

# MOVING FORWARD

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The present is made of the past and contains the future. Our past in humanistic psychology has been about optimism, about human potential, about excitement and growth in the human personality. And then gradually the field has shifted away from a reaching out and taking risks and being one's own truth in the face of all forces.

The Treaty of Rome has emphasised a trend towards professionalism and academising. Instead of Self-Awareness events, people began to attend Counsellor and therapy training courses, and shifted attention from their own self-actualisation towards the actualisation, or at least towards the mental health, of others, their clients. My guess is that many more people are in or have completed some recent certificated training in these therapies, than ever attended encounter groups and the like in the olden days of the sixties and seventies.

At the same time, psychology degrees have become immensely popular. Again, my guess is that these trainings attract people who are interested in their own development, as well as in that of others. One result of all this is that there are myriad therapists, a word I am using to save saying counsellors-and -psychotherapists too many times in this article. Many of them have gone through a remarkable number of hours of training and practice and personal therapy before qualifying. Many of them do not find as many clients as they need, to make a living. And recently some training establishments are finding that their boom days are not continuing: the field is shifting again.

One of Charles Handy's notions of how businesses need to keep themselves healthy involves a bell jar image: when the enterprise is sensed to be coming up to the top of the curve, then is the time to **bring in new ideas, and be ready to change**. Counselling and psychotherapy have to my mind begun a descent down the other side of the bell. Funding in general medical practice seems to be getting tighter for this branch of help. Workplace counselling is commonly seen in terms of six session interventions. The British distrust of meddling with your mind is particularly loudly voiced in recent years, through unsympathetic radio, television and newspaper accounts or denunciations. We are perhaps well past Professor Handy's ideal time for change. But do we want to change? And even if we do, what on earth do we want to change into?

Quoting from a professor of business studies is perhaps relevant here, as workplace counselling, and many sorts of intervention by our profession into organisations are more and more in evidence. Supervisees come to me saying, almost guiltily, that they are doing a soft of personal therapy for managers, managers who would be appalled to hear the word, though they appear to flourish in the activity. So

this seems to be an odd development from the iconoclasm of earlier humanistic practice, to mainstream handmaiding of big business. And there is a familiar echo to me in the notion of hiding half your knowledge while, cautiously using other parts.

It reminds me of times when I have been in humanistic gatherings where images from the analytic psychologies have struck me as the most telling description of group process. Yet I have felt very uneasy about whether these images and bits of theory would be seen as a devaluing of humanistic perceptions. Since finding other people going through the same censoring process, I have become bolder and spoken out. Indeed, boldness is rarely needed now for such interventions, as many humanistic practitioners and students seem to scramble to show who can be the most analytic in vocabulary and knowledge.

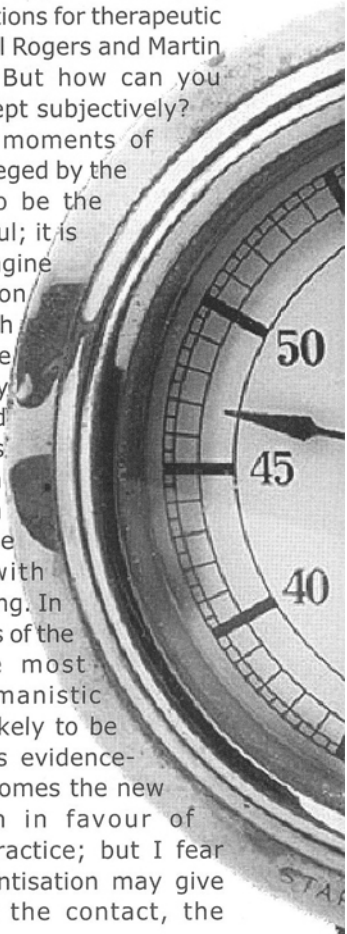
One marked change that is gaining strength is a move towards integrating theory and practice between psychotherapies. Some of this is named and deliberate. Some is more covert, and occasionally accompanied by quarrels about who thought of what first. Something else that is being integrated into some humanistic practice is a valuing of what is now called the spiritual dimension. Perhaps it can also be described as love, as agape, breadth of vision, unpossessive affection, joy, and the extraordinary sense of cleared perception which can accompany these feelings: all things are made plain.

