

A Personal Perspective on the Origin of the AHPP Working Party on Core Beliefs

Christopher Coulson

I proposed setting up the AHPP Working Party on Core Beliefs because I thought it would provide an economical and enjoyable route to meeting the following objectives:

- To enhance democracy within AHPP
- To provide us as individuals and collectively as AHPP with a clear philosophical foundation (this would give us some ammunition in our discussions with the outside world and a set of criteria by which to measure our own performance)
- To find a way to manage the UKCP's drive to impose control and standardisation over all its member organisations
- For myself, to feel congruent as a member of an organisation that was itself congruent

Organisational democracy

A voluntary organisation is a curious beast. The people that want to get involved and make things happen are clearly doing this for some set of reasons of their own. However, they're supposed to act not just

on their own behalves but also on behalf of all the other members. Adherence to this ideal is difficult to ensure in the AHPP because there's no inevitable meeting of the whole membership. In fact, in the nearly six years I've been on the AHPP Board, attending conferences, AGMs etc., I've probably not met more than a quarter of the membership.

One possible effect of this is that the Board may pursue an agenda different from that desired by the rest of the membership simply through ignorance of what the membership really wants. A cynical Board could even deliberately abuse its position. More pragmatically, the lack of a clear, organisation-wide collective opinion can make strategic decision-making very difficult. However one looks at it, a lack of checks and balances within the organisation increases the risk of the Board operating at odds with the membership, even without malicious intent.

I felt that we might protect democracy within AHPP by setting up two groups. One would have the task of polling the membership and ascertaining what our

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common beliefs were. The other would have the job of ensuring that the Board's actions, together with the AHPP's published policies and procedures, reflected those common beliefs.

In the end the two groups were implemented as one: the Working Party on Core Beliefs. It's early days yet, but the signs are already there that our decision-making is being affected by the Working Party's input.

Empowering focus

I believe that humanistic approaches with their roots in rigorous and extended self-examination are the best forms of psychotherapy available to the public today. I am strong in my belief that the humanistic movement (and the AHPP, provided it can stay up with it) is bound to succeed. This is because it embraces truth, flexibility, growth, reassessment and above all the possibility of theoretical error.

Having said that, however, the humanistic approach lacks a readily identifiable unique selling proposition and consequently looks weaker than its more tightly defined—and defining—competitors. For example, psychoanalysis and 'soft' derivatives like psychodynamic counselling have two major marketing advantages. Firstly, they have what the regulators call 'first-mover advantage'. Quite simply, this means that as Freud started the whole industry he inevitably set the standards in a way that favoured his own 'marketing position', or theories. Secondly, psychoanalytically-based modalities don't threaten the status quo. Their goal is merely to make you less miserable; their model of relating is the familiar and reassuring one of parent/child; and their view of the

human is the reductive one found in every GP's surgery.

Against all this the humanistic position looks woolly and dangerous. We find ourselves caught up in arguments about why we're not something rather than why we are. We founder in a mass of discussion about what being humanistic really is. We argue about whether there are 12 or 12.5 steps to ultimate human development and about what that ultimate stage might be. We believe that the outcome of the therapy is to become one's true self, regardless of where that 'becoming' might lead.

For the consumer, it can seem very confusing and very threatening to face up to all these tricky questions and frightening ramifications. It's much easier and less dangerous to focus on analysing a bit of intrapsychic process according to rules set down by some long-dead theorist. We must recognise that this is easier for us 'humanistics', too, and that the individual organism's natural preference for ease can undermine any painful search for the truth. Consequently, as individuals and as a group, our commitment to the truth is constantly under threat.

This threat is exacerbated by the fact that the whole structure of the therapy industry is based on the parent/child model adopted by the psychoanalysts. The ethical underpinnings, complaints procedures, accreditation processes and supervision requirements are all rooted in the view that someone else is better qualified than you to judge what you do. The never-questioned implication, of course, is that there is some scientifically-based standard against which to base that judgement.

