

The Future of Humanistic Psychology

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SYNOPSIS

In this short article I am describing my four current interests in psychology/spirituality. These are forgiveness, the effects of shock, the future of the planet, and non-duality, or questioning the existence of a separate 'I'. Obviously these are huge topics and I do no more than touch on them, but I think each can have a place in the future of Humanistic Psychology.

Having been associated with Humanistic Psychology for 35 years, I was delighted that *Self and Society* was going into good hands and delighted too to be asked to write something on this theme.

The topic of the Future of Humanistic Psychology is quite a daunting one. I barely know my own future for the coming months, so I have decided to describe some of my interests and hypothesise why they might be relevant.

The first is forgiveness. I ran a forgiveness conference at Findhorn in 1999, and I will be doing another in 2013. As part of my research I came across a short article (sadly lost) in which the author described how the future of humanity depended on forgiveness. This was not just his or her opinion – computer programmes had been run which said that the biggest danger to humanity was in fact the cycles of revenge that seemed to have been

going since 'the year dot', but now the weaponry was so powerful that the danger was not localised.

The second topic that I think bears study is shock. I am in the middle of a book called *We are all in Shock* by Stephanie Mines. The title speaks for itself. My belief is that an inability to forgive reflects an inability to let go. What makes it so difficult to let go is partly shock. The whole body/mind system has contracted and before it can loosen itself, the need for safety is paramount. And the world in many ways is less safe (although we should not exaggerate this – if we think of illness, mortality rates, world wars even as little as 60 years ago. What I think has happened is that our expectations have increased so the world feels less safe.) Humanistic Psychology with a focus on bodywork would seem to play an important part in helping the release of shock. And this will open up the possibility of forgiveness.

The third area relates to the future of the planet. It would appear that we are fast running out of resources – well I don't need to go into detail. About 20 years ago I wrote an article called 'How green is your mind?' In it I asked the reader to imagine that they were a car and their mind was the exhaust. Every time they had a negative thought, any negative thought, they would be polluting the planet. In other words, I put the responsibility for pollution not on to managing resources or global warming, but in the way our minds work, in the way we do not recognise our interdependence, how we create separation, and in doing so increase fear, which stresses our adrenals and making us more likely both to be shocked and to stay shocked. The Upanishads have a saying: Where there is another there is fear. What I think they mean is that if I see you as separate, then you are potentially a threat. If I come from seeing you as connected, then even if it does not appear like it, we are on the same side, and just holding that possibility makes it more likely to happen. You cannot be green and have vengeful thoughts. And so connecting back to

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Humanistic Psychology, mindfulness, the work of such people as Eckhart Tolle seem very relevant.

My final strand is the field of non-duality, there being no separate 'I'. This is commonly associated with Buddhism, but I came across it through the Hindu path of Advaita Vedanta. In truth the non-dual approach transcends all approaches and paths. Teachers in this field include the great Indian sage Ramana Maharshi, and more recently Jeff Foster, Byron Katie, Roger Lynden, Jac O'Keeffe (these can all be found by googling conscious TV). Ramana Maharshi used to describe this approach as using a thorn to get out another thorn – using mind to go beyond mind. And this idea is quite radical for the future of Humanistic Psychology – using it to go beyond it, to question the existence of the separate 'I' is to question the need for a psychology of it. This is a huge topic, and worthy of a whole special edition of the journal, I think.

As I finished writing this I was teaching a module on a supervision course, and I revisited John Rowan's *The Reality Game*, written in 1983. John was very instrumental in helping to spread Humanistic Psychology in Britain, and the book has a timeless simplicity in explaining some of the core concepts. I strongly recommend it. It is good to see that even though Humanistic Psychology might have grown and changed and will continue to do so, the foundations seem as sound to me now as they did all those years ago. 5

Robin Shohet is co-author of *Supervision in the Helping Professions* (Open University Press, 3rd edition 2006) and editor of *Passionate Supervision* and *Supervision as Transformation* (both published by Jessica Kingsley). Robin has been teaching supervision through the Centre for Supervision and Team Development (www.cstd.co.uk) for over 30 years.

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