

John Rowan and Alexandra Chalfont

HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY REACHES OUT - John Rowan

For many years humanistic psychology cultivated its own particular patch. Under names like the growth movement, human potential and authentic living, it differentiated itself from psychoanalysis on the one hand, and behaviorism on the other. Its favourite values were decency, openness, authenticity, aliveness and expansiveness.

It became very popular. In the 1960s and the 1970s there was a worldwide spread of groupwork and growth centres. It was in tune with the optimism of the time, when everything seemed possible. To many people, depressed by the narrowness and conventionality of the 1950s, it seemed like coming home. I was there. I lived it. I went to the AHP conference at Princeton in 1976, and met the two thousand people there, including Carl Rogers, Jean Houston, Al Huang, Will Schutz and other worthies. There were processions with drums and torches, there was skinny-dipping, there was original thinking, openness and connection.

But those days are long gone. We have gone through a long dry period, with competing voices from many sides. The New Age people were close enough to be really confusing, the behaviorists tried to take over everything in sight, the internet seemed like a different world.

And then, in 2009, disaster struck the AHP in Britain. Through what might tactfully be described as a series of unfortunate events, we found ourselves poor and rudderless. We had virtually no bank balance, no proper accounts, we were in bad odour with the Charity Commission, we had no programme of events, and *Self & Society* looked doomed to extinction. The committee had disintegrated, and there was virtually no one in charge. But some of us decided that this was not to be the end. Under the able leadership of Maxine Linnell and Sue Orton we set out to put matters right. Gradually the figures made sense, the Charity Commission was satisfied, *Self & Society* was

saved. We all put our shoulders to the wheel, and went about fund raising to restore our depleted treasure house. These fund-raising events became quite historic in their impact. Julian Nangle put in an amazing amount of effort which paid off richly in what we were enabled to do. We reached out to people we thought might be sympathetic, and found a surprising amount of goodwill and help.

Tracy Jarvis, who some of you will have met at our last fundraising event, has been a terrific source of help with our use of technology, managing to procure a very efficient electronic database which enables us to keep our Membership details completely up to date and in a usable format. We are working on developing the system further and our sincere thanks go to John Hawkins who kindly offered this system to us as a charitable donation. Tracy has recently agreed to be co-opted on the Board and we are pleased to have her; not least because by having her join us, the average age of Board members has reduced significantly! We improved our website, we got on Facebook and Twitter, we presented a fresh face to the world. And at the same time we all got together to devise a new phrase or saying to head up our letterheads, our leaflets, our announcements to the world. After a lot of ideas and drafts and arguments, Alexandra Chalfont came out with the final, our logo and the phrase 'new vistas'. By this we meant that we're not just defending the old values, but opening to new ones.

When Positive Psychology came along, we felt encouraged that somebody was following our lead in being interested in love, in happiness, in growth. But we felt betrayed by their insistence on reducing everything to numbers. We were put off when we found out that studying love meant creating a scale for measuring love, that studying happiness meant constructing a happiness measure, and so on.

So what now? Now we want to give up our narrowness. We want to reach out to others who have different names, different histories, but similar values, similar ways of seeing the world, a similar impatience with second-best and low horizons. People in the transpersonal field are an obvious step in this endeavour, and the AHP in the United States (who have been going through similar difficulties) actually in 2007 went through a form of 'marriage' with the Association for Transpersonal Psychology, whereby they shared facilities and some publications.

But beyond that we have reached out to less obvious candidates. One of our finds was Windy Dryden, for example, who kindly came along and helped us out on one occasion. And now we have found two people who have agreed to come to our aid by speaking for nothing, and they are appearing for us on October 1st this year. They are Andrew Samuels and Ernesto Spinelli. We would like a hundred people to rise to the occasion and turn up and fill our coffers. If this works out well we shall be able to restore Self & Society to six issues a year, and mount a Festival next Summer.

Ernesto Spinelli represents existentialism. We think our humanistic outlook is very close to the existential, and people like Rollo May, James Bugental, Fritz Perls and Kirk Schneider have said so too. As a matter of fact, Ernesto does not agree with this, which makes it all the more impressive that he has agreed to speak on October 1st. Ernesto will be exploring the question of the relationship in therapy. Existentialism in recent years has been moving away from the stark position of Sartre, who used phrases like “free and alone, without assistance and without excuse”, and moving toward a more relational position, where we are with the other and for the other at all times, inseparable.

