Letters to the Editors

This exchange (which includes several lengthy 'letters'!) between John Rowan and James T. Hansen raises vital issues for Humanistic Psychology; we would welcome responses to these issues from readers.

Dear Editors

The new look *Self & Society* is very impressive, and I like it very much. But I have to raise an issue about the article in your birthday issue (vol. 40, no. 1) by James Hansen. He keeps on referring to humanism, as if it had something to do with Humanistic Psychology. There have been a number of pronouncements by important people recently about secular humanism, saying that it is a dead end, a spiritual disaster, a false doctrine and the gospel of materialism.

However true or false these accusations may be – and others like them – our withers are unwrung. We do not have to concern ourselves about them one way or another, because humanistic psychologists are not secular humanists. But it is one of the oldest confusions in the business. I remember when I first went to an AHP event in London, the caretaker told me it was the humanist meeting, and I thought at the time that it was run by some humanist group.

But in fact the two things are like chalk and cheese. The main plank in Humanistic Psychology is the integration of body, feelings, intellect, soul and spirit, and it says so very clearly in all the introductory leaflets put out by AHP affiliates in various countries around the world. This integration is the key to what we call self-actualisation, and all our workshops touch on it in some way. The secular humanists, on the other hand, are often not much interested in the body or in feelings, and actively deny any existence to the spiritual or transpersonal aspects of our life.

I actually joined the British Humanist Association at one time, to see whether any links could be made, but I found the people involved in it to be aridly intellectual, unawarely sexist and very narrow, spending a lot of their time and energy knocking Christianity, and some of the rest on issues like abortion and euthanasia. I lasted a year, and walked out in protest at the sexism expressed at the Annual General Meeting.

Now it may well be that secular humanism should not be judged by the activities of the BHA (or the National Secular Society, which it much resembles) because humanism is itself a much wider philosophy. Nevertheless, the BHA is trying to represent it, and there must be some connection somewhere. None of these things is Humanistic Psychology.

So when I find James Hansen blithely going on about humanism, as if there were no problem with that, I am a bit perturbed. And I am further perturbed when he appears to adopt postmodernism as the answer for Humanistic Psychology. He writes: 'Psychological humanism, therefore, is a mid-century manifestation of the humanities' impulse that has generally not been updated to embrace contemporary ideas about truth and self.' It seems to me that Humanistic Psychology still has to embrace the notion of the real self, and therefore can have no truck with postmodernism or its friends and neighbours. I have written the detailed argument at some length elsewhere (Rowan, 2000).

Please let us not embrace the term 'humanism' as if it belonged to us.

John Rowan, October 2012

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Response to Rowan

Dear Editors,

I am grateful to John Rowan for formulating a letter to the editors about my article ('The future of humanism: cultivating the humanities' impulse in mental health culture'). Critical dialogue is a vital component of scholarly inquiry that helps to illuminate the nuances of various positions. Therefore, I am pleased to respond to his critiques.

Rowan had two fundamental objections to my article. First, he objected to my association of humanism or secular humanism with Humanistic Psychology. Secondly, he was 'perturbed' by my suggestion that psychological humanism might be theoretically updated with postmodernist conceptualizations of self. I discuss my disagreement with each of these critiques below. In terms of secular humanism, Rowan has two objections: a) according to Rowan, 'important People' say that secular humanism is 'a dead end, a spiritual disaster, a false doctrine and the gospel of materialism'; and b) Rowan characterized secular humanists (from his admittedly limited experience with them) as 'aridly intellectual, unawarely sexist and very narrow'. Because of these impressions, he objected to my association of secular humanism with psychological humanism, as if, by ideological association, I had contaminated the pure goodness of psychological humanism with sewage from the secular variety.

Rowan's objections to secular humanism are easily refuted by two counterpoints: a) many 'important people' are actually very hopeful and excited about the possibilities of secular humanism; and b) contrary to Rowan's experience, I have met numerous genuine, liberal-minded, and deep-feeling secular humanists. Now that these objections to secular humanism are out of the way, I discuss Rowan's charge that I had wrongly associated secular humanism with psychological humanism.

Psychological humanism did not arise out of thin air in the mid-twentieth century. Like all theoretical movements, it had ideological precursors. In my article in the previous issue, I attempted to clarify the ideological precursors of psychological humanism by stating that it 'echoed many of the themes present in Renaissance humanism'. Note that I did not argue that this earlier form of humanism was identical to psychological humanism; I only claimed that the theme of irreducibility is a common conceptual denominator of both psychological and Renaissance humanism. Therefore, humanism and psychological humanism are not like 'chalk and cheese', as Rowan claims. These movements have a common conceptual lineage, which has been noted by leading humanistic scholars.

