

Dear S&S,

It was interesting to see an issue of *Self & Society* with the headline on the cover saying NO SELF AND SOCIETY, and containing a number of articles on mystical experiences. Yet I was a little disappointed to miss any reference to what connection there might be between mysticism and humanistic psychology.

This is something I have written about at some length, both in *The Reality Game* (2nd edition 1998) and in *Ordinary Ecstasy* (3rd edition 2001). But just briefly, it seems to me that Ken Wilber offers quite a convincing map of this territory. He says we are all on a psychospiritual journey, and that there are certain way-stations which are quite recognisable. His writing on this has become much more complex in recent years, and the book called *Integral Psychology* does justice to the up-to-date version.

To cut a long story short, humanistic psychology represents a part of the journey called the Centaur stage – otherwise known as the stage of existential consciousness, the stage of bodymind unity, the stage of authenticity, and so forth. It is a remarkable position, hovering around the borderline of the personal and the transpersonal. It is not like the Mental Ego, which is the previous level; nor is it the Subtle, which is the next. And it is certainly not the Causal or the Nondual, which range further into the transpersonal realms. In fact, the Causal and the Nondual are so much further on that few people have anything other than brief glimpses of them.

The awful thing is that as soon as people hear that there are levels of consciousness beyond the Mental Ego (the average everyday stage of consciousness familiar to all of us) they tend to want to claim membership of such levels. And it is not enough to claim membership of the Subtle stage (rich and marvellous as it is); they have to claim membership of the Causal and/or the Nondual, because these are more advanced. This is particularly clear in the case of *A Course In Miracles*, which has led to an organization which urges people to think only in terms of getting to the ultimate stage, and staying there. Anything less is surrendering to the blandishments of the Ego.

Indeed, some of those who claim either actually to be enlightened, or who are regarded by others as enlightened, are very hard on the poor old Ego, and accuse it of being the ultimate enemy. It has to be overcome and overthrown.

We in humanistic psychology, on the other hand, think that the ego does indeed have to be met and dealt with, but by being welcomed and engaged with in depth, and in such a way becoming transformed. The Centaur

consciousness which emerges from this process often appears at first in glimpses (peak experiences), but if we persevere it can become a plateau experience, and later a permanent realisation. But even at this final stage it does not simply take the place of the ego. All the previous stages of our development remain within us, like Russian dolls, and we can go back to them as necessary. In fact, most of the people who have been through this transition find it most convenient to remain most of the time at the level of the Mental Ego, with Centaur consciousness hovering in the background, ready to be called upon when authentic interaction or creative endeavour is required.

Humanistic psychology of course has an interest in the 'farther reaches of human nature' (Maslow's phrase), but its heartland is at the Centaur level. This makes it much more accessible and closer to home, and quite achievable in this lifetime. In fact, it is by going further and experiencing the higher reaches beyond the Centaur level that one becomes aware of how possible that level is by comparison. Nowadays it does not seem so prideful to say 'I am self-actualized', whereas back in the 1970s we were very wary of that and preferred to say 'I am self-actualizing'. But it is now possible to see that the self which was to be actualised was a Centaur self, nothing Subtle or Causal, and therefore within reach, rather than forever out of reach. Anyone who finds this explanation too brief to follow might find Chapter 3 of *Ordinary Ecstasy* of help.

I am not against mysticism – I have had mystical experiences myself and found them of great value – but I just wanted to spell out a bit more clearly the relationship between mysticism and humanistic psychology. They are not the same thing.

John Rowan

Dear S&S

I read the letter from the Campaign for Real Psychotherapy with disbelief. Why is this ageing quixotic bunch fighting the old battles? 'What would CAMRAP do? Quite possibly nothing ...' Hmm. 'Real Psychotherapy' ... Like Real Meat, or Real Ale?

When in doubt, form a political party. Of men, note. Eleven men - Angry men? - bring back Henry Fonda! Are we womenfolk meant to wait patiently in the rear while you protect us from the 'reality' of battle? You must be joking ... It's you who need to get real.

But I fear you aren't joking, and will respond with a ponderous 1000 word letter. No - go away and laugh at yourselves. That's what we elders have to do with our self-important posturing. Humour, after all, is transpersonal ... and can lead from the staleness of the ego to the originality of the soul.

Alix Pirani