This view is strongly represented even

within the humanistic movement. The AHPP has adopted the standards of the first movers, partly because of enormous pressure to conform, but also partly from a sense that those standards are desirable. Such a sense has grown, I believe, because of a lack of assembled thought to the contrary. The humanistic position lacks weight even within the bastions of humanistic practice.

I don't believe there is a simple, sound-bite solution to this problem, because of the broad and interwoven nature of our beliefs. We do have one overwhelming strength, however: our commitment to put truth before expediency. I feel sure that if we can simply adhere to our own convictions then, little by little, we will change ourselves and the world. The truth will out.

The Core Beliefs Working Party is there to add weight when our motivation falters and to empower us to maintain our commitment to truth both in the field and in our organisation. It remains to be seen whether it is sufficient as and of itself.

An autonomous identity

Autonomy is a healthy goal for organisations as well as individuals, and, like autonomous individuals, autonomous organisations live in relationship with others. Probably the most influential external organisation of recent years has been the UKCP. This massive group of training organisations became particularly active a few years ago, both organising itself and putting pressure to change on those who had been its creators.

This activity produced a sudden rush of demands for new codes of ethics and practice, complaints procedures and

accreditation criteria, which in turn triggered a brief period of administrative and philosophical disarray in the AHPP. Suddenly we were being required to do things whether we liked them or not. In addition, the UKCP was itself still in some disarray, so demands were often confusing, countermanded or required within a period of time that did not permit full democratic discussion within the AHPP Board.

Many of us were disturbed by the growth in power of the UKCP. AHPP meetings of all kinds were full of complaints at the way 'they' imposed demands on 'us'. However, strategic discussions of these matters at Board level and at general meetings were hindered by the fact that we as an organisation did not have a coherent or articulated philosophy. Accordingly, we lacked the strong sense of organisational identity needed to make consistent and strong responses and thus to maintain an equal-strength relationship with the UKCP.

This lack of identity affected our administration, as well. It seemed to me then that within the AHPP Board we were often struggling with the difference between being humanistic and being competent. Time and again in Board meetings we ran up against the question 'Are we being humanistic?' or the accusation 'That isn't humanistic!'. This basically left us with two options: debate the question 'What is humanistic?', or succumb to our time constraints and take the line of least resistance. That usually meant accepting the status quo — which was all too frequently dictated by the UKCP.

This general disquiet coalesced for many members into the 'Rebel against the UKCP' movement, as if we could find an

identity for ourselves in opposition which we were unable to find creatively from within. The movement found its mission when the UKCP decided to pursue statutory registration for psychotherapists. Most (perhaps all: I don't remember) Board members were opposed to this. Some Board members questioned whether we should leave the UKCP. Others wanted to lead an open attack on its values from inside the UKCP.

The notion of attack seemed wrong to me; I share the good general's belief that the first rule of war is 'Don't go to war'. I also felt it would be absurd to attack the UKCP for doing what it was set up to do: control psychotherapist training and accreditation. Finally, though I am aware I was only guessing at this, I thought that leaving or attacking the UKCP would go against the wishes of the bulk of the membership. (Later, in order to protect AHPP members who are also members of other organisations, the AGM voted in Clause 5.10.2 of the Constitution.)

In an ideal relationship, I felt, we would feel safe enough to acknowledge the UKCP's strength and value, while resisting its tendency to autocracy. It seemed to me that the way forward for humanistic practitioners was to create a centre of energy and excellence that would have its own momentum regardless of what other organisations such as UKCP, UKRC and BCP said and did. I felt that we needed to separate our identity from the UKCP's so that we could see it as something we belonged to, not as something that controlled us. Then we could grow alongside it, not constrained by its 'umbrella'.

The way to do this seemed appropriately democratic: to have the membership

at large determine the philosophical basis to guide our actions. This would have the effect of integrating the membership and of introducing a new measure of congruence and groundedness into the organisation. The Working Party on Core Beliefs was introduced with this objective and seems to have succeeded. We are very active in the UKCP and have our representatives on the UKCP Governing Board and on the UKCP Training Standards Committee. However, we no longer feel ruled by the UKCP.