Regarding his second objection that humanism 'can have no truck with postmodernism', Rowan noted that 'Humanistic Psychology has to embrace the notion of the real self'. He did not explain why Humanistic Psychology *'has to'* do this, so I do not know Rowan's reasons for insisting on this mandate. Perhaps the reason is the same as the one he offered for his claim that psychological humanism must emphasize self-integration: because 'it says so very clearly in all the introductory leaflets put out by AHP affiliates in various countries around the world'. This is not a compelling reason to me, but Rowan provided no others. However, I gladly take this opportunity to elaborate my reasons for suggesting that psychological humanism should be updated with postmodernist conceptualizations of self.

Psychological humanism arose in the mid-twentieth century, a time when the self was generally conceptualized as singular. This modernist, singular self was a logical by-product of an era when roles were well-defined and identity possibilities were fairly limited. Contemporarily, however, people are deluged by multifarious identity opportunities and demands that would have been impossible to imagine in previous generations. The click of a mouse, for example, can instantly transport someone to numerous subcultures and identity possibilities that are radical departures from one's usual self-definition. Moreover, contemporary role demands (e.g. for women to be workers and mothers) create tremendous pressures for people to adopt multiple identities. This pressure was generally not present during the era when psychological humanism arose. In the face of these societal changes, we could dogmatically adhere to the original tenets of psychological humanism (i.e. holistic, singular, congruent self), as Rowan advocated. Alternatively, we could consider updating humanism with the postmodernist ideal of multiple, adaptive selves. In my article, Rowan became 'perturbed' when I suggested the latter option. I view the latter option as completely reasonable. Indeed, it is arguably oppressive and psychologically harmful to insist on singular, congruent selves during an era when people are struggling to

balance multiple, conflictual identity demands.

Furthermore, other theories have greatly benefited from a postmodernist update. Psychoanalysis, for instance, traditionally emphasized the objectivity of the psychoanalyst. Various postmodernist influences in contemporary psychoanalytic thought, however, have caused psychoanalysts to trade the grandiose notion of therapist objectivity for the acknowledgement that both parties in the therapeutic process contribute to the intersubjective field. Given the tremendous benefits that postmodernist ideas have provided to various theoretical orientations, it seems unreasonably dogmatic and short-sighted to refuse to allow these ideas to contribute to psychological humanism.

In this regard, it is ironic that Rowan is a strong advocate for the humanistic psychological principle of 'self-actualisation', yet he does not want psychological humanism itself to evolve, transform or actualize. I view psychological humanism as an exciting, dynamic and evolving set of premises that can, itself, move toward actualization. Unlike Rowan, I do not think that psychological humanism should remain untouched, like a roped-off museum exhibit, by other ideological influences. Humanism, like all theories, is a product of the values and culture of a particular time; if it is not updated, it will become obsolete.

Again, I appreciate John Rowan's letter to the editors about my article. His critical charges have given me the opportunity to elaborate the nuances of my position. I hope that our debate will spark continued dialogue about psychological humanism.

James T. Hansen

Hansen and Authenticity

I was interested to see the response of James Hansen. He raises some important issues. However, he seems to ignore the point which is most important to me – the question of authenticity.

The idea of authenticity is of course to be found in most of the forms of humanistic psychotherapy, including Person-centred, Gestalt, Psychodrama, experiential therapies, Primal Integration, radical therapy, feminist therapy, several body therapies, dream work and so forth. They are very much at home there, contributing essentially to the humanistic emphasis on the whole person and the authentic relationship. The humanistic view of authenticity is broader and more inclusive than that to be found in existential analysis, and this seems to be because those who hold hard to existentialism in an exclusive way are much too wedded to Heidegger's notions. Emmy van Deurzen, for example, says this: 'Being anxious because of our acute awareness of our human limitations and mortality is therefore the key to authenticity and with it the key to true humanity' (van Deurzen-Smith, 1997: 39).

This one-sided emphasis on death and destruction is just what is wrong with existential analysis in its understanding of authenticity. Compare it with the formulations of Jim Bugental, who has written two books about authenticity. He says that authenticity is a combination of self-respect (we are not just part of an undifferentiated world) and self-enactment – we express our care or involvement in the world in a visible way. Here is a key quotation:

> By authenticity I mean a central genuineness and awareness of being. Authenticity is that presence of an individual in his living in which he is fully aware in the present moment, in the present situation. Authenticity is difficult to convey in words, but experientially it is readily perceived in ourselves or in others.
> (Bugental, 1981: 102)

In other words, what he is saying is that authenticity is an experience.

