Davis, Anne Dickson, Jacqueline Larcombe Doyle, Joan Evans, Rose Evison, Marty Fromm, Jenner Hoidale, *Karen Horney, Jean Houston, Marcia Karp, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Norma Lyman, Dawna Markova, *Alice Miller, Zerka Moreno, Laura Perls, Magda Proskauer, Janette Rainwater, Natalie Rogers, Dorothy Rowe, Ilana Rubinfeld, Virginia Satir, Charlotte Selver, Barry Stevens, Emmy van Deurzen-Smith, Frances Vaughan or Diana Whitmore, but they seem pretty impressive to me. (The ones with stars are psychoanalysts who have been 'adopted' into the humanistic family.)

Another cheap gibe is where Bleakley says that 'Humanistic psychologists always talk of 'work' - the 'workshop', where 'growth-work' is done. There is a fantasy of the Protestant ethic here - nothing

happens unless we sweat at it.' And he goes on to an elaborate analogy with the god Hephaestus 'the blacksmith, the ugliest, most bodily deformed and sorest in personality of the gods.' Yet humanistic psychologists are acutely aware of the dangers of the words 'work' and 'workshop': I wish I had a shilling for every discussion I have been in where people have said that this was all wrong and that some other word should be used. But so far no one has come up with one.

Perhaps the one which annoys me most is where Bleakley talks about body work and says that there is an oppressive moralism here which says 'that the non-verbal is somehow more truthful and authentic than the verbal: 'the body never lies'. The trickster Hermes with his twisted truths would have something to say on the hypocritical moralism of such 'authenticity' My question here is - what about real authenticity? This is one of the prime values of humanistic psychology, as can be seen from Figure 1 again, yet the only time Bleakley mentions it is here. There seems to be no place for authenticity in Bleakley or Hillman, and this seems to me a serious loss.

Out of the Embrace

It is disappointing to find a whole chapter devoted to humanistic psychology which actually says so little about it. Can we find anything to take seriously?

I think Bleakley's point that we have no great father-figure is interesting. He seems to see it as

a disadvantage, whereas I would see it as a strength. He says that without a father-focus, humanistic psychology has hung on to a mother, and a child. Perhaps in this present age that is a strength and an advantage, rather than anything else. Perhaps the world would be a safer place if this idea spread.

Similarly, his criticism of humanistic psychology as taken with the fantasy of natural growth actually clarified for me the importance of growth as a concept. When he said - 'The turd is not accepted in its own right, but is considered as manure, as symbolic of growth. The rotting flesh in the dream is a precursor to the purity and strength of the white skeleton below. Every event, no matter how grotesque, is seen in the light of potential "growth".' I just wanted to say, Yes, Yes, Yes!

It seems to me that such an approach has its place. The implication of Figure 1 - if we can now come back to that - is that work at the Mental Ego level is appropriate if that person cannot yet manage their roles and their world: work at the Centaur level is appropriate if the person is at the state of questioning all the roles and needing to integrate the split-off parts of the personality and actualise the self; and work at the Transpersonal level is appropriate if the person has found themselves and now wants to question the taken-for-granted boundaries which still exist around them.

But I think Bleakley and his mentor Hillman have to recognise that at

the Transpersonal level the idea of psychotherapy becomes deeply ambiguous. A lot of what goes on at this level is guidance or initiation, rather than therapy in any ordinary sense of the word. Bleakley says that the word 'therapy' in Greek originally meant 'attendance on the gods', and this is obviously not the meaning of the word today, where it simply means 'healing'. There is a real sense in which Hillman and Bleakley have ceased to be therapists, and started to turn into shamans or medicine-men. At one point

Bleakley says: . . . it is perhaps to the poet, rather than the priest or psychiatrist, that we should look for a surer guide to the underworld descent . . . ' and funnily enough, Bleakley is also a poet.

To criticise real therapists from this standpoint, as if this is what they should be doing instead of healing people and facilitating their healthy growth, seems to me an unhelpful move and not well considered.

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