My individual motivation

As I act from, I believe, healthy self-interest, I have reasons of my own for wanting to see the Working Party thrive. Primarily, this has to do with my need for congruence, which I experience as an unconscious compulsion to practise what I preach. I see the Core Beliefs Working Party as a way of bringing congruence to the organisation and thus of enhancing my own state of congruence. There is a great sense of security in this for me. That sense of security has been enhanced by the way the membership has embraced the Working Party. Once the vote to proceed had been obtained the whole membership was invited to join it. Twenty people did so, probably the largest AHPP 'committee' ever to take direct action in everyday affairs. Today's *Statement of Core Beliefs* is the result.

I love what's been produced. It's supremely human: not perfect, but a powerful declaration of intent and attitude. It's a courageous statement that confronts much of the nonsense that is fomented in therapeutic circles. It is a very firm foundation on which to build and by which to

gauge our own actions. It is joyously lacking in intellectual cant and theoretical arrogance. It contains tenets that I can live by in every aspect of my life.

As far as can be judged right now, our objectives appear to have been achieved. The AHPP has a democratic way to assess members' desires and Board actions. Our ideological base is strengthened, which

provides us with greater power in the world and a clear demarcation from the UKCP. My personal quest for congruence is closer to being satisfied

Most satisfyingly, we as an organisation have responded powerfully during a period of great stress and have emerged with greater integrity as a result.

Humanistic and Me

Jennifer Madden

I have never been comfortable with 'humanistic' as a description of my personal or professional values, because of its association with humanism. Whilst I can identify with being philanthropic, humanitarian, benevolent, compassionate, and believe in mankind as self-regulating, responsible and progressive beings, my orientation is not confined to the intellect. As I understand it, humanism as a thought-system concerns itself with human rather than divine or supernatural

matters, and seeks solely rational ways of solving human problems. This is where I part company. However, there is a contradiction at the heart of humanism; the word 'human' literally translated means 'God-man'! That being so, I guess I can live with it, but only just.

*Yours humanistically, integratively,
holistically, mystically and eccentrically
(does it matter?),
Jennifer*

Humanistic Psychology and Values

from an early issue of S&S

The values which were developed by humanistic psychology and the human potential movement seem to be clear enough. Here is an attempt to set them out as a ten-point creed derived from

the literature on humanistic psychology and from the way that humanistic psychologists tend to work. Trying to make the list comprehensive, consistent and acceptable to everyone would probably be

a futile exercise. But by spelling it out we might be able to check out how well the values can be applied outside the movement which generated them. (Of course this creed is not intended as an oath which newcomers must swear and show they understand. It might, however, produce interesting effects when chanted in a group.)

The humanistic creed

'I believe in:

- the validation of choice of lifestyle, whether or not it is approved by established power groups in society
- recognition of wants, needs and desires
- a disciplined method for personal growth

- autonomy and co-operation in relationships
- authoritative guides as opposed to authoritarian experts
- the empowerment of clients and not the control of patients or cases
- validation of emotion and emotional competence
- experiential learning
- awareness of our own obsessive or patterned responses due to archaic or current distress
- the idea of body-mind-action as a single system
- the celebration of who we are, what we do and what we experience.'

Five Basic Postulates of Humanistic Psychology

from the US

Journal of Humanistic Psychology

1. Human beings, as human, supersede the sum of their parts. They cannot be reduced to components.
2. Human beings have their existence in a uniquely human context, as well as in a cosmic ecology.
3. Human beings are aware and aware of being aware — ie, they are conscious. Human consciousness always includes an

awareness of oneself in the context of other people.

4. Human beings have some choice and, with that, responsibility.
5. Human beings are intentional, aim at goals, are aware that they cause future events, and seek meaning, value, and creativity.