What it seems so hard to convey to Hansen and others is that the real self, the self which is to be actualised

in self-actualisation, is not a concept but an experience. It is not something to be argued at a philosophical level, it is something to be encountered at an experiential level. If we say that authenticity is merely 'an openness to existence, an acceptance of what is given as well as our freedom to respond to it' (Cohn, 1997: 127), then there is no way of perceiving authenticity. It becomes an abstract and useless concept. Other existentialists have gone much further, as for example here:

> Authenticity consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate. There is no doubt that authenticity demands much courage and more than courage. Thus it is not surprising that one finds it so rarely.
> (Sartre, 1948: 90)

For me, authenticity is a direct experience of the real self. It is unmistakable, it is self-authenticating. It is a true experience of freedom, of liberation. We have already heard what Bugental says about it. And that is not all.

There is an important link between authenticity and genuineness as described by Carl Rogers:

> It is my feeling that congruence is a part of existential authenticity, that the person who is genuinely authentic in his being-in-the-world is congruent within himself; and to the extent that one attains authentic being in his life, to that extent is he congruent.
> (Bugental, 1981: 108)

Again it takes Bugental to draw our attention to the heartland of the humanistic approach, which is also the heartland of the existential approach. Both Bugental and Rogers are clear that congruence is difficult and demanding, and recent writers like Dave Mearns (1994, 1996, 1997) have made it clear that it cannot be taught as a skill. I like the quotation from Ernesto Spinelli which follows:

> As **authentic** beings, we recognise our individuality. Further, we recognise that this individuality is not a static quality but is, rather, a set of (possibly infinite) potentialities. As such, while in the authentic mode, we maintain an independence of thought and action, and subsequently feel 'in charge' of the way our life is experienced. Rather than reacting as victims to the vicissitudes of being, we, as authentic beings, acknowledge our role in determining our actions, thought and beliefs, and thereby experience a stronger and fuller sense of integration, acceptance, 'openness' and 'aliveness' to the potentialities of being-in-the-world.
> (Spinelli, 1989: 109)

So if we want to go beyond the everyday ego, we have to do it for ourselves, on our own account. We have to step off the escalator. We have to take responsibility for our own lives. We have to cross the Great Gap. And what is on the other side? Primarily, and most obviously, it is authenticity.

Now authenticity is a difficult concept. Just because it is not a Mental Ego concept, most people have only the vaguest idea as to what it could mean. They are not satisfied with the simple statement – 'It is seeing through your own eyes, instead of through the eyes of others'. One of the best authorities on authenticity was James Bugental (1965), who had the unique distinction of being on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and the journal *Existential Analysis*. He says,

> It is my feeling that congruence is a part of existential authenticity, that the person who is genuinely authentic in his being-in-the-world is congruent within himself; and to the extent that one attains authentic being in his life, to that extent is he congruent.
> (Bugental, 1981: 108)

Or again, he says, 'An authentic acceptance of responsibility takes the form of commitment. The contrasting, avoidant response is blaming' (Bugental, 1987: 246).

A more recent writer is Jenny Wade (1996), who says, 'Authentic consciousness differs dramatically from earlier stages because it is free from commonly recognised forms of ego-distorted cognitive and affective perception'. Traditional theorists view this stage as markedly free of the ego defences seen prior to this level, so that persons at this level are able to experience and express themselves fully (Maslow, 1987; Belenky et al., 1986; Graves, 1981). Their increased capacities have led Maslow and the Gravesians to designate this stage 'the first level of another developmental order' (p. 160). What we are saying, then, is that the real self which we are

aiming at in Humanistic Psychotherapy is not something very abstract and hard to pin down – it is situated both in the empirical realm of psychological research and in the conceptual realm of philosophy. It is closest to the self as described in existential psychotherapy, as described by Friedenberg (1973: 94):

[T]he purpose of therapeutic intervention is to support and re-establish a sense of self and personal authenticity. Not mastery of the objective environment; not effective functioning within social institutions; not freedom from the suffering caused by anxiety – though any or all of these may be concomitant outcomes of successful therapy – but personal awareness, depth of real feeling, and, above all, the conviction that one can use one's full powers, that one has the courage to be and use all one's essence in the praxis of being.

This seems to me a ringing and crystal-clear assertion, which is echoed many times in existential writings (van Deurzen, 1997; Spinelli, 1994; Cooper 2003; Schneider and Krug, 2010).