Out of this rapid look around some of what makes the foreground for me of the present state of humanistic psychology, I will spend a little time

describing what may happen in the future. Then I will talk at more length of what could happen, and what I want to happen.

## FUTURE PROBABLE

The statutory regulation of the profession which is being prepared at the moment will be in place within a decade, and may serve to reinforce the already strong requirements of academic attainment for therapists. As many of the core beliefs of humanistic practitioners are recognisable but not measurable, they will probably be devalued. Many of us, for example, believe in the conditions for therapeutic movement that Carl Rogers and Martin Buber described. But how can you measure love, except subjectively? Buber's I - Thou moments of meeting may be alleged by the parties to them to be the very food of the soul; it is hard for me to imagine a research study on the subject which would not be derided by academics who had themselves perhaps never been exposed to such moments of intense naked contact with another human being. In this way the aspects of the psyche that are most important to humanistic practitioners are likely to be mentioned less, as evidence-based practice becomes the new orthodoxy. I am in favour of evidence-based practice; but I fear that creeping scientisation may give less attention to the contact, the



therapeutic bond, the life between therapist and client, in favour of an evaluation of techniques. Yet, many a time, the technique involved is the mere vehicle, the mere occasion of experiencing, of exploring and changing, the unmeasurable Between.

Since Expert Counselling has become a symbol of Governmental concern about disasters, I expect it, whatever it is, will continue to be offered where asked for and where not. Brief counselling is another place where therapy may burgeon, as doctors in Primary Care take on responsibility for first interventions in mental health, and organisations find it effective to devolve

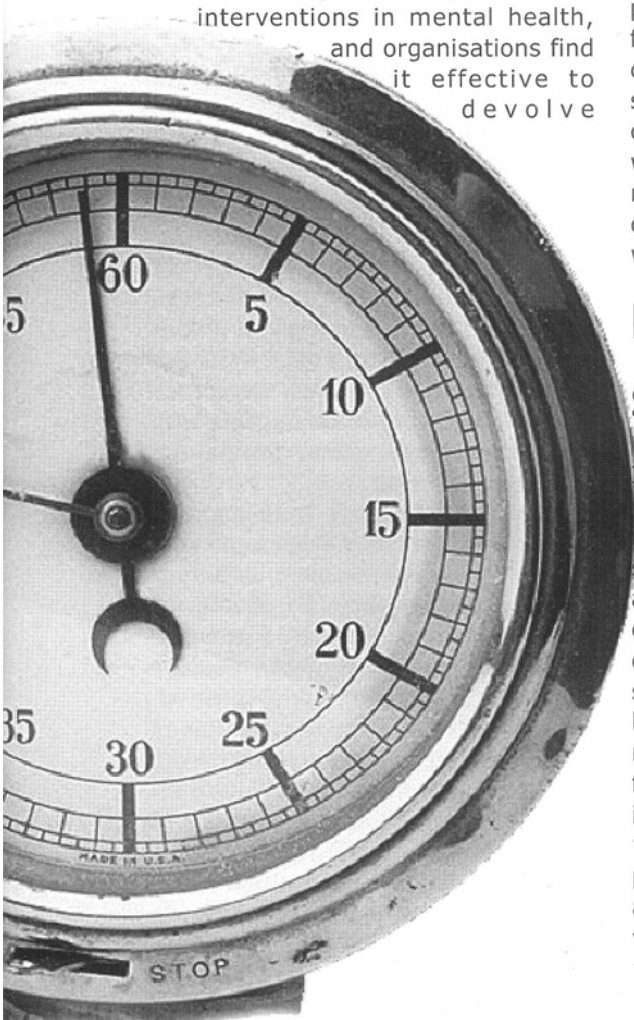
responsibility for warmth understanding and recognition to some outside department or agency.

