

Letters to the Editor

Heresy Hunting in the AHP: Alix Pirani replies to John Rowan

Dear John,

I appreciate your article on heresies in the January issue. It has helped me to extend my thinking about the meaning of our work, and I'd like to add some observations.

Some of your strictures I agree with; others not. But I feel very encouraged by your approach to what is happening. I think leaders and therapists do lose touch with their deepest values and that we need to help one another to keep a real hold on those values: real in the light of all the attacks on them from the environment and, more significantly, from within ourselves. I know I myself need help to keep a hold on the good in this work, and have had to explore my own envy and negativity to allow the good, the real peace and love to come in. I recognise under the -isms in the growth movement a dangerously subtle cynicism and envy which undermines our effectiveness.

It connects directly with the sexism you speak of. I see male leaders, therapists and others in the 'business' of humanistic psychology making careers out of human relations and forgetting their own humanity. Some of them let themselves be pushed into phallic hero roles; the -isms and the prestigious leader image are cultivated; there's a lot of seduction and ultimately a betrayal of true love, maturity and respect for **persons**. That makes me angry. I don't want the women leaders and therapists to become polarised from the men, but there is that danger.

The values of humanistic psychology are perhaps being seen as the good breast, and too many men in the movement are acting out breast-envy and vagina-envy by subtly perverting these values. And the women are becoming aggressive and separatist.

It is about values, and meaning; about our understanding of, and capacity for love; about our 'repression of the sublime'. I am as cautious as you are, John, about phoney spirituality and the 'spiritualistic' flight from reality and rationality. But we can and do ground our spirituality, and we can learn to make love real and rational, and therefore effective. Surely the body and personality are vehicles through which spirituality is grounded.

I think it is part of human potential to transcend the 'mere' human and still be human. Isn't that what you meant by Ordinary Ecstasy? Another term for it is Love incarnate. And William Blake said it all:

What is it men in women do
require?

The lineaments of Gratified
Desire.

What is it women do in men
require?

The lineaments of Gratified
Desire.

Men and women are having great difficulty 'getting it together' at present. Think of the enormous power for love and good we might have if we could. I'd like to begin with some basic confrontation in the AHP between men and women leaders. It could be very creative. And frightening. However, we have nothing to lose but our images. . .

Love,

Alix