Let us now turn to another source of wisdom. Clare Graves was the researcher who developed the theory which was later taken up and further elaborated by Beck and Cowan (1996), and named by them as Spiral Dynamics. This theory says that all the stages up to and including what we have called the Mental Ego (that is, what they call the Beige, Red, Purple, Blue, Orange and Green stages) are restricted to First Tier thinking (that is, formal logic), while the stages after that adopt Second Tier thinking (which is sometimes called dialectical logic, or vision-logic). Graves calls this 'a momentous leap'. This seems clear and well stated: First Tier thinking uses what is called formal, Aristotelian, Boolean, classical or Newtonian logic. It is familiar and easily understood, and all our computers are based on it. Its fundamental tenet is 'A is A'. Dialectical logic, which can embrace paradox and contradiction, has a different fundamental tenet: 'A is not simply A'. It can immediately be seen how important this is for therapy. If a client comes into the room and I as a therapist say to myself, 'Arthur is Arthur', that gives me no hint of what might happen later. But if a client comes into the room and I say to myself, 'Agnes is not simply Agnes', that immediately opens up vistas of future change in unspecified directions.

Of course there is far more to self-actualisation than authenticity or dialectical thinking. Maslow (1987) laid down 17 characteristics, and I have added to these (Rowan, 2001) to make a total of 30. But if therapy is a work of freedom, which I believe it potentially is, this has to be endured. Authenticity is not an easy option.

John Rowan

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Second response to Rowan

I appreciate John Rowan's willingness to continue our dialogue. However, I was somewhat mystified by his latest contribution because he did not address any of the points I made in my response to him. Rowan said that I had 'raise[d] some important issues', but, oddly, after this brief introductory acknowledgment, he did not comment on any of these issues. Instead, he proceeded to discuss authenticity and related humanistic/existential constructs.

Rowan justified his decision to completely disregard my points in two ways. First, he claimed that I had ignored 'the question of authenticity', which is 'the point which is most important to me'. Presumably, then, because I did not address authenticity, Rowan felt compelled to engage in an extended explanation of authenticity instead of responding to the critical issues that I had raised. Ironically, however, even though he characterized authenticity as 'most important' to him, Rowan never mentioned authenticity in his initial response to my article. I did not 'ignore' authenticity; he never raised it as an issue to discuss! If Rowan had discussed authenticity, I certainly would have responded to it, just as I responded to his other points.Therefore, the groundless claim that I had ignored authenticity (when it was actually Rowan who ignored it) cannot possibly serve as a justification for Rowan's failure to address the challenges that I raised in my response to him.

Rowan's second reason for disregarding my points is that the topics under discussion are 'not something to be argued at a philosophical level' but 'something to be encountered at an experiential level'. He made this point several times, claiming that 'self-actualisation is not a concept but an experience', and 'authenticity is an experience'. According to Rowan, then, my philosophical/conceptual points were not worth a response because the essence of humanism is experiential, not conceptual. Rowan noted that this point is 'hard to convey to Hansen and others'. Rowan has never tried to convey this point to me, so I do not understand his claim that it was 'hard' to do so. Presumably, though, because I am incapable of grasping the experiential essence of humanistic concepts, I had to resort to a mere conceptual discussion. Rowan, on the other hand, because of his higher experiential understanding, felt no obligation to lower himself into a conceptual dialogue with me.

This reasoning was particularly baffling to me because Rowan, after disregarding my points because they are 'not something to be argued at a philosophical level', subsequently engaged in a lengthy philosophical discussion. Indeed, most of his response consisted of a highly philosophical/conceptual discussion of authenticity, the real self, and other humanistic constructs. For instance, Rowan, referring to the real self, stated that 'it is situated both in the empirical realm of psychological research and in the conceptual realm of philosophy'. This statement, of course, explicitly acknowledges the philosophical dimension of the construct.

Rowan cannot have it both ways; it is unreasonable (and, indeed, highly incongruent) for him to dismiss and refuse to address my points because they are philosophical and then to launch into a philosophical discussion himself (about the very issues that he refused to address with me because I had framed those issues philosophically). Therefore, neither reason (i.e. my supposed failure to address authenticity or the philosophical nature of my response) can serve as a logical justification for Rowan's failure to address the points I made in my response to him. Rowan, indeed, completely changed the subject. This leaves me with virtually nothing to say about the content of his response to me (except to comment on his reasons for not responding to any of my points).

I can say, however, that I do not agree with Rowan that humanistic constructs are 'not something to be argued at a philosophical level'. I certainly recognize that there is a strong experiential component to authenticity and self-actualization. However, these constructs should also be subjected to philosophical scrutiny through active study, dialogue and debate. Whatever is encountered at an experiential level is never a pure, unfiltered experience of something; it is always mediated by human meaning systems and cognitive categories. It is a worthwhile endeavor to clarify, critique and attempt to gain further understanding of these meaning systems and categories at a philosophical level. Otherwise, humanistic constructs would fail to evolve, and helping professionals would have no conceptual tools to aid them in reflecting on the ways that these constructs impact their work.

Again, I am pleased that Rowan chose to write an additional response to me. I just wish he had addressed the points that I had made instead of completely ignoring them.

James T. Hansen