Andrew Samuels represents the Jungian tradition. Again, we think there a strong connection with Jungian thinking, as opposed to the narrowness of some of the other heirs of Freud. And we like his undoubted connection with the transpersonal. He pioneered a lot of the connections we now see with the whole realm of dreams, of symbols and images, of an acceptance of the whole spiritual realm as open to study and open to experience. Andrew himself has adopted some of the humanistic reliance on experiential methods in his teaching and his presentations. Andrew will be exploring the limits of the relational. If we are part of a relational field, does that mean that there is no individual any more? If that were the case, what would happen to the Jungian idea of individuation? Somehow we have to hold both in suspension, if we are to do justice to the whole situation. Andrew is a great performer, and would well repay your interest on October 1st.

I would like to see you all on that date. If you can't come, please send some money instead to our Administrator, Julian Nangle at: AHPB, BM Box 3582, London WC1N 3XX

AFTER A YEAR - Alexandra Chalfont

I hope John's lovely piece above stimulates members to come along to the October conference. I want to invite you also to come to the AGM (details below) and give your feedback, ideas and to offer to join in activities in whatever way takes your fancy. I have decided to make my piece here a tad more personal at the end of this first year as Co-Chair.

A year ago when John stood as Co-Chair, I initially put myself forward as Vice-Chair to support him in the work and learn the job. As retiring Co-Chair, Sue Orton asked me to upgrade to Co-Chair so that we could continue this newly-born tradition of having two people sharing responsibility for the role.

As it transpired, our work fell naturally into more distinct areas. John, as Doyen of Humanistic Psychology in Britain, took on a more presidential role, and it is thanks only to his friendships among the Big Names in psychotherapy that we have been able to benefit from the wonderful pro-bono contributions of speakers like Windy Dryden, Andrew Samuels and Ernesto Spinelli.

That left me with the more hands-on work. Having been involved mainly with S&S in the past, I had a lot to learn about the behind-the-scenes way an AHP Board functions, and tried to find out as much as possible. I realised quickly that hopes for faster continuing recovery and development needed to be tempered with realism, but still made all the classic mistakes of thinking that innovation could happen within shorter time-frames, so thanks to the Board for tolerating this impatience.

Getting so deeply involved has sometimes harboured the danger of too much "working in" the association to the detriment of "working on". For the first few months I was very grateful to a gifted coach friend, Marie Taylor, who offered a monthly pro-bono coaching conversation hour. This was invaluable, giving a little space and reflective time to clear cobwebs and explore multiple perspectives. Thank you, Marie!

AHP in the past has let Board members learn the ropes on the job, to the extent that we had no documents available for new directors and trustees – and copies of our Mems & Arts had be searched out from hidden files. Our admin system was run on archaic software that could not be shared with

modern systems, with the result that only one person had access to the information, and we still did not have accurate numbers of how many members we had. That has all now been rectified, and thanks to much voluntary contribution we have caught up with the 21st century and are more able to make improvements as we go along. Thanks to Julian for going along with some of the changes.

Our new website, now up and running and beginning to develop, is our portal to the world: hopefully this much needed renaissance for Humanistic Psychology will resonate with people in many countries. I hope they will create and join conversations, and continue to develop the approach in its widest sense. This all depends on how many people we can reach, and you can contribute by inviting people to join and take forward the great work of the past.

During the year I have often heard phrases like “He/she is not humanistic”; “that’s not humanistic”; “have a good old humanistic rant”. I found myself wondering how tightly “humanistic” is defined. I remember chatting to a member of the HIPC (Humanistic and Integrative College) of the UKCP this year, who said “Oh, I’m not Humanistic, I’m a Body and Relational Psychotherapist”. I felt myself reeling inwardly. Isn’t it time these Berlin walls between the tribes came tumbling down? I would like us to honour and explore diversity and do more - a lot more - to celebrate commonality.

AHP is simultaneously a club, an association, a limited company and a charity – and probably more. Regularly looking at the way we do things is vital for healthy development. However much we love process and “pure” democratic approaches, I am delighted when we are able to pay attention to outcomes and employ different ways of meeting, of decision-making and of doing for various purposes. Have we reached another maturational stage in AHP? I don’t know, but I warmly greet a more multi-perspectival approach. Whenever I find myself getting attached to a particular opinion or way of doing/seeing, I like to remember the visuals from a presentation by Sir Ken Robinson on You-Tube. Pictures show how large our planet Earth is - in comparison with some heavenly bodies. Further pictures go on to show it increasingly small compared to others, until it disappears in the comparison, tinier than a speck of dust, into invisibility. You can’t help laughing out loud.