Humanistic practitioners will increasingly find themselves pulled between irreconcilable demands. On the one hand, the production line work of too much brief therapy, coupled with ever more stringent professional rules about training, supervision, memberships, academic recognition and more. On the other, the growing popularity of Continuing Professional Development is likely to keep them uncomfortably awake to the possibilities of their work, to the vision, flexibility, creativity, intimacy which can be inherent in therapy. CPD may seem to be on both sides of their conflict at once; in time and money it will be another burden on their regulated lives; in experience, a series of glimpses of a Promised Land in which they will never reside for long.

## POSSIBLE FUTURE

### Science

In the last section I spoke of scientisation, by which I meant the attempts to render measurable the sublime, perhaps as well exemplified as anywhere by the move to NVQ's in counselling. The neuro-sciences, on the other hand, are an example of true science which might be of immense benefit to any therapist, humanistic or not. Part of a possible future, even a future perfect for me, would be the integration of all studies relevant to therapy. It is remarkable that different professions research the same areas and reach broadly similar conclusions, yet never quote each other, though they might have illuminated each



other's work immensely, and maybe expedited it to boot. Human development is an example of this, in the exciting work of Daniel Stern, researcher and analyst, on one side, and the psychiatrists Judy Dunn and Michael Rutter, on the other. The work of all of them is of help to humanistic practitioners, if only we find out about it. The Internet offers more possibility than there has been before, of speedy access to the writings of diverse but related groups, and so to the integration that comes from sound knowledge.

The further integration that is beginning and needs to strengthen, is that between the sciences, the knowledge so far as we have it of the biology of the emotions and of behaviour, with art. The art is the intuitive, the intimate, the contactful, which cannot be fully replicated by anything except other human beings of goodwill. Either alone is not enough for the best therapy.

Another possibility that I would like realised is the return of group therapy from the margins where it seems often to be at the moment. There are ways in which group therapy is superior to one on one work, and I will recall one or two of these, as they seem so ignored and perhaps forgotten. One to one, the therapist is half the world, so her pronouncements may take on a somewhat overwhelming value for the client, the other half of this narrow universe. Most therapists, aware of this, temper the wind to the shorn lamb, and may even get to be namby pamby. in a group, spades can be named as spades or bloody shovels, and other voices will dispute what has been said. Reality is built in a larger way than in the pair. Besides, much

vicarious therapy happens, as people see some of several lives, and can begin to find that they are better copers than they thought, or that there are different ways to perceive the world or their problem, or what all else that becomes available where there are a number of people being open with each other in a therapeutic setting.

And groups are cheaper to run per capita than pair therapy. This obvious fact is ignored in all the scurrying after brevity of intervention in the name of saving money happens now.

## Is Therapy Bad for Therapists?

Some of the givens, the orthodoxy which has been adopted from older schools into humanistic practice, sit more and more oddly in my mind. You the reader, and I, can make a proper and convincing case about what are termed Boundary Issues. Of course you are not going to be buddies with these clients with whom you have a professional relationship, we might agree. And certainly it is a great convenience to the therapist to know that the dysfunctional powers of relating of some lonely but difficult client need only be attended to within the neat time frame of the therapy hours. Yet many people who come for therapy have had mixed messages about their acceptability, all their lives. They have been beamed at and then ignored, or they have been abused and then somehow encouraged to the strength that has brought them to the consulting room in the first place. It looks to me as if the therapy can be construed as an ultimate mixed

message, telling something about insight, care parenting, attention and great openness, and then scissoring that off when the clock strikes.

There is great emphasis in many humanistic trainings now about transference, and of respecting the transference level of what goes on in the therapeutic pair. The therapist, we learn, is likely at times to be seen as an ideal parent, as well as much else. Now what ideal parent boots you out of the door after an hour, and only offers you additional contact if you say you are in advanced despair? I am not always sure what the exact time keeping that is so convenient to the therapist has to do with anything much except anxiety and guilt, for the client. Nor can I make a case to a sceptical observer, that the one-to-one mode of most individual humanistic therapy is to do with the skills of real relationship. Yet the end point of most therapy seems usefully to be no more nor less than that the client learns to get on better with other people and himself. The model offered by therapy is, on the one hand, of narcissistic investigation and discovery, and on the other of being a skilled handmaid to that process for another. There are times in life when both these modes between people are of enormous value. But they are not the modes of open dialogue, of excitement and growth and argument and open fury and reconciliation, in other words of the growth of love.

