

Idge — Adrian Zakrzewski

Thoughts on Encounter: and Humanistic Psychology in General

The foregoing comments have been evoked by the events that occurred at the British AHP's 'Introduction to Humanistic Psychology' which took place on Saturday July 7th.

I was somewhat dismayed at the excessive and almost fanatical emphasis placed upon 1) one's inner feelings, and 2) the 'here and now'. Although I am a newcomer to the AHP and encounter groups as such, I have had a number of experiences via psychedelic drugs and Eastern forms of meditation (in both solitary and group settings) which, together with my reading on the subject and formal and informal discussions with friends and fellow students over the past nine years, enable me to believe that I am qualified enough to know what humanistic psychology is all about - or what it should be all about. In other words I consider my opinions and fantasies to be as valid as anyone else's even though I hold no position of 'importance' in the AHP or any other organisation.

Humanistic psychology is surely about the integration and concomitant growth of all that is part of the human organism. As we are social beings who like to manipulate our environment, this means that which is without as well as that which is within. In other words recognition and assimilation of the self's relationship and interdependence not only with the underlying 'real' self but also with others and inanimate objects. It is about integrating mind and body, and self and society.

In a strange situation, for instance an encounter group with people I have never met before, I become aware of my anxiety when I wish to make a comment on something or other - increased pulse rate, 'butterflies' in the stomach, dry mouth and so on - simply speaking I am in touch with my feelings. Simultaneous with such feelings however I am permitted the luxury of possessing a faculty known as cognition which I use to rationalise (or intellectualise if you like) the events in which I participate. I cannot escape rationalising even though the result of so doing may contradict what my senses tell me; I do it all the time and what's more I enjoy doing it and believe it to be a very healthy exercise. Perception does not always complement cognition but that is no reason to accept the one to the complete exclusion of the other. Some of you will no doubt be saying, as was actually said to me at the 'Introduction', "Huh! but you are intellectualising. Don't think, *feel!*" I'm sorry but I *do* think as well as feel, and I am quite capable of using both faculties at the same time. And I like to be free to do so without being dictated to by somebody else. To me, thinking *is* feeling and I object to being told, that

because I appear to be intellectualising I am therefore not expressing my feelings and should thus keep quiet. I feel hurt and misunderstood.

Who was it who once said, "I think, therefore I am". Well I am, and given the problems and pressures that I have been confronted with during the past few months, it is extremely frustrating to be told that I am *not*, and, if one cares to peruse the work of Bateson, Laing and Esterson for example and the 'double bind' syndrome, also potentially damaging to the individual psyche. The complete human being is body and mind, feeling and thought, subject and object. To concentrate on just the one is to concentrate on merely half a human being.

As for the here and now, I agree that in existential terms there is no more than the here and now (and me?). But I think Marx and Freud showed quite adequately that wo/man's character is shaped for her/him by circumstances s/he finds her/himself in at different periods during her/his development. Historical forces act in a cumulative way with the result that in any given situation, even in an AHP encounter group, a person might react not merely to events occurring now but also to events that occurred in the past. The present might be the culmination of a whole series of disturbing events (or pleasant events), which of course will have been unknown to the other participants and so to them the (re)action may appear as an outburst of rather unintelligible behaviour. Whilst they refuse to acknowledge the relevance of the past then obviously that person's behaviour (or comments) will continue to remain unintelligible to the others.

People interested in humanistic psychology may be tempted to reject Freud and Marx in total which in my opinion would be to our own disadvantage. Criticism is a healthy and constructive exercise but there appears to be, in the AHP, a general propensity toward cynicism about orthodox, or what I call mechanistic psychology. Beware, the degree of cynicism exhibited may reach acute proportions which will result in, at best stagnation for the movement, and at worst destruction. The AHP says that we can learn from many diverse disciplines; well, that ought also to include orthodox psychology and the 'old masters'. Don't be led (or rather lead yourselves) into the same trap that has been the fate of many other organisations. If humanistic psychology is to be a holistic and dynamic discipline then do not let's kid ourselves that we know all the answers, or that ours is the only answer. We have much to learn, even from the 'mechanistic' sciences which often appear to us to neglect many of the innate qualities of being human.

Humanistic psychology must be founded upon love and consideration for one's fellow citizens. It must also be gentle, unless otherwise stated for specific reasons. Those who attend the various events for whatever reasons, especially newcomers to the movement, should, I feel be treated with kindness and respect by those more experienced. At the 'Introduction' on July 7th were several persons who had a fair amount of experience behind them (and appeared to be there for some sort of ego trip;) and who not only seemed to be rather invading personalities, but were also overtly hostile at times. This being

done with a somewhat sardonic and pompous air. Such manifestations seemed to permeate the whole group with the result that it was not the constructive and 'opening-up' experience that it might have been. Quite the contrary, I feel, for several people, who were possibly frightened off for good, which is our loss as well as theirs.

One who has confidence and self-security should, I believe, attempt to share it with those less well endowed, at least until they are capable of developing their own. What happened at the 'Introduction' was that the confident, secure, and experienced were feeding off the less-confident, less-secure and inexperienced for their own personal gain. 'Doing your own thing' is great - except when it is at the expense of another's 'thing', in which case I think it is damnable!

Western society does not readily lend itself to the development of wo/mankind as a living, feeling being. We are blocked off from our feelings. Hence to be confronted by perhaps a lifetime's repressed feelings can be an extremely harrowing experience for the uninitiated if they have not been adequately prepared for it and are not aware of what they are letting themselves in for.

My criticism of the day's events therefore, is twofold. Firstly the leaders did not adequately introduce the nature of humanistic psychology to newcomers; we were more or less 'thrown in at the deep end'. Luckily some could swim but unfortunately did not extend a helping hand to those who couldn't. We were drowned and washed away as soon as the floodgates of the group psyche were opened. Secondly, as the event was supposed to be an introduction I feel that those experienced with encounter groups within the AHP and/or in their professional work should not have attended, unless they were willing to let the facilitators lead rather than attempt to dominate the meeting themselves. Otherwise I can foresee the day when violence will erupt at such a group meeting.

I hope that this critique is not interpreted as a scathing attack on the characters and intentions of those concerned. It is merely intended as a presentation of some ideas which we might all do well to ponder over for a while and perhaps act upon in the future. The desire for personal growth and freedom inextricably entails a degree of responsibility to others for *their* growth and freedom. May I suggest that everyone within the growth movement go about their duties with love and a little humility in their hearts. Arrogance and self-righteousness will only drive people away - and I assume that is *not* where the AHP would like to be at. If on the other hand I am mistaken will somebody please let me know.
