

Directions for Humanistic Psychology

John Rowan

I have been involved in Humanistic Psychology since 1970, have been to conferences in the USA and elsewhere, have met some of the leading figures, and been to groups led by these people. I have been writing about Humanistic Psychology since 1975.

There have been some changes along the way. The great reliance on expressing feelings, so prevalent in the 1970s, has diminished. The emphasis on the individual, such a key thing in those days, has shifted. We are all relational now. And one of the most interesting changes has been the increased interest in the transpersonal. Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology have always been close – after all, Maslow founded both of them – but in recent years, in the USA, there have been some organisational moves which have brought the two into closer proximity. In Europe, too, there has been a huge growth in Eurotas (the European transpersonal umbrella), which now has about 30 national organisational members. The Eurotas conferences look and feel very much like humanistic conferences. In England, the UKCP has just formed a subsection devoted to transpersonal psychotherapy.

At the same time there has been an increased interest in the relationship between the humanistic and the existential. The current editor of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* is the author of several books bringing together humanistic and existential ideas in the field of psychotherapy. James Bugental had the unique honour of being admitted to the editorial boards of both the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and the *Journal of Existential Analysis*. Rollo May is another important writer with a foot in both camps. In this country Mick Cooper is someone who has contributed to person-centred, experiential and existential writings, and to research too.

One of my own contributions has been the chapter in the *Handbook of Humanistic Psychology* in which I outline some of the similarities and differences between the humanistic and the existential, and in the next chapter Ernesto Spinelli presents some arguments with a different position in the

same area. It seems obvious to me that the humanistic and the existential share an outlook which Ken Wilber calls the Centaur – a belief in bodymind unity, an appreciation of authenticity, a way of thinking which is essentially dialectical. This is what Maslow called 'self-actualisation'.

It is interesting that in a recent book describing the newer tendencies in psychoanalysis, the writer says: 'Self-actualization, a term developed by humanistic psychologists, is one way to characterize the broadest aim of most psychoanalytic psychotherapists.' It is amazing to realise how many different schools of psychotherapy are now adopting a relational approach. Even the behavioural schools are starting to do this, as for example with ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy), which has aspirations to be the humanistic face of CBT and its relatives. I am not giving academic references here, because this is not a technical matter, but rather a human matter.

But we are under threat today. The problem is that most of us do not believe that randomised control trials (RCTs) are the right way to research psychotherapy. Such things are good for measuring the efficacy of techniques of treatment. But the techniques of treatment only account for a small percentage – about 15 per cent in most findings – of the efficacy of therapy. Why get involved in the very expensive trappings of the RCT, if that way of working in research is not going to measure anything that is worth measuring? Mick Cooper, who is a good friend and someone I respect, seems to have fallen for the blandishments of the RCT, but I don't really understand how.


There is now a serious attempt in motion to complain to the UK's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), who idolise the RCT, that this is not the way to go. It is to be hoped that this movement succeeds (and there are signs that it will), otherwise we are all going to be deprived of Government funding and acknowledgement. There are serious signs that humanistic therapies are being downgraded in many areas – for example, a recent compendium of therapies,

the previous editions of which had chapters on Gestalt and on Transactional Analysis, has dropped these chapters from its current edition.

I got so worried about this that I wrote around to the chairs of all the humanistic organisations in the UKCP, asking them if they wanted to get together to fight this tendency. I even sent them a copy of my *Guide to Humanistic Psychology* to remind them of what that speciality contained. I only got one reply. Whether this is apathy or adherence to a different approach I do not know. What I do know is that I am a bit disappointed and even disgusted by such a low level of response. Who cares about this question?

So do we just concentrate on the transpersonal approach, and let the humanistic organisations stew in their own juice? One of the difficulties of the transpersonal approach is that it is even less known and even less welcomed than Humanistic Psychology in academia. Part of the reason for this is that it is about spirituality, and there is no consensus as to what spirituality is, or how it is to be treated. We thought in the 1970s that everyone accepted the perennial philosophy: there was really only one spiritual journey, even if people used different names to describe it. But in recent times this has been challenged, particularly by Jorge Ferrer of the

California Institute of Integral Psychology. He has brought up huge academic batteries of argument to prove that the perennial philosophy is wrong. I have in fact engaged in wordy battles with him in the *BPS Transpersonal Psychology Review* on this very point. But this is a contested area, and the final shape of the understanding of spirituality is still to come.

In view of all this, how can we regain our optimism? I don't have the answer. But I do have the question, and perhaps questions are more important than answers. Certainly they are more stimulating and more full of the divine dissatisfaction that may lead to new ideas and, as we say, new vistas. 



John Rowan is now well known as a humanistic therapist and writer, and has also done a good deal of work in the transpersonal area. His more recent efforts in the area of the Dialogical Self have borne fruit both in his work and in his writing. He is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and also of the BACP and UKCP. He has consistently pushed for more attention to the Primal and to the Transpersonal, which he has dubbed the Terrible Twins of Therapy. His most recent book is *Personification*.

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The research will entail the recording of one therapy session and one follow-up interview with the therapist and one follow-up interview with the client using the Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) method.

The research is concerned with the description of process and is in no way intended to evaluate the session.

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session, can allow additional and deeper insight than is normally the case when sessions are not reflected on so consciously. This usually adds to the quality of further sessions.

If you are interested in further information and/or information sheets please contact me.

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