Maybe we should do less therapy. You see that I become less convinced as I go along that therapy is all humanising. Parts of it seem dehumanising. I frown at supervisees who have hugged a client in a closed room. I agree with clients that I will acknowledge them with a faint smile

and no more if we meet by chance in public. I sometimes reach a place of great understanding and affection with a longer-term client, then observe the no-social contact-for-two-years advice and miss a wedding or party that is an important moment in their lives, and to which I am asked. What is more, I can get to be such a good listener that in social gatherings I am drowned in the deluge of other people's stories, and do not remember to tell my own. And I question all this, so perhaps that is what makes me propose:

## Let's Try and Do Ourselves Out of a Job

Here is a part of the future I would most like to see: what Ivan Illich called the return of the skills to the laity. In a complex society, specialism is inevitable, so of course we have ended up in this last century within this new specialism called counselling.

The confessional, the confidante, are some of the roles supposed to have fulfilled the needs now dealt with by therapists. In other words, people seem always to have needed to talk out their griefs and calamities and terrors with a receptive other.

I would like a civilised society to be one in which everyone was helped into these skills of getting on with themselves and each other. Some are already taught on courses for grown-ups, called Counselling Skills courses. They include listening, putting yourself in the other person's shoes for a moment, and giving honest answers. They include knowing your own feelings and confessing them rather than always indulging them at the

other person's expense. They include knowing your own needs and fulfilling them at the least expense and most reward to all involved. There must be more that I have overlooked. But these not inconsiderable skills have no business to be made the property of one profession. They are the skills of living that anyone coming to counselling is very likely to have difficulty with. They need to be taught in school, where experiments along these lines show the eagerness with which young children will flourish on such teaching.

We shall not do ourselves out of a job, in that there will probably always be people whose temperaments and difficulties need specialist time and patience and skill. But the impatience some disaster survivors have shown at the infliction of qualified counsellors on them in their grief and shock seems a healthy sign to me. If we can train people to be better listeners to themselves and each other, they will be in a stronger position to deal with some of the hard events of life without recourse to a consulting room.

## New Forms

Beyond psychotherapy, the How of moving forward suggests something nearer the growth model Perls talked about, and which he distinguished from a hedonistic turn-on model. I see the application of this in a society which is increasingly computer and television and video dominated. There is a hunger for contact skills and experience, admitted by many people in IT, and implied by government predictions that within a couple of decades 25% of the population will live alone.

Humans are social animals. Humanistic psychologists will I think do well to invent ways of offering acceptable groups to a whole range of people who would probably rear like wild horses at the mention of such words as counselling or group therapy. Clubs? Holidays with a sense of community like some already operating successfully in Mediterranean and other resorts? New forms are needed already and will be more as alienation threatens.

## Agape or Death

Beyond the pleasures of face-to-face groups, there are all the large ones to which we belong, and by which we are profoundly affected. If we ignore process, our own process, in these larger groups, and specially very large groups, we shall leave ourselves vulnerable to impetuosity of a potentially horrifying kind.

One way of describing many of the brutal wars in the world at the moment is that the people taking part in them have made their membership of one group so foreground that it apparently tunes out of awareness or value all other memberships. A young Serbian woman in this country during the Bosnian crisis told me how she and her parents lived in an apartment block in Sarajevo, along with people from all the other Yugoslavian groups. She said that until the conflict, she was hardly aware of these national labels. Well into the conflict, her father took turns with the other men of all these groups, to guard the apartment block at night. Membership of the living place was still paramount. Then he was shot in the back from within the block, and her mother fled. No matter what the behaviour, being Serbian risked death



from neighbours. There are millions of stories as poignant as this.

My hypothesis is that until we increase awareness of our archaic, out-of-awareness responses to large and small group membership, we are the more likely to propel ourselves into behaviours and attitudes that might have been useful to the species when mammoths roamed the frozen earth, but that seem only tragic when reinvented now.

Here in condensed form I have put a few of the ideas with which I hope to stimulate people to look more at our future, and perhaps invent quite other ways forward than the ones I suggest here. I hope the conversation goes on.

## Further Reading

Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. Scriveners 1970

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