

Dear *Self & Society*,

REPLY TO DANY NOBUS

I was pleased to see the reply by Dany Nobus (S&S 28/5) to my reply to his original article. It is easy for the reader to lose track of these arguments, so I will stick to just one point and start from the beginning again with it.

The original article cast some doubt on the optimism of humanistic psychology that such things as self-actualization were possible. In my reply I gave some reasons to suppose that they were indeed possible and quite achievable. In the latest contribution, Dany Nobus again casts doubt on such things. He says: "John Rowan may find my perspective weird or, indeed, perverse. I gather that he would 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."

What interests me is that he cannot mention mysticism without inserting the (obviously prejudicial) word "cult". I think we have to take mysticism more seriously than that, simply because Centaur consciousness (the home of humanistic psychology and existentialism in terms of general outlook) is a fairly low-level form of mysticism itself. Mysticism is simply that form of spirituality where we refuse to take it from others and insist on having the experience for ourselves. It seems worthwhile to me to take some time to understand what spirituality is in general.

There are at least four widely used definitions of spirituality, each of which contains an important but partial truth, and all of which need to be included in any balanced account: (1) spirituality involves peak experiences or altered states, which can occur at almost any stage and any age; (2) spirituality involves the highest levels in any of the lines of development which may be taken seriously; (3) spirituality is a separate developmental line itself; (4) spirituality is an attitude (such as openness, trust, or love) that the self may or may not have at any stage.

These are not the only four definitions of spirituality. In *A Sociable God*, Ken Wilber gives nine of them. But these four are some of the most common and, I believe, most significant. In *A Sociable God*, Wilber also refers to the important distinction in the sociology of religion between legitimate (or translative) spirituality, which seeks to fortify the self at its present level of development, no matter how high or low; and authentic (or transformative) spirituality, which seeks to transcend the self altogether (or at least transform it to a higher wave

of consciousness). The first three uses of "spirituality" mentioned above are different definitions of authentic spirituality, in that all of them involve, at least in part, the idea that real spirituality involves a change in level of consciousness (either temporary, as in the first, or permanent, as in the second and third). The fourth usage is a good definition of legitimate spirituality, in that it seeks to promote the health of the self at whatever level it is at, without vertically changing consciousness. All four of these uses of "spirituality" are valid, in my opinion, and all four of them represent very real and important functions that spirituality can perform. The difficulty, as usual, is that some religious and spiritual movements latch onto just one narrow aspect of the religious impulse in humans and claim it is the only impulse worth acting on, which distorts both legitimate and authentic spirituality and often sets the self in a spiral of deception and deceit. Hence the 'cults' to which Nobus refers.

In my new book (*Ordinary Ecstasy, 3rd edition*) I argue at length that the most important level of spirituality for humanistic psychology to pay attention to is Centaur consciousness – that form of consciousness which lies beyond the Mental Ego (what has sometimes been described as the consensus trance), but which has not gone on to the level of the Subtle (archetypal and divine forms and symbols) or the Causal (the deep water of spirituality where we lose all need for symbols and images).

Centaur consciousness (so called by Wilber because of its emphasis on bodymind unity) is what Maslow calls the level of self-actualization, what Rogers calls the level of the fully functioning person, what Mahrer calls the level of the person who is integrated and actualised, what May calls the level of the person who has discovered the 'I Am!', what Bugental describes as the authentic person. These are all writers who have gone very deeply into these matters, and are not to be dismissed in the quick way which Nobus seems to believe possible. The recent book by Jenny Wade, entitled *Changes of Mind*, puts together a lot of the research into a very cohesive and convincing story, which Nobus and others who think the same might like to consider.

I hope this brief letter will at least make it a little clearer that we do have to be a bit careful in dismissing the other, whether it be the psychoanalytic other or the mystical other. After all, psychoanalysts like Wilfred Bion, psychiatrists like Mark Epstein, analytical psychologists like Nathan Field have all written in a way which gives a place to mysticism as something important for psychotherapy.

John Rowan

Dear *Self & Society*,

Dear Nick; Dear Heward,

Thank you for sharing your e-mail dialogue with me. (*S + S* Vol. 28 No3) Interesting you should share your discussion with me at the time the two American Presidential Candidates are also debating in public. The parallel being, that in debate, does any 'side' ever much see it from the others point of view?

Once again therefore, I am saddened to observe two therapists whom I respect, unable to agree despite efforts to apparently empathize and accept each other's phenomenological view. For whilst being genuine to yourselves, you did not display a congruence to the debate over registration or not, nor evidence of, as I've said, empathy or acceptance.

So you both fail to evidence the three core conditions and leave the debating field, much as it was when you entered. For as Carl Rogers said, these conditions are necessary and sufficient if therapeutic change is to occur.

This argumentative luxury of yours really annoys me. Is the psychotherapy profession condemned to conflict? If so, no wonder it's little taken seriously outside of its own precious domain.

What a model, what a demonstration to display to the non-therapeutic world. Where were your attempts at genuine co-operation and conflict-resolution? Certainly for me, not in the disingenuous sounding, "love Nick; love Heward".

I thought you both blasphemed in your use of the term love. So I'm certainly not going to join you in that kind of formatted dialogue.

I'm actually hacked off with the pair of you whilst at the same time very well able to empathize with both of you. For as I debate within myself, whether or not after twenty years of practicing as a therapist whether to seek further registration or not, I can identify with both your points of view.

What hacks me off about both of you, is that you 'posture' like two of my cockerels who in the end, after much strutting, beating of wings and manipulative behavior to 'bonk' more hens than each other; finally fought it out to the death, interestingly, of both!! In so doing, they denied if it matters, each hen's daily servicing, and more importantly for me, the eating of fertilized eggs that taste so much better than the factory or even 'free-range' eggs that are invariably 'un-cocked'.

The parallel to this with you both, is it appears to me, that as you both 'fight' over the issue of registration or not, along with other disputing therapists; the entire therapeutic endeavour is dismissed, not because as the Labour Party when always out of office declare; debate isn't healthy; but because it is surely incongruent if not hypocritical for therapists to argue. Never argue with your clients is surely an agreed tenet at the very least within the ranks of the humanistic brigades. (I am deliberately using military terms here to enforce my point about opposing allegiances). And why?

Well at least for the reason of 'splitting'; either the therapist from the client and/or for encouraging a split within the client.

Contradictions can co-exist. So we are instructed by Taoist philosophy and reminded again of by CG Jung in his 'equals and opposites' ideas. The 'and and' idea that you both sometimes tried for, but ultimately could not sustain.

You Heward, because as I read it, you just refused, would not try to see Nick's point of view and hence met his frustration. And you Nick, because despite your aversion to statutory registration, and thus the politicisation of therapy, actually kept batting from the anarchist crease, Anarchism is as much a political statement as even Heward's beauracritic, pyramidal and thus conservative standpoint.

Thus you *both* politicised the therapeutic endeavour and so ended up in as much disagreement as when you began the dialogue.

Thank goodness then that you ended it Heward. As you say, 'we could both go on debating till the cows come home!'

I think however your next statement, that the dialogue was 'much enjoyed' just goes to demonstrate how ego-centric you both probably are.

Except for positioning and posturing, and in your disingenuous use of the word love, (both actually being clearly argumentative and competitive) you have rendered the therapeutic endeavour a disservice, possibly wasted this reader's time along with the incredible indulgence of eleven pages in this magazine (seventeen percent of its content?), not to speak ecologically of the waste to once living trees, and ultimately bored the pants off me.

Maybe you both *feel* better for being so indulged in this fruitless extravaganza, but for me, that only goes to show how far removed you both have become from practicing as therapists with people who are distressed, anxious and perplexed with their 'real' situations of bereavement, stress, illness and confusion. As the musician Frank Zappa, once said, having debated with a persistently argumentative member of the audience who kept repeating himself; "stop it: you'll hurt your throat."

At the risk of sounding pompous, I would commend you both to take what is clearly for you both, an emotive and highly charged issue, to your own individual therapists and 'own' what this is really about, which sounds especially from you, Nick, to be about exclusion or inclusion, belonging or not belonging, accepted or rejected.

To conclude then, I think you have both 'acted out' and thus demonstrated your incongruence to that which you presumably subscribe to, i.e. therapy along the lines of Carl Rogers' Three Core Conditions.

AND; I know you both *in me*.

My own struggles with inclusion/exclusion etc continue unabated. I wish you both strength and humility in the struggles that you have shared with me. We

are all fellow travelers who I think will travel little if at all, whilst we continue to externalise these struggles, especially in the political world of largely, posturing.

As Gore Vidal said when sitting with Anthony Clare In The Psychiatrists Chair (13/10/2000) 'all politics is about conning'.

Some are more successful at this than others, but ultimately, it's still, all a con.

If you wish to dialogue further with me, then please write from your hearts; share something of your soul with me, or do not converse with me at all. My time is precious. So is yours.

Go about your work as therapists with good intent. There is so much dis-ease in the world and so few of us that will give time to others in their distress. Nick, Heward; just get on with 'the work' and let's all support each other in this so needed, so noble and wonder-full endeavour of 'being with' each other and those that are courageous enough to share something of their struggles with us.

Who is Lord Alderdice anyway? I don't meet him in my various consulting rooms!

In peace and friendship (now that I've expressed my annoyance and irritation with you both).

John Sivyver

Dear Nick, dear Heward,

Upon further reflection, and more succinctly put; I agree with both of you. Isn't this the way forward?

John

Dear *Self & Society*,

RESPONSE TO JOHN SIVYER

Dear John

After feeling irritation for a short time at the tone of your letter my next impulse was to want to write to Nick and say surely we can both agree that this is a ridiculous response to what we did! Then I decided to just take the risk on my own account of a response.

I find in your letter the strongest possible wish that 'there should not be politics', and to me that is totalitarian. That you invoke the core conditions - as if anyone who disagrees is violating them, also indicating you would never disagree with a client, (which just astonished me!) - led me to think rather savagely that, yes Rogers too had forgotten, as half the therapy world seems to have

forgotten, what a reasoned debate, and genuine disagreement, is. I recently read on a condom machine in a gents loo the legend, 'Feeling is everything.' It seems as if Rogers, as interpreted by you, would not disagree. Whatever happened to thinking?

Nick and I might be able to agree if we dialogued long enough, and we might not, but we were also engaged in epitomising a debate in a space which you already feel is far too long and a waste of precious time! And I felt we achieved considerable understanding of each other's positions, which is the first step. But neither of our positions is lightly held, and at least neither of us caricatured the other, as you certainly do me when you characterise my position as 'bureaucratic, pyramidal and thus conservative'. The truth is, I believe, that both Nick and I are anarchists, inmates of the asylum, if you like; we just have different pragmatic views as to how to cope with, or try to run, the asylum. And indeed those views may have drastic implications in what happens, or not, for the world of therapy and therapists, but I think your fighting cock analogy applied to us personally is out of order. We respect each other, go back a long time, and, yes, can disagree with love.

It's as if disagreement itself is a problem with you, as your final remarks seem to indicate. And I predict the second thing Nick and I would both agree on is that the intrusion of politics into therapy is quite inescapable. With Andrew Samuels we would both think 'the psyche is a political psyche' and would both find it hard to imagine believing otherwise, even if we may disagree on 'where the politics is'.

Of course Nick and I might in fact disagree on that too and that would be another disagreement for you to cope with, or be bored by. And with you I am faced with my own belief that you are not putting forward a position to be dialogued with - and in a sense I think you would agree with that, since you regard 'positions' as a derogation from the utopian unity, and redeemed state, in which all therapists do/ought to exist.

But to tease all that out with you we would, once again, have to start with statements of position and make some political judgments as to how improvement can be achieved. Politics and dialogue would have to be done.

Are you yourself up for that, or would your response be the same as Frank Zappa's - silence the arguers?

Heward Wilkinson

Postscript

I have realised after some days reflection that I want to add that I think there is a level of violence, hurtful intention, and discourtesy, in your comments, of a type that I would wish could be banished for good out of public therapy (psychotherapy/counselling) discourse. It is not 'good honest humanistic robustness'; it is just serious bad news.