



Holism and collegiality

John Heron

Humanistic psychology arrived in the UK, as an experiential force, with a large minilab held at the Inn on the Park Hotel, in London in March 1970. The event was sponsored by Leslie Elliott. Immediately after it, he provided the premises for Quaesitor, the first growth centre in Europe, run by Pat and Paul Lowe. Six years later in 1976, the IDHP was formed by the initiative of David Blagden Marks, who by then had taken over Quaesitor from the Lowes. The IDHP launching committee consisted of David, Tom Feldberg, Kate Hopkinson, Frank Lake and myself.

The whole force of the term 'humanistic' in the IDHP's diploma title ('Diploma in Humanistic Psychology') derived from Carl Rogers' notion of self-actualization. For Rogers, personality was governed by an innate actualizing tendency: 'the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to maintain or enhance the organism' (Rogers, 1959). This tendency, he believed, 'is selective and directional - a constructive tendency' (Rogers, 1980). It affects both biological and psychological functions. Psychologically, it guides people toward increased autonomy and self-sufficiency, expanding their experiences and fostering personal growth.

This idea of an organismic root for human autonomy and personal growth exactly met the need of the day. It entitled us to come to our senses and ground our emotional liberation in radical bodywork, unencumbered by metaphysical and mystical baggage. After all, 'humanistic' was simply an extension of 'humanist', with all its autonomous secular force now deepened by the healing of past distress.

Eugene Gendlin, following in Rogers' footsteps, developed experiential focusing as a method for making quite explicit, within the body-mind, the selective and directional guidance of the actualizing tendency. You create a relaxed space within the body-mind, take an issue of concern into that space, let it take shape in appropriate symbolic form, and hold the form with all its attendant affect within that relaxed space. You wait until there is a resolution of the issue in imagery and/or words, the hallmark of resolution being a subtle liberating release of somatic energy. Once again the action of the actualizing tendency was seen as organismic, i.e. 'somatic' (Gendlin, 1981).

Nowadays, 25 years after the founding of the IDHP, I think we need to replace the term 'humanistic' in the diploma

title, with the term 'holistic', simply to move beyond the implicit humanist connotation of the former term and to affirm an all-inclusive psychology. To cut a long story short, by the start of the twenty first century, the idea of an organismic actualizing tendency has metamorphosed into a 'bio-spiritual' actualizing tendency, 'an experience of grace in the body', a movement of the indwelling life-giving presence and power of the divine (McMahon and Campbell, 1991). This is Schelling's *deus implicitus*, now in the form of the 'Dynamic Ground (libido, psychic energy, numinous power or spirit) of somatic, instinctual, affective and creative-imaginal potentials' (Washburn, 1995); of the 'Entelechy Self...the Root Self, the ground of one's being, and the seeded coded essence in you which contains both the patterns and the possibilities of your life' (Houston, 1987); of 'Eros as spirit-in-action', the indwelling divine drive at the root of human aspiration (Wilber, 1995). Human motivation is grounded in the spiritual life-potential within. The actualizing tendency has become construed as a process of divine-human becoming (Heron, 1998).

This divine tendency in people appears to have a basic polarity, a radical and dynamic complementarity: there is the impulse to realize individual distinctness of being and the impulse to realize interactive unity with wider fields of being (Heron, 1992). The idea of this dipolar dynamic has been around for a long time. 'Virtually all personality theorists of whatever creed or persuasion assume that personality contains polar tendencies' (Hall and Lindzey, 1957). Koestler used the word 'holon' for subsystems which exhibit the polarity of part and whole in the hierarchic order of life. This was his

basis for a generalized theory of autonomous tendencies and participatory tendencies in biological, social and mental development (Koestler, 1964, 1978; Wilber, 1995). Systems theorists agree that these two polar tendencies are a basic complementary dynamic that is characteristic of systems phenomena, whether organisms, societies or ecosystems (Capra, 1983). The same principle is found in Hindu psychology. Bhagavan Das postulates a polarity of the primal Shakti, or divine creative power within the psyche, as a will to live as an individual, and a will to live as the universal (Das, 1953).

This polarity of the participatory and the autonomous seems to mirror the One-Many nature of being. 'Distinguish in order to unite', said Maritain. A person, perhaps, wants to become a distinct one of the Many in order to participate more fully in interaction with the rest of the Many and in attunement with the One. It's a subtle balance: too much individualism leads to egocentric narcissism; too much universalism leads to spiritual fascism, authoritarianism and oppression. I think a guiding principle for balance is that of collegiality.

On the holonomic principle, just as the genetic potential of the whole human body is present in each of its cells, so it may be that the whole of the One-Many divine is present in each inquiring one of the Many as his or her infinite potential. This *deus implicitus*, spirit-in-action, is the drive of each one to open to the heights and depths of the One and manifest an ever more distinctive lustre within the collegiality of the Many. We long to be open to the One. We long for collegiality - unbound mutuality and co-inherence of distinctness of being without

separation of being, individual diversity in free unity.

Theologians, East and West, have had a range of delicious terms for co-inherence - *circuminsessio, conciliarité, koinonia, perichoresis, sobornost* - and these now call for general release beyond the reach of church dogmatics. Following Solovyov in the nineteenth century, Berdyaev (1937) in the twentieth century gave the best generalized account of the best of these terms - *sobornost* - as the creative process of divine spirit manifest through the self-determining subjectivity of human personhood, engaged in the realization of value and achieved in true community.

It follows from this sort of account that spiritual authority - the validating principle of our divine-human becoming - is both autonomous and participatory. It is both within the individual as critical self-determining subjectivity, and within the community as critical dialogic intersubjectivity (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2000). The IDHP has consistently developed and applied this kind of collegial authority - as self and peer assessment and accreditation (Heron, 1999) - in its courses, without compromise, for 25 years. It is well placed to move forward and affirm explicitly the collegiality of divine-human holism.

Further reading

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