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Being humanistic

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The end of the 70's. It seems a long time ago, another world. In 1980 I joined the Open Centre, which was a microcosm of the Growth movement. My training started in encounter groups, through gestalt into TA, which was for me a rich experience. Old Saybrook 1964 saw the founding of the American AHP which was written up by David Elkins in *Self & Society* (Volume 27 No. 6). New Saybrook, taking place this year, will see a revisioning of the Humanistic Movement, which is to be welcomed. At the end of his article David Elkins writes 'what's good in human life? No other psychology can answer that question'. I would go one further and say that no psychology can. There are so many ways of being human; I have learned that from being a therapist.

At another gathering of AHPP the answer to the question 'what informs your work?' was love and freedom. One of our hallmarks is that we are not prescriptive. In our thinking today we need to avoid being evangelical. I am reminded of the story of the young 19th century minister who went to Glasgow to save the poor. After six months he wrote to his father saying, 'I came here to change people but now that I have got to know them, I don't want to

anymore, I like them as they are'. As practitioners we are not here to change the world though we may cause change by being and doing what we are and how we do things, showing respect for the way people are. So it's a human world - all are human - the good, bad and ugly. That's why we give people a fair trial, and condemn atrocities while not condoning vengeance. My assumption is that everyone is okay, has intrinsic value, no matter what they do, or say or think. This is not a feeling but a statement. Therefore, I'll not talk about human versus inhuman. What we mean by our theme for today is that there are *aspects* of our world which are cruel and lacking in compassion.

How then are we to respond in the face of negative behaviour? What do we do when we see brutality in the home, unfairness at work, injustice generally? What is our contribution to the situation? We need to use our integrity and do no harm without letting our conscience overwhelm us. A nurse on a tea break might have avoided a patient's death. But for my lack of sensitivity a client may not have lost his job. We need forgiveness to inform our opinions of ourselves and others.

is sharing our humanity

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John Rowan's address to the conference was printed last Summer.

But being humanistic is down to us. It is up to me to act in such a way that will improve the quality of life that will assist my clients to find the resources to resist some of the awfulness of life and perhaps change something in the process. It is up to me to co-operate in any move that will help improve the conditions of life. As practitioners we can treat people in a straight, fair and caring way, and not be afraid to confront destructiveness. At the same time it is up to me to recognise that I am a part of everyone and, like it or not, have a share in the pain of others. At some level we are all doing our best and I also recognise that the pressure and stresses of life cause people to do rotten things sometimes for the greater good. If the balloon is going down who goes out? We are all human, how can we send one person to their death or do we all go down? That's often the dilemma we face.

Nevertheless, I consider that the world is a better place for the increase of self knowledge, for the opening up of options and for the increased skills that the world of therapy has given. A big part of that is the humanistic movement. In saying this I want to stress that all who are in the helping professions are to some extent

humanistic - they are there for the good of humans, even though we may see aspects of their work which are not. What we stress is that each individual is important, next the group or family and lastly organisations. Organisations do not necessarily exist for the good of those involved. Hopefully therapy organisations do. But we must take care that we do not fall into the trap of justifying our existence by some impersonal criteria. At the same time we need to avoid the mistake of a large manufacturing industry that changed into a person-centred enterprise and went out of business in the process.

To summarise: the four major resources we have are money, power, freedom and love. The question is how do we use these? In contemporary practice where practitioners are interfacing with the world of work and primary care which are controlled by large systems, what is the direction of therapy? Gaie Houston in her recent article in *Self & Society*, Volume 27 no. 6, points out the dangers of losing our way so that money and power are used in opposition to love and freedom. So it is how we use our power, how we live our values which counts and makes us humanistic. And in all of this to take responsibility for ourselves and invite others to do the same.