

YOU VALUE ME AND I VALUE YOU

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One of the fundamental ideas in Humanistic Psychology is that the human being is to be respected and valued. Few people I think would disagree with this on face value but from time to time people do try to evaluate just what it means. John J. Mitchell in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* Vol 15, No. 1 asks among other things 'is every person approximately equal in worth and value' and goes on to evaluate the difference between the death of Christ and of Socrates with that of a junky pimp.

Very frequently also we read of the wrongness of making 'value judgements'. The implication here is that this is a mechanical judgement based on a moral schema and the suggestion is that the moral framework may not be valid in the particular circumstances.

I think one of the great troubles is the different meanings in the word value. We have already had three – firstly a general feeling of approval and respect, secondly a measurement which can be used to compare like with like, and thirdly an ethical judgement system.

When we speak of valuing the human individual; surely we can only mean the first of these, that is a general and aware approval and respect. 'Approval and respect' of the junky pimp? Or of Adolf Hitler? This would seem to shrink the meaning of value now down even further, in fact just to awareness. And perhaps this is right. Certainly the idea of measuring one individual against another in order to say which is more valuable is only relevant in an economic situation. A fast typist is more valuable than a slow one, and a young healthy slave is more valuable than an old unhealthy one. But even if we as traders evaluate useful human skills or qualities as between individuals, we may still as human beings be aware of (and perhaps try to respond to) their unique individual humanness.

And awareness that does not make judgements, does not approve or disapprove, does not measure, can be extended equally to the typist, the salve, Christ, Socrates and junky pimp. And indeed the house dog, the house cat and the ant on the kitchen window-sill.

The one article of faith it seems to me in humanistic psychology is that people are basically – or should I perhaps say potentially – good. Which raises the problem good for what, good at what, or good by whose scale of values?

I personally am prepared to leave this as I said already, as an article of faith. I have a firm conviction which is independent of argument or debate of semantic inquisition that I understand what the word good means to me I know what I mean when I say that the essential human being starts by being 'good'. If asked further to define, I would go on to say that good gives satisfaction, gives pleasure, adds to and enhances life, creates rather than destroys, accepts rather than rejects, is willing to understand, is aware of others and of their needs and their characteristics.

To say that man is potentially good is not to deny the fact that very many human beings, however potentially good, do in fact develop in the opposite direction, like the junky pimp or Adolf Hitler. We live in a very imperfect world: we are each of us in our own way, very imperfect, it is my own belief that much of this imperfection stems, not from false valuing, but from a lack of awareness. The punishing and ego-distorting parent and teacher, the sadistic G.I., the junky pimp, all are enabled to behave as they do primarily not because their values are wrong, but because their awareness of their victims is lacking or imperfect. My own reading of the value of humanistic psychology's teachings to me is that as far as you are concerned, I will not judge your actions or evaluate them in a moral sense, I will be pleased by them or hurt by them and show this as openly as I can, but I will be as aware as I possibly can of you as an individual and of your unique feelings, needs and attitudes.

Self & Society Vol 3., No 8, August 1975

