

Between language imperialism and the mystical self

Dear *Self & Society*,

Although John Rowan asserts in his critique of my essay on 'Psychoanalysis vs Humanistic Therapy', *Self & Society* 28, 3, that he wishes to take issue with one or two points, his letter raises a welter of fundamental concerns, which I shall address as briefly as possible.

First of all, John Rowan accuses me of exterminating the autonomous self with the common disease of language imperialism, thus exchanging the necessary dialectical opposition between self and society for the hegemony of symbolic constructivism. Here I want to point out that I am as little inclined to endorse the transcendental power of the social discourse as the self-regulatory action of the conscious self. I do not adhere to Foucault's conception of a symbolic structure which operates as a self-contained system beyond subjective control, yet neither do I champion the humanistic notion of the self as an independent agency endowed with a free will and the ability to grow. In my view, the majority of human beings is indeed involved in a dialectical relationship with the symbolic structure, which implies that language is subjectified and that subjectivity does not exist beyond language. When I claim in my essay that human beings are being created and acted upon as subjects by a symbolic structure that precedes and outlives them, I therefore do not want to suggest that language functions as an anonymous superstructure, but rather as the inevitable medium through which human beings continuously (re)invent themselves.

I am pleased to see that John Rowan is eager to rescue the dialectical opposition between self and society, but I am not convinced that the humanistic paradigm leaves room for such a dialectical process. The concept of the self, which is traditionally associated with personal liberty, autonomy, freedom of choice and consciousness, seems to contradict a properly dialectical dynamics between the human being and the social structure, and this presumably explains why John Rowan tends to refer to it as a paradox and a dilemma. It also remains a mystery to me how the dialectical opposition between these two forces can be maintained alongside the therapeutic goals of self-realisation, authenticity, etc. To me, the latter aims imply that the self is capable of liberating itself from and elevating itself above the restrictive influence of the symbolic system in which it is trapped. I am afraid that I cannot fathom how this kind of curative idealism chimes with the intrinsically dialectic relationship between the human being and the symbolic order of law and language. I would love to hear John Rowan explain how the literally mind-blowing hierarchy of consciousness-expanding achievements, and the 'whole world of the mystical', can be incorporated within a dialectical outlook of the human condition.

John Rowan deplores the fact that I do not give any reasons for arguing that general well-being, authenticity, self-achievement, etc. are merely misnomers for false hope. Although he does not give any conclusive evidence either in arguing for the opposite, apart from the knowledge derived from his own humanistic practice and that of others, I am happy to reply to his challenge. First of all, my point is the direct outcome of the dialectical model that I consider to be at work. Secondly, the general failure of the alternative therapeutic cultures which emerged during the late 1960s in keeping their promises of spiritual enlightenment proves that, pace Freud, illusions do not always have a future. Thirdly, both the contemporary promotion of new age romanticism and the widespread marketing of traditional healing methods capitalize on the public's desperate yearning for self-discovery and authenticity in an age of virtual fragmentation and moral decline. However, whereas the yearning is genuine, the object is but an inadequate commodity, which is demonstrated by the speed with which people travel from one alternative ideology to another.

In my essay I do not intimate that 'fantasies about the therapist are the only things that really do justice to the particularity of the client's problems, as John Rowan puts it. I merely want to indicate that the more the therapist engages in self-disclosure, the more the client's problems will lose its uniqueness, and the more the relationship is doomed to disintegrate into a *folie à deux*. Whereas John Rowan is betting on the effectiveness of a therapeutic self-disclosure, I reject the technique precisely because there is no such thing as non-therapeutic self-disclosure. Put differently, were there to be a form of self-disclosure which does not have a therapeutic effect, I would be happy to employ it, but unfortunately this is where the *furor sanandi* reigns. John Rowan may find my perspective weird or, indeed, perverse. I gather he will not mind my finding 'Centaur consciousness' a bit weird too, not to mention the fact that those who advocate it presumably come closer to cult-mysticism than your average weird psychoanalyst.

Some 35 years ago, Philip Rieff argued that a great many post-Freudian authors had transformed Freud's original inspiration of psychoanalysis into a vast therapeutic culture, in which therapy had replaced faith by surreptitiously adopting all its essential characteristics. Perhaps humanistic therapy and psychoanalysis can become kindred spirits in the mutual celebration of therapeutic ideals, but I have serious reservations about the entire project. In my opinion, psychoanalysis cannot and should not become a new faith because; (a) it does not provide the answers to the central questions of origin and destiny; (b) it does not forgive; and (c) it does not promise a better future. If people do not like the menu, they are free to go somewhere else, but I do not want to vow for the quality of the meal.

Finally, I wish to draw John Rowan's attention to the fact that the most memorable moments of an analysis are not always the most effective ones.

Dany Nobus

To Noni Kers, c/o S&S Editor
13 November 2000

Dear (?) Noni,

Owwwww!!!! Blub, Blub, Boohoo! Blub, Boohoo! Boohoo! Blub. Cruel, Unkind!
Cruel, Unkind! Cruel, Unkind!

How could you say such horrible things to me, your poor defenceless, victimised client! Just because I asked you to pay me. (Out of role-: I am the professional client here, *you* answered my advert for a client to practice on! - Now into Persecutor:-) Now I'll get even with you, never mind Violet Agra and her kick starting, how about Violent Aggro?? I'm gonna send round my mates William Pending and his literal sidekick N E Kappa, and they won't be thumping cushions! A little accident in the Jacuzzi? However, they will accept a donation of six cases of **vintage** champagne (That was Rescuer - I have to give you these explanatory asides because I don't think you're a good-enough therapist to recognise my splits.)

You ask where are my projections? That's for you to tell me. Here is one in front of you, can't you grasp it? You remind me of my _____ and my _____ [fill in the gaps]. They did stick me in a dark and joyless place [so you are getting something right - eventually] when I was naughty. They put me under the stairs, in a bunker as you spotted, but you're saying I put myself there. And now you're doing the same, putting me in a place of misery! Blub, Blub, Blub, Blub. It's not fair! I SHALL COMPLAIN TO YOUR ASSOCIATION! Though who'd have you as a Member? I demand to know your professional body. But then you'll all gang upon me, that's why you slipped in that 'sandbagged' word, isn't it? Call me paranoid? Please call me paranoid, I need to know who I am, I'm, dis asso cia ted and split ting. Help me! Keep away! Help me! Keep away! Help me! Keep away! Keep away! Help me!

Owwwww!!!! Blub, Boohoo! Boohoo! Blub, Blub, Boohoo! Blub. Sniff, Sniff, Sniff.

Maybe you're right, maybe I have had too much therapy? Yes! No? Yes? No! Yes? No? Yes! No! Yes? No!

You've let me down, I feel all limp. You've abandoned Don. Hey, maybe that's why my parents called me Don!? (Why am I doing all the work here?) Oh my God, maybe they did abandon Don?!?! Are you going to leave me like this? Maybe Violet Agra will be more upright and open than you, get her to write to me and take me in, even if I give her a hard time. Mind you, I'm still sending round Pending & Kappa of CRAPS (Client Rescue And Protection Services).

Good bye, for ever?
Don Thelpme
Professional Client

(So, Noni, can you cope with demolishing a client, or am I beyond your grasp? If you wish, I can go into Stalker Mode, for an extra fee of course.)