

standing speaker, the woman who received a standing ovation and moved many of us to tears, was Caryn Stardancer, herself a survivor. Caryn is founder and executive director of Survivorship, based in the USA. She is part of a multi-self system and spoke to us on 'Ritual abuse, the exploitation of myth' in a clear and concise way, conceptualising the history and social context of ritual abuse.

I was also fortunate enough to attend Caryn's two-hour workshop 'Becoming conscious: self-deprogramming for survi-

vors', in which she successfully demystified mind control and its uses, clearly outlining in practical terms how it can be counteracted.

I came away enriched by my experience of the conference — new ideas, information for use in therapeutic relationships, more threads to the support network. I also believe that through our work with healing the consequences of ritual abuse we are working towards stopping such atrocities. I was honoured to be part of the first such conference in this country.

On the Controversy about Plural Selves

John Rowan

On the one hand it is obvious that people have subpersonalities. Both in literature and in everyday life we are all familiar with the internal conflicts which plague us, and which often emerge in the form 'part of me wants this, part of me wants that'. We all know about Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, and some of us have even read the more sophisticated *Steppenwolf* of Hermann Hesse.

On the other hand common sense, the law, and a great body of theory tells us that the self is a unity. If we are to be responsible for our actions there has to be one person

in charge, one person who can be rewarded for success or punished for crimes and misdemeanours. After all we only have one body, whatever illusions may be going on in our minds.

The argument gets polarised. Those who believe in plural selves generally believe in the existence of the unconscious, and of repression. They believe that people can have traumas early in their lives which are forgotten until later — perhaps when they get into therapy and have the opportunity and the encouragement to remember and deal with such unfinished

John Rowan is a psychotherapist and supervisor, the author of many books on humanistic psychology, and a regular contributor to Self & Society.

business.

Those who believe in the self as a unity generally have a scepticism towards repression, and think that if terrible things happen to people, they remember them. And that if such things are repeated over and over again, they are bound to remember them. There is no way they can be forgotten and put away and hidden, only to pop out again later: the idea is unbelievable.

It gets political. The pluralists tend to be pro-children. They love children, or they love the child within themselves. They believe children. They want to save children. They are very aware of children's pain. They want to help children. In cases where there is a conflict between parents and children, they tend to side with the children.

The unitarians tend to be pro-parent. They think parents deserve some credit and some honour. They are very aware of parental pain. They want to defend parents against horrible allegations made against them. In cases where there is a conflict between parents and children, they tend to side with the parents.

It gets emotional and antagonistic. Pluralists have been known to accuse unitarians of being self-servers and paedophiles, people who will do anything rather than admit that they might be guilty as charged. They draw attention to the way in which the others fudge the evidence, use emotive language and hide relevant facts.

Unitarians have been known to accuse the others of being sentimental child-

savers, people who will believe in anything — multiple personality, abduction by aliens, satanic ritual abuse. They draw attention to the way in which the others use emotive language, fudge the evidence and hide relevant facts.

At this point we may search for the truth, the definitive evidence. Surely there must be some way of establishing which story is true? Well no, it is surprisingly difficult. You read one paper which convinces you one way, then next day you read another which convinces you the other way. If you want copious material on pluralism you go to Marjorie Orr, of Accuracy About Abuse. If you want copious material on unitarianism you go to Roger Scotford, of the British False Memory Society. They are both serious people trying to do a good job. According to each of them, the other is totally wrong.

This is a sad situation, because real people are involved, deep feelings are aroused, and there is a lot of pain on all sides. This is not something, in my opinion, which can be solved by a few definitive scientific studies. It is about family dynamics, personal problems and ideological convictions. It is a heady brew involving people in torment and people trying to make a buck, or a reputation, or a power base.

It is not an American problem, even though it started there. It affects many people in an increasing number of countries. People in humanistic psychology may find themselves on either side of the divide, or desperately trying to straddle it. It seems to me that there is no clear